

# THE AGORA

Volume 6, 2019



**PLATO**  Participatory  
Learning  
And  
Teaching  
Organization

*Where love of learning never gets old*



## ART

Jim Albright  
Grethe Brix-J. Leer  
Nancy Cross Dunham  
Felicitus Ferington  
Susan Young Hoffman  
Joan Kutter  
Julie Pretell  
Edie Urness-Pondillo

## FICTION

Rose Ann Findlen  
Joanne Lee Storlie  
Linda Pilmer  
Gerry Wettersten  
Allen H. Youngwood

## COVER ART: Don Tubesing

The Dane County Jail now escorts inmates out of their cell in hand and foot shackles, even for a chaplain's visit. This unsettling information stimulated Tubesing's creation of this sculpture from the gnarly, dark, hard, and brittle rucite found in British Columbia.

## POETRY

M. Jane Ayer  
David Berger  
Barbara Carson  
Kate Dike  
Nancy Cross Dunham  
Clara Lazimy  
Norman Leer  
Vince Kavaloski  
Gwen Pangburn  
Dawn Proctor

## NONFICTION

Janice Golay  
Lorna Kniaz  
Norman Leer  
Linda Pilmer  
Richard C. Radtke  
Frederic Ross  
Paul Thompson  
Judi K. Turkel  
Tom Schlicht

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PLATO is a community of intellectually curious adults, typically 50 and over, which explores subjects of interest through member-led discussion groups, lectures, travel, and cultural activities.

## **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 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**

The Agora Board wishes to thank the PLATO Board of Directors for their generous financial support of this arts and literary journal.

## **Dedication**

*The Agora* Volume 6 is dedicated to Patricia Becker, who served as managing editor of *The Agora* for the previous two volumes. Not only did she set a high standard with her editorial work but supplied us with volumes of invaluable information including time schedules, budgets and sample forms. The Board and I greatly appreciate all her efforts. Thank you, Patricia.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of Louise Fowler, the previous Office Coordinator.

*The Agora* Board extends special thanks to Edie Urness-Pondillo for organizing and laying out Volume 6. Her work was highly professional, artistically pleasing, and wonderfully creative. We are thankful for her expertise, dedication, and cooperation.

We also wish to congratulate poets, authors and artists whose creative work is featured in this volume. In addition, we wish to thank those who submitted work we were not able to include in this volume. We appreciate the encouragement from all PLATO members who support this arts and literary journal.



# THE AGORA

Volume 6, 2019

|                 |                            |
|-----------------|----------------------------|
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# A Common Language

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by *Judi K-Turkel*

The little man was a dear friend of mine, not too young, not old, with hair that once flamed red. He loved the world and forgave it, but for twenty years he himself had been a vegetarian.

He was also a successful distributor of mechanical aids for the halt and crippled and in that capacity, once every few years he traveled to France and Italy. He had not seen Odessa, the city of his birth, since childhood. So after the detente he often toyed with the thought to make a side trip. What stopped him? Always, the warnings that in Russia fruits and vegetables were scarce, and that Russians don't cater to vegetarians anyway.

One summer, though, time seemed to be beginning its countdown. The longing was great. "So what can happen to me? For the two weeks, I'll live," he told me, shrugging, and bought a round-trip tour ticket for Kiev.

But starving is easier said than done. After Aeroflot took off and served its inflight dinner, he shook his head, sent it back, and went to seek out the British woman who spoke Russian and who acted as the tour leader. "I'm a vegetarian," he said gently, toying with his beret. "I can't eat that food. Can you ask if they could prepare me a plate of vegetables?"

She said she'd see what she could do and went back to the galley. In a few moments she reappeared with a shrug. "You are in the hands of the Russians now," she sighed. "I can't do very much."

At the Moscow stopover, my friend went to bed just slightly hungry. It was like a one-day fast. In the morning, though he couldn't eat the rolls for the milk in them, he cheered himself with several cups of hot sugar-cubed tea.

Even so, by the time they got to Kiev, he was ravenous. He entered the hotel restaurant hoping for even a small salad plate, craving a little borscht with no sour cream afloat that boasted more than a paucity of beets. No, the bill of fare had been predetermined for the group. To prove out Russia's wealth, more than eighty per cent consisted of animal products. To his chagrin, he was not even able to get a second helping of potatoes.

A bona fide Russian now accompanied the tour group, a man who'd met them at the Kiev airport. He seemed to be the official Intourist watchdog, here to see that they were taken to the right exhibits and led through the correct streets. The agent spoke English, so in his discomfort my little friend sought him out after dinner. He found the official at the reservation desk,

talking to the clerk. "Excuse me, sir," he asked, "but may I have a word?"

The Russian, a beefy young six-footer, seemed to peer down the length of his nostrils. "Ya?"

"I'm a vegetarian, sir. I can't eat this food. Do you think..."

He looked annoyed. "Can't eat? You zick or zomting?"

"No, I'm not sick. I'm a vegetarian. I can't eat meat or eggs or butter..."

The Russian's head cocked. Clearly, he was trying to puzzle out the disease. "Your stomach?"

"No, I'm not sick, I..."

A finger raised in exclamation. "Heart!"

The little man sifted through his brain, calling earnestly on creativity. Then, "Do you know of Count Tolstoy, the great writer?" A nod. "Do you happen to know that famous portrait of him that hangs in the Hermitage?" He had seen a similar one many times at the Metropolitan; he was an amateur dabbler and it was among his favorites.

Luck was with him. The guide knew the painting. "Tolstoy. Yes, Tolstoy," he said.

My friend pressed on. "Do you recall seeing that, then, Count Tolstoy was barefoot?"

"Barefoot?" To this Russian, barefoot was as foreign a word as vegetarian.

The old man pointed to his feet. "He wore no shoes."

The Russian smiled. He did know the picture. So my friend went on. "Do you know why he, a rich Count, a nobleman, wore no shoes?"

Interest. A headshake.

"Because he was a vegetarian."

"A vegetarian," the Russian mused, still uncomprehending.

"Count Tolstoy wouldn't eat meat or eggs or butter or anything that had come from an animal. He wouldn't wear furs or shoe leather because they came from animals. He was a rich man and a great writer and he loved the people. He wanted the Russian people to be freed from the oppression of the ruling class. He also loved animals, and wanted them freed from oppression by men."

At the word oppression, a great change came over the Intourist agent. The official grinned, his shoulders squared, all of a sudden he understood. What did he understand? Maybe not what vegetarian meant, but maybe a lot more than that. He put out both his hammy arms and grabbed the little man by his shoulders, and shaking him slightly he said, "Tolstoy. Tolstoy." Then he motioned. "Come. Follow me."

My friend was taken to the kitchen and asked to wait. There was a brief conference with the chef in Russian too fast for his unaccustomed ears. "Tolstoy. Tolstoy," he heard several times. Then he was waved over. "Tell chef what to cook," the agent said. Chef prodded him through the hotel's larder, urging him to view and sample a sequestered abundance of fresh vegetables and juicy fruit. Then he was prepared a kingly supper dish and served by the chef himself.

But it didn't stop there. At every hotel in every city for two weeks, the Intourist man introduced him to the chef with a barrage of Russian through which he could hear sifting, "Tolstoy. Tolstoy." At every meal he received lovingly prepared plates of fruits and vegetables while

the other tourists gaped and ate their meat and eggs. And at least twice, the tour bus was rerouted miles out of its way so that the guide could point out to him, "That's where Tolstoy lived."

When the little man came back to America, I

asked him, "So? Did you find your Russia a land of milk and honey?"

"No milk," he answered. "Just honey, thank you," and he told the story that, so many years later, I'm telling you.



*Early Morning Illusions--Nancy Cross Dunham*

## **My camera**

*by Kate Dike*

The violet's eye  
pulls me in; the fern uncurls,  
reaching for my hand.



# Bones

*by Allen H. Youngwood*

---

Like many small, family-owned grocery stores, Miller's Market is not so much shabby as outdated. The narrow aisles are crammed with displays in a valiant effort to maximize selection so customers don't bolt to the big-box competition. For the same reason, Miller's is open late, very, very late. Far later than is sensible.

So it was, very late one warm summer evening Mr. Pralines, a gentleman of advanced years, meandered the deserted aisles with a hand basket. 1960s pop music wafted softly from somewhere in the ceiling. Martha and the Vandellas were predicting a "Heat Wave."

Autumn, not yet 21, with a name tag pinned to her store uniform slouched at a checkout station. Her short-cropped hair was the color of titanium borscht. She leafed through a tabloid magazine. Chewed gum. Yawned.

Eddie the bag boy, not yet 17, stood at the end of the counter. A vacant stare. He could have been asleep with his eyes open.

Mr. Pralines entered the checkout lane and dumped a bizarre assortment of items from his basket onto the conveyor belt. Clam juice, jelly donuts, Bon-Ami, marshmallow creme, Musinex, pickled herring . . . a six-pack of Old Style beer brought up the rear.

From above, Marvin Gaye wondered, "What's goin' on? What's goin' on? Tell me what's goin' on?"

Autumn stowed the magazine with a sigh and began to scan the merchandise.

Eddie engaged, "Paper or plastic, sir?"

"Give me your finest woven satin bags, young man," replied Pralines with a flourish.

Eddie blinked. Opened his mouth. Closed it.

Autumn stopped scanning. With a wry smile, "Now that's a hoot! We got nothin' fine, woven or satin. We got paper. We got plastic."

"Fair enough. Paper then," said Pralines with a wink in her direction.

Autumn shook her head and continued to scan as Eddie pulled paper and started to bag. Autumn suspected that her Scottish grandmother would peg

this old dude as “a wee bit fey.”

Pralines opened his wallet, extracted a credit card, and slid it into the reader. “So, tell me Autumn, are you a . . . seasonal employee?”

“No, I’m . . . Oh, I get it . . . Cute,” she deadpanned.

Pralines grinned impishly. Autumn picked up the pace, quickly scanning the remaining items up to the six-pack. She dropped her chin to her lapel mic, “Check.”

Ryan the floor manager, just barely 21, ambled up and sidled in front of Autumn. He swiped an access card and keyed a code into the console. “Identification please.”

“Certainly.” Pralines extracted his driver’s license from his wallet. Snapped it down on the counter.

Ryan ignored it completely. Tapped a few keys. “Okay.”

As Ryan edged out of the space Pralines slowly returned his license to his wallet. “So, how old?”

“Sir?” said Ryan.

“How old does one have to be?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, legal drinking age is 21. I’m 66. And, since you didn’t even glance at my license I must look my age.”

Under her breath, Autumn interjected, “And how!” This earned her a scowl from Pralines. Autumn feigned innocence.

“What’s your point, sir?” said Ryan.

“My point, young man, is I am forty-five years past legal. Yet, you still card me. How old would I need to be in order for you not to ask for my I.D.?”

Autumn answered, “Bones! Ya gotta be bones!”

Ryan frowned at her. “Store policy, sir. We card everyone.”

“But, look at the bags under my eyes. The loss of moss on my head. The liver spots on my hands. Look at them!”

“Must we?” asked Autumn softly.

“Appearance doesn’t matter, sir.”

“No?” Pralines pondered a moment. “Let’s say, just for the sake of argument, that the legal age was ten. No ten-year-old boy has facial hair, right? You could just check for whiskers. Still card?”

Ryan didn’t hesitate, “Yes, sir.”

Autumn regained full voice, “Bleached bones! Ya gotta be . . .”

Ryan shot Autumn an icy glare. She demurred.

Pralines turned to Autumn. “If I was a skeleton I couldn’t hold my liquor, now could I? Why on earth would I buy a six-pack of beer?”

Ryan slid behind Eddie and spoke softly into his lapel mic.

Pralines continued, “There would be no point to it. Still card me?”

Autumn was emphatic, “Bet your bony ass we would!”

“My bony ass is not relevant to the topic at hand.”

From on high, Eric Burdon and the Animals suggested, “We gotta get outta this place, if it’s the last thing we ever do.”

Sam, a uniformed security guard, strode purposefully toward the counter. At the ripe old

age of 23 he was a seasoned professional. Ryan spotted his back-up en route and addressed the creepy old trouble maker, "I'll have to ask you to take your purchases and leave, sir."

As Autumn tore off the sales slip and stuffed it in the paper bag, Pralines said, "I have to ask you, Ryan. Does this make any sense whatsoever?"

Sam was gruff, "Let's go, mister!" He took Pralines by the arm.

The forefinger on Pralines' free hand thrust skyward, "This is conclusive proof that the world is ruled by bean counters and shysters! It's insane!"

Autumn laughed as Sam escorted Pralines toward the door. Ryan followed along and Eddie

trailed with Pralines's paper sack and six-pack.

Through cupped hands, Autumn said, "Come back when you're bones!"

Over his shoulder, Pralines retorted, "Not . . . nice!"

The sliding doors parted and Sam ejected Pralines from the store. Eddie sat the bag and beer at Pralines' feet, a rote recital, "Thank you for shopping at Miller's, your hometown market. Have a great evening."

As Eddie returned to Ryan and Sam waiting just inside the doors, Pralines remained defiant. "You'll be hearing from my attorney about this . . . Tommy Tuttle!"

Just before the doors slid closed . . .

"He's FIVE!"

## 5 a.m. Abstract

*by Norman Leer*

First brush strokes, the sun  
plays with the sky; a splash

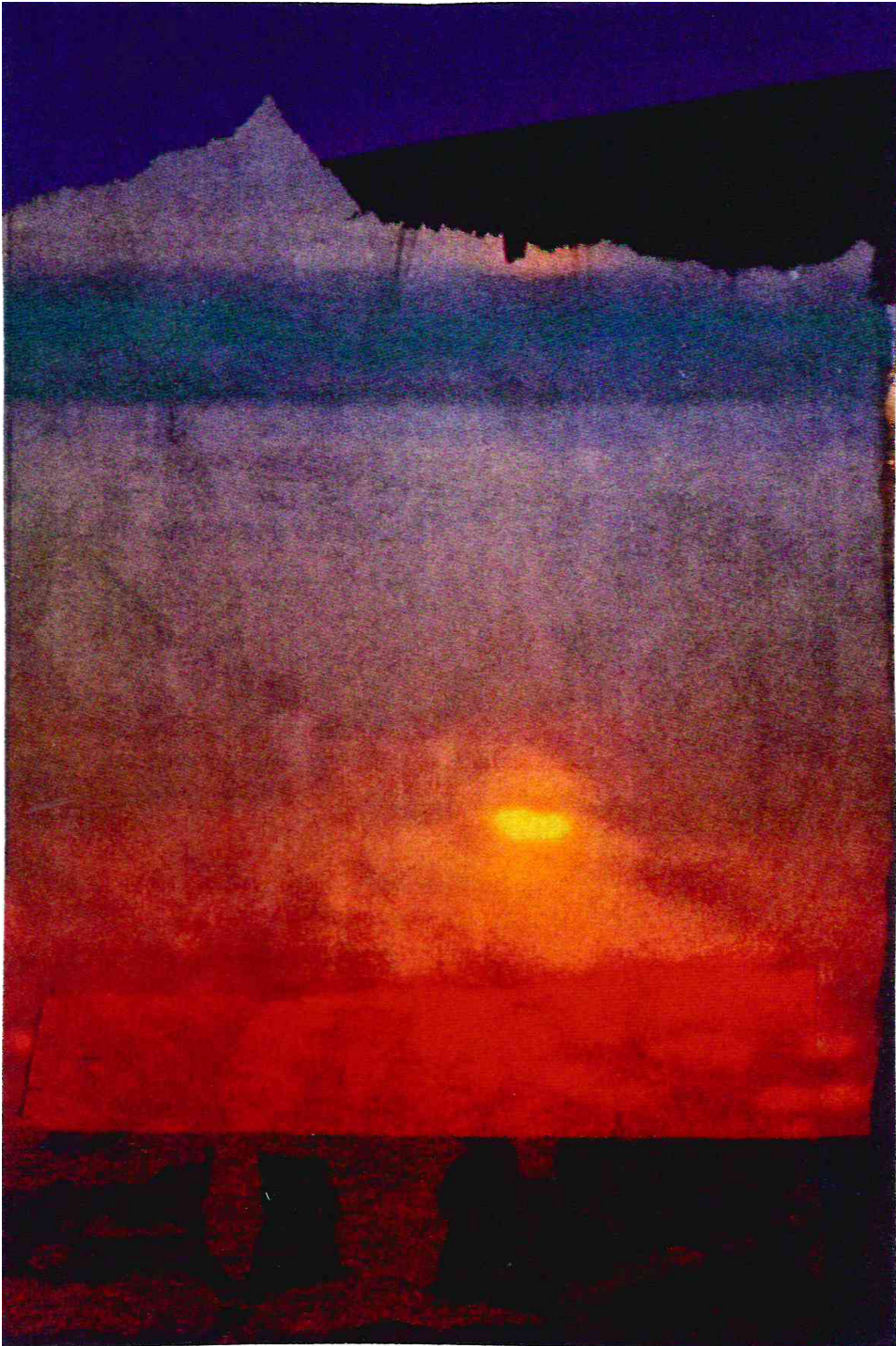
of red, a streak of gold against  
the dark wash residue of night.

A dancing blues by Bird,  
the light settles on and lifts

the red and purple hibiscus,  
the square tile roof

of the pumping station, pulls  
all the colors forward

in a singing burst of morning,  
the clarity and mystery.



*5 a.m. Abstract--Grethe Brix-J. Leer*

# In the Still of the Night

---

*by Gerry Wettersten*

Two creatures from the distant planet Quig perched on top of the tall headboard looking down at the sleeping woman. They had their scaly heads titled at exactly the same angle. It was necessary because Quiglers have one eye each which must function as a pair for an image to be perceived by the brain. This less than ideal arrangement developed eons ago when, on their planet, evolution lost out to somewhat intelligent design. A few flubs were bound to occur.

The Deputy Grand Eye of the Blue Region, his right partner sitting beside him, had explained. “We will place you on planet earth. These creatures live in boxes, in what they call residential neighborhoods.” The deputy and his right eye looked at them intently. “You will be lowered into place in a large net. All you need to do is enter a box, obtain one creature, and return to the net which will hoist you and your captive back home. Our ocular scientists are very eager to examine these beings where right and left inhabit the same body.”

Now the first part of their mission was complete. Left spoke to Right. “She’s rather large. Do you think we can carry her?” Quiglers’ speech, if it could be heard by humans, would sound like radio static. But it’s inaudible to anyone but other Quiglers who can discern distinct right and left accents. Quiglers are also invisible to all but their own kind.

Right statted back to his partner, “The deputy said we are much stronger than earth creatures, and that they can’t hear or see us even if they do have two eyes each. I don’t think we’ll have any trouble. Besides I’ve heard that these earth beings have a hobby they call dreaming.”

“What’s that?”

“In dreams impossible things happen, but these folks think they are real.” Left rolled his eye, which turned Right’s sight of the woman into a kaleidoscope. “Quit that!” Left’s green lips smiled beneath his beak. Rights always think they’re so smart. “The thing is,” Right went on, “this dreaming thing will work for us in reverse. When she is lifted off her bed by something she can’t see, and carried out the window we came in through, she will believe she is dreaming.” They nodded in unison. It seemed fool proof.

There was a plop and both heads turned to its source. Another creature, one they had not been briefed on, was now sitting on the bed. Their eyes

examined it anxiously. It was smaller by far than the woman, smaller than the Quiglers, and had a curious covering. It appeared to be a zillion fine short hairs which gave it a fluffy appearance. The woman was not startled by the little being. She did not open her eyes, but reached out a hand to stroke the hairs and murmured a few words before sinking back into deep sleep.

Quiglers are not good at improvising, something about always having to function in tandem discourages initiative. While they remained on their perch, confused as to the next step, the hairy creature settled itself next to the woman's legs and, seeming to sense their presence, turned its gaze to the top of the headboard.

Right and Left nearly fell off. It had two eyes, just like the earth people, but these eyes glowed in the dark! Furthermore, it could turn them off with darkness moving from top to bottom, then reverse the direction to light them again. A rumble started in the creature's chest; it had a power source.

That did it. Left and Right were fearful of the tongue lashing they would encounter from the Deputy Grand Eye. But they would rather turn both their faces to him and hear him out than to risk the wrath of the burning-eyed haired thing. They tumbled out of the window, one at a time,

which blinded them until they regrouped below and rushed to the waiting net.

It was a great disappointment to Left. The deputy had hinted that they would receive special favors upon return from a successful mission. Most Quiglers were paired early in life to facilitate coordination, and recoupling was unusual. Unusual, but not unheard of. The favor Left dearly wanted to ask was to be reassigned to another Right. He had endured years of being treated as an inferior. Right sometimes referred to him as "My blind eye." Well, life would just have to go on usual, no dramatic rearrangement. While he had been thinking, the net had smoothly lifted off and they were already approaching the Milky Way.

"I wonder if you have noticed that this is not a factual net, but a psychic one," lectured Right. Oh, pa...leeze. Left shut his eye just to give Right vertigo.

It was morning in the bedroom. Nothing looked out of place. There were a couple of Quigler rump scales clinging to the rattan headboard, but, of course, they were invisible. The woman woke to a series of gentle, furry taps to her face, feline Morris Code for "feed the cat." She groaned and reluctantly opened her eyes. "Muffin, what good are you?"

# Winds of Change

*by Joanne Lee Storlie*

---

Everything about the meal was dreary, she thought. Even the good china dishes, used instead of the everyday dinnerware to lend a special air to the unique occurrence of having all the family members assembled at once, had gone unnoticed. As she cleared the plates, still containing bits of uneaten food that hurried people had no time for, she wondered if her specialties had lost their appeal. True, no one had complained, but no one had acknowledged the flavorful and familiar tastes, the perfect timing, or the hours of loving care that had gone into planning and preparing such a meal.

Uneasiness stirred within her, and she reached inside her mind to grasp it. She struggled to identify the vague, uncomfortable feelings, and at length an anguished protest welled up. They weren't really here, she silently concluded. Everyone seemed to have their mind on other things, things beyond the large, warm room that had been the hub of so many activities for twenty years. Each one of them seemed involved in his own world of cares, a world that now took them along separate pathways to separate futures. Seldom did anyone take the time to serve up his thoughts, spread them before the others, and invite those assembled to partake of them. Did they not need the nourishment provided for their souls by siblings and parents along with the nourishment provided for their bodies anymore?

What call was so persistent, what lure was so strong? Their goings and doings, for the most part, excluded one another. While dining, they watched the clock, calculating and anticipating their imminent departures to individual and diverse destinations. Common ancestry and communal living no longer held them in a tightly knit group. It appeared to her that the fabric of their existence, which she had so carefully woven, was fraying and that her attempts to repair or delay the damage were futile. Indeed, gender, age, and blood relationships now appeared to measure differences instead of similarities. Was there really so much contrast in the interests of a sophomore and a senior? Was it really gauche to be seen with your brother? Was it unsophisticated to tell friends you had plans to do something with the family or that you'd prefer to stay at home one evening rather than gallivant to places of little lasting consequence? Were family picnics old fashioned, and family reunions only pleasures of the past?

It wasn't always like this, she recalled as she wiped the table in the now silent and empty room. Bright chatter used to fill this room. The air itself



hummed with shared interest, common goals, and happy memories. Eyes shone at the sight of one another, and absences were keenly felt. The simplest meals, whether hot dogs and beans or meat loaf and mashed potatoes, were always someone's favorite and loudly acclaimed. The simplest offerings, such as a batch of peanut butter cookies or a lemon meringue pie, could perk up spirits when they ebbed or reunite antagonists when dissension flared. We used to need each other, lean on one another, she reminisced.

Echoes of voices, raised to capture attention over other equally adamant speakers, came back to her: Does anyone have a suggestion for this essay I have to write? What would you do if you were in my shoes? Can I borrow your sweater? Let's make plans for our summer vacation. There was teamwork and camaraderie, family jokes and family rituals. She chuckled as she remembered how the younger children had their hands "sniffed" before meals by the older ones to prove their dampened paws had actually touched a bar of soap. She smiled as she called to mind the calendar which hung on the kitchen wall, boldly marked with bright red pen to announce the day's "Kitchen Klean-up Krew." Such repeated rites provided a stage for practicing a variety of responses to life and an environment for acquiring skills and attitudes necessary for successful existence. The usefulness of negotiation was learned; the art of diplomacy promoted. A sense of responsibility was ingrained; a sense of fair play and fair share encouraged. Even the dubious basics of bribery, sometimes learned at a tender age and

employed in filial transactions—"I'll let you use my baseball glove if you promise not to tell"—figured in the eternal scheme of things.

Oh yes, they sometimes hurried through meals, but that was to begin after-meal activities enjoyed by all ages and genders. Each season brought its specialties. In summer, there were backyard softball games and trips to the beach. In winter, there were ice skating at the park behind the house and sledding on a nearby hill. Raking leaves, bonfires and roasting marshmallows were among fall's delights. And spring brought bike hikes and gardening. Throughout the year, especially during inclement weather, jigsaw puzzles, card games, and on-going tournaments of chess, checkers, and ping-pong provided pleasant pastimes.

The hot water running from the faucet burned her hands and brought her thoughts back to the present. "Of course that was long ago!" This she said aloud as if answering the internal sentinel that always stood guard over her wandering thoughts and dutifully brought her back to matters at hand when such thoughts threatened to lead her down a road where dismay and melancholy waited. She knew that change was the only certain thing in life! She knew they would one day go out into the world and seek their fortunes! She was glad they were independent! And yet...

She wanted to cry and didn't know why. She wanted to go too, but didn't know where. She wanted to do something but hadn't the slightest idea what it could be.

And so she did the dishes.



*Reflections of Another Time and Place--Julie Pretell*

# Every Little Girl

*by Dawn Proctor*

Every little girl in love  
with daddy  
dreams  
of strong shoulders  
a place that's safe  
from loud  
house noise  
and rough-house boys

Lift me up and over  
stones and  
chaos  
shards of glass  
out of the car  
onto the grass  
light as hair  
on muscled arms  
out of the shade  
into the sun

Still seeking  
weightlessness  
no longer  
petite female  
fleeing years  
of gravity  
escapes each night  
to sweet safety  
once again in Daddy's arms  
wakes rudely to  
his memory.

# Reading Poetry--Resourcefully and Responsibly

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by Frederic Ross

## Who reads poetry?

So far as I am aware, everyone I know is a reader. Likely, some of their reading is golden, some dross. They read newspapers, magazines, business reports, even Facebook. They read history, biography, current events, essays and novels. Whatever. But I am aware of few, very few, who read poetry. Or admit to it.

In *The Atlantic* magazine several decades ago (May 1991), poet Dana Gioia flung to the world one of the more contentious articles ever to appear in that influential publication. Poetry, he declared, had become the enclave of academia and elitist institutions, a well-funded industry existing by and for itself, happily ignored by virtually all general readers. Poets poeticized but readers didn't read the stuff. He went on to recommend several changes for the poem industry to undo this unhappy state of affairs. However, a very recent article in *The Atlantic* (September 2018) by Jesse Lichtenstein contends that grey skies are turning blue, that poetry is in fact beginning to matter to a larger public. But a different public than Gioia had in mind. Now poetry matters to a much more inclusive public—black, Hispanic, Asian, female, gay, young, however identified. Predictably, this too has generated controversy, wrapped up in the debate over identity politics and whether inclusivity is indeed inclusive.

I acknowledge that my poetry bias tilts toward the Great Tradition and, further, that my readership sample may be skewed. Nevertheless I stand by my opening observation: few people today read poetry—whether old white guys or young black females or middle age Hispanics, and whether they are inclusive or not. Why is this? Well, it has something to do with the poets and the industry. But it also has to do with the non-readers. If poetry is ever to be more than a niche market, the transformation required to produce this expanded vision must include readers as well as poets and industry.

I'll leave to Gioia and other critics the task of corralling the poetry industry; my target here is that small band of non-readers who might be induced to come in from the poetic cold if they were to understand not just the challenge but the opportunity a poem presents. The challenge develops because a poem's meaning isn't spoon fed from author to reader. The author creates the text, but a reader is required to actualize meaning, akin to a tree falling in the forest

requiring ears if there is to be sound. And just here is the opportunity. By seeking from a poem not *the* meaning but *a* meaning, what the poem means *to me*, the resourceful reader can be a partner in the creative process. Definitive meaning can be left to scholars.

### **The challenges of poetry.**

Although poetry creates special challenges, extracting meaning from any literature is necessarily mindful activity. The reader must expect to be stretched. Noted British critic John Cary rightly observes that “a vital element in all literature is indistinctness, and this empowers the reader. The reader . . . must come to some kind of accommodation with the indistinctness in order to take meaning from the text.”<sup>1</sup>

In poetry indistinctness becomes something of a badge of honor. Robert Frost famously said that poetry “provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another. People say, ‘Why don’t you say what you mean?’ We never do that. . . .”<sup>2</sup> At its highest level, poetry seeks to express the inexpressible, straining language far beyond its everyday signification. Moreover, author and reader bring to a poem different sets of feelings, experiences, memories and associations, and these differences must be accommodated.

Since much of a reader’s response to poetry is emotional, one must be wary of analytic bludgeoning, murdering a poem through dissection. So Billy Collins’ lines on this score:

But all they want to do  
is tie the poem to a chair with rope  
and torture a confession out of it.  
They begin beating it with a hose  
to find out what it really means.<sup>3</sup>

Collins is correct but incomplete. Readers must be equally wary of assuming poetry is simply the

unleashing of strong feelings. Resourceful reading requires a willingness to shift gears, to analyze when appropriate and to intuit when intuition is appropriate.

No poem captivates every reader. I readily admit to finding some poetry of little interest, as likely will most readers. But so much is interesting. Sometimes after several readings and reflection on a well-wrought poem it is enough just to absorb the meaning. We savor and are fulfilled. But other times this is not enough. Although we want to absorb and savor, our reach exceeds our grasp. Meaning eludes us, and we face a decision: cry uncle or push on embracing the challenges and rewards inherent in the creative process? It is these poems, forcing readers to a decision, which I have in mind.

This is not a “how-to” essay on reading poetry. Others, far more capable, have done that.<sup>4</sup> I have instead two goals. The first is to create in resourceful readers an appetite for poetry, just as they might develop an appetite for any creative endeavor. The second is to point to certain responsibilities for the resourceful reader, even while he or she functions as a creative partner with the author. Partnership does not give license for anarchy; an author deserves more than cavalier disregard and not all readings are compelling.

### **Resourceful and responsible reading**

#### ***1. The resourceful-responsible reader closely engages a poem’s literary elements.***

Literary elements are the properties and features that make a poem a poem—tone, theme, imagery, setting, point-of-view and form. It will be helpful here to draw on a well-known verse from A. E. Housman’s *A Shropshire Lad*:

### **With Rue My Heart Is Laden**

With rue my heart is laden  
For golden friends I had,  
For many a rose-lipt maiden  
And many a lightfoot lad.

By brooks too broad for leaping  
The light foot boys are laid;  
The rose-lipt girls are sleeping  
In fields where roses fade.<sup>5</sup>

A poem's tone is its mood or atmosphere. Taken as a whole, does the poem seem joyous or solemn or playful or disheartened or celebratory or any other of countless possibilities? For me, in Housman's poem the tone is pensive, even somber, as we sense from words like "rue," "sleeping," and "fade." The apparent theme, the inescapable consequences of time and the fading of youth, emerges from this tone and is sustained by the imagery. The "rose lipt" maids and "light foot" lads are "golden friends" who, like Shakespeare's golden boys and girls, must come to dust. The quiet rural setting, with "fields" and "brooks too broad for leaping," contributes to the pensive tone, as does the point-of-view of the poem's persona, whose "heart is laden" by rueful recognition that all humans are captive to time's insistent hand. Housman then wraps these various elements with form, by which I mean all those poetic devices distinguishing poetry from prose—meter, rhyme, versification and others. Form is the aesthetic vessel that carries a poem's meaning. There is insufficient space here to review how Housman employs these devices, but consider: were he to have written his sentiments in prose few readers would have bothered to interrogate them for meaning.

### ***2. The resourceful-responsible reader is attentive to a poem's context.***

Context is the poem's total environment, its

historical, cultural, social, political and intellectual surroundings. Context need not—should not—be static. While the original context for Housman's poem is fleeting adolescence in pastoral England in the early 20th century, this context can be extended to other times, locales and situations, giving currency to its meaning. But there are limits. Imagination should not run amok. The context for this poem could not reasonably be rivers becoming "too broad for leaping" because of unprecedented rainfall from global climate change.

In her brief lyric of a liberated, make-no-apologies woman, Rochelle Kraut provides a wonderful example of how a poem's meaning emerges from its context.

### **My Makeup**

on my cheeks I wear  
the flush of two beers

on my eyes I use  
the dark circles of sleepless nights  
to great advantage

for lipstick  
I wear my lips<sup>6</sup>

The context is modern, urban, feminist. In my reading, the woman is a survivor, defiant, resourceful and accepting of the rigors of "sleepless nights." Others will draw a different picture. The point is that flexibility of a reader to enter into and shape a poem's context will be a major determinant in the meaning he or she extracts.

### ***3. The resourceful-responsible reader is sensitive to the author's intention.***

It would be naïve to argue that the author's intention constitutes the full substance of a poem's meaning. It would be equally naïve to argue that the author's impulse for writing is of

no interest or help for interpretation. Meaning emerges from an exchange between author and reader. Consider this poem by Theodore Roethke:

### Root Cellar

Nothing would sleep in that cellar, dank as a ditch,  
Bulbs broke out of boxes hunting for chinks in  
the dark,  
Shoots dangled and drooped,  
Lolling obscenely from mildewed crates,  
Hung down long yellow evil necks, like tropical  
snakes.  
And what a congress of stinks!  
Roots ripe as old bait,  
Pulpy stems, rank, silo-rich,  
Leaf-mold, manure, lime, piled against slippery  
planks.  
Nothing would give up life:  
Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath.<sup>7</sup>

At first blush the root cellar seems a Dantesque environment, “dank,” “dark,” smelling and twisted. But additional readings suggest something else. It is a repository of fecund, unyielding natural life, never sleeping, refusing to “give up.” What it lacks in beauty it gains in doggedness. Even the “dirt” keeps “breathing,” insistent on survival. In images like “evil” and “obscenely” the pit displays a human aura, while the reference to “snakes” evokes the Edenic garden and a connection between humans and nature.

As an extended metaphor Roethke’s awesome cellar is susceptible to a variety of readings. As one possibility, it points to a psyche confined within its own dark night. Even though enveloped in cellar-like despair, the introspective spirit-soul refuses surrender. Light and life will persist, unyielding and unquenchable. But does such a reading jar with the author’s intention? Although Roethke himself avoided assigning meaning to his poems, from his life and writing we find aids for their study. Many aspects of his life are reflected

in his so-called “Greenhouse poems,” of which “Root Cellar” is one, but also in others, such as “Cuttings,” “In a Dark Time,” and “Journey into the Interior.” Thus, there are ample external clues to suggest such a reading does Roethke’s intent no violence.

#### ***4. The resourceful-responsible reader assesses reasonability of an interpretation.***

While a reader is licensed to co-create poetic meaning, he or she should not expect huzzahs from a candid world for fanciful readings. “My Makeup” is not a sweeping indictment of the Barbie Doll industry, nor is “Root Cellar” a bleak parody of the “congress of stinks” in Washington. It is just here, after the reader has done the hard work of interpretation, that published critical readings can be helpful. They can serve as proxies for the candid world, providing a check against fanciful readings. So does the above reading of “Root Cellar” withstand objective scrutiny? There are numerous critical interpretations of the poem, none of which is exactly like the one I have suggested. However, taken collectively, neither would they suggest this reading to be fanciful. I therefore believe the interpretation passes the reasonability test.

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### End Notes

1. *What Good are the Arts?* (Oxford University Press, 2006) 214.
2. “Education by Poetry,” February 1930; at Amherst College.
3. From *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*, David Lehman, ed., (Oxford University Press, 2006).
4. See Terry Eagleton, *How to Read Literature* (Yale University Press, 2013).
5. From *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 3rd ed. (Norton, 1983).
6. Quoted in Camille Paglia, *Break, Blom, Burn* (Vintage Books, 2005).
7. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 3rd ed.

# One Small Poem

*by Barbara Carson*

## Survival

In November,  
In the greenhouse atmosphere of the zoo aquarium  
I watched a tropical finch  
Soften with toilet paper  
The nest it had constructed  
Within the mouth of a stuffed and mounted tuna.

## The Skeptics

I watched a bird  
Construct a poem  
Within a tuna's mouth.  
But when I showed the poem to others,  
They would not believe.  
One called the nest "a literary exercise"  
Another thought the finch's colors  
Were due to psychedelic drugs  
Or worse yet—  
Pure fantasy.  
Only one believed  
And he had placed his hand  
Into the pink gills  
That lined the tuna's side.



# That Lonesome Valley: My Life With Roots Music

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by Norman Leer

“You got to cross that lonesome valley; You got to cross it by yourself,”

- As sung by Richard Dyer Bennet

**M**y first memory of folk, or as it’s now called roots music is from the Assemblies at Manumit, the progressive boarding school outside Philadelphia where I was sent after my parents’ divorce. The Director, Uncle Billy (William Mann Fincke), would stand in front of the stone fireplace in the Main Hall, his arms moving enthusiastically, as if he were not only conducting but sending us a gift. He would lead us in obscure eastern European rounds (“Ifka’s Tumbling Waters”) and spirituals such as “I’m On My Way:”

“I’m on my way, and I won’t turn back,  
I’m on my way, and I won’t turn back,  
I’m on my way, and I won’t turn back;  
I’m on my way, great God, I’m on my way.”

Because Manumit was a very nurturing school and the first place where I felt unconditional love, these assemblies remain vivid in my mind. At the time, the songs weren’t labeled as folk music but they took on an aura of warmth and kindness that left me receptive as I heard more of the music later on.

The school was on an old farm, and everyone from Uncle Billy and the teachers down to the youngest students came together every week to do construction work on the old barns and farm buildings. I lived in a converted chicken coop and afternoons after classes I would return to my room, lie on the cot and listen to an hour-long program I’d found on a nearby radio station, WCKM in Camden, New Jersey. The program was called “Jazz Unlimited,” and featured a half-hour of traditional jazz and another half of modern. I responded especially to the zig-zagging clarinet of Johnny Dodds and the lace-iron trumpet improvisations of Louis Armstrong in their seminal Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings. I also loved the more introverted supple blues clarinet of George Lewis and the clean aggressive lines of Bunk Johnson’s trumpet. This early jazz unlocked a stream of emotions inside me; it still does. Jazz became part of my musical support system. One reason I prefer the term roots music is that it includes jazz and other indigenous forms under a definition that covers any music with communal origins, including the written songs of Woody Guthrie or The Carter Family and the elaborate compositions of Duke Ellington. I’m not

a musician. Once, when I tried out for a school glee club, the director said there was no category for my voice. But throughout my life music has been a life-affirming presence, listening a meditation and connection. Something in roots music, I think the emotional openness and the similarities between instrumental phrasing and the human voice, caught the shapes of my feelings and helped me navigate whatever lonesome or happy valleys I had to cross.

On holidays from Manumit I rode the Baltimore and Ohio's all-coach streamliner, The Columbian, back and forth to my family in Chicago. Trains, with their boogie-woogie rhythms and their melancholy whistles embodied some of the same emotions for me as the music. I think this explains their influence on both jazz and bluegrass. The Columbian had a dome car, and I would sit and watch as night came on and made the shapes of the Appalachian Mountains sadder and dimmer. Clumps of old trees opened their branches to the murky night. They looked like groping hands on a giant blackboard. The train ran from Washington to Pittsburgh via Harper's Ferry and Cumberland, Maryland. I remember the sad singing ironwork and neon sign of a hotel next to the Cumberland station. Later, as I learned the connections between these mountains and the old ballads, the songs began to look like the hills and valleys and the music and landscape merged into a childhood memory and longing for something called home.

After my father remarried, I wanted to come home. My step-mother said no, and I was sent to a boys' boarding school outside Chicago. This was a disaster. The school closed in 1954, the year I graduated. Most of the boys were into Elvis, who at his best had always seemed to me a bad imitation of blues singers like Leadbelly. I'd already begun listening to early acoustic blues

recordings and I was very much the outsider, often bullied by the duck-tailed, low-slung Elvis acolytes.

On vacations in Chicago I had friends in Hyde Park, the neighborhood of the University of Chicago. I went with them to Pete Seeger and Paul Robeson concerts at Mandel Hall. My parents had supported Henry Wallace in 1948. The music and its audience seemed like home. I felt good joining in the protest songs with Pete. I also felt good being picketed by the American Legion outside the Hall when Paul Robeson sang. In those days, the police were still protecting us from the snarling demonstrators. I was sheltered in an atmosphere of self-righteousness and idealism. Old hymns were resurrected as labor songs:

“You gotta go down and join that union,  
You got to join it by yourself.”

I remember once at a party sitting at the feet of the blues singer, Big Bill Broonzy, while he sang his own “Black, Brown and White:”

“If you white, you alright,  
And if you brown, stick around;  
But as you black, brother,  
Get back, get back, get back”

There wasn't much of a folk culture at college. Grinnell was an excellent school academically. It had no fraternities or sororities, which was partly why I'd chosen it, but there was compulsory hazing in the men's dorms. This was still the fifties in a flat and crew-cut Iowa town and one of my first political acts was to get elected to the Hall Council in my senior year and abolish hazing. By the time I got to grad school the folk revival had begun and I was drawn to the melancholy long hair and ballads of Joan Baez and Judy Collins. The Kingston Trio looked too much like a small fraternity. I felt I should have

liked the early Bob Dylan. I was moved and still am by his protest songs such as “A Hard Rain’s Gonna Fall.” The imagery danced, the feelings seemed real and relevant, but somehow there seemed a contrived edge to his singing that I didn’t respond to. I still can’t fully explain this. Joan Baez was in many ways as contrived, but at least for me, her voice connected with the old songs and the dark mountains outside the train windows.

My interest in jazz remained constant. I still listened to Bunk Johnson’s recordings, which were issued on ten-inch red vinyl LP’s with pictures of the band, in their undershirts, playing at New Orleans’ San Jacinto Hall. The introspective, blues-sensitive Chicago pianist Art Hodes became one of my favorites. I began to appreciate the nervous sounds of Charlie Parker and John Coltrane, the muted pain of Miles Davis and the intricate swinging blend of blues and Bach by John Lewis and the Modern Jazz Quartet.

At this time, something new was happening that broadened the folk culture. This was the re-emergence of country and blues musicians who had recorded and broadcast during the late twenties and thirties. The eccentric Harry Smith edited his influential anthology of old recordings for Folkways Records. Israel “Izzy” Young, John Cohen, Jean Ritchie and others organized a series of “old-time music” concerts out of The Folklore Center in Greenwich Village. Musicians like The Carter Family, The Stoneman’s, Bill and Charlie Monroe, The Stanley Brothers and blues singers like Mississippi John Hurt, Furry Lewis and Fred McDowell became familiar names beyond their ethnic and regional enclaves. Mike Seeger, John Cohen, and Tom Paley (later joined by Tracy Schwarz) formed The New Lost City Ramblers and played in the style of string bands

from the twenties.

As a grad student I joined a number of folklore students, including the singer Ellen Stekert, and organized a folksong club with a series of monthly “hootenannies.” Since my voice was still unclassifiable, I drew posters for the group and made up verses while others led the songs during the hoots. I remember finding an LP at a record store by a group I’d never heard of: Bill and Earl Bolick, The Blue Sky Boys. There were some old ballads on the album that I recognized. I mentioned my find to a folklore friend and discovered that I’d come across one of the more “authentic” old-time groups. Their harmonies were sweet and bittersweet at the same time, and I’m still drawn to their mournful recordings.

I also began listening to British folk singers: Shirley Collins, who had collected songs with Alan Lomax, A.L. Lloyd, Ewan MacColl, and his wife Peggy Seeger. They focused on ancient ballads along with MacColl and Seeger’s contemporary protest songs. There were also groups: the Scottish Ian Campbell Folk Group and the Irish Clancy Brothers. Ian Campbell’s Group sang songs I remembered from Manumit assemblies and MacColl’s a capella renditions of traditional ballads had the tight emotional sinews of poetry.

The performances by the old-time artists became a reason for the more inclusive term, roots music. Many of their recordings used written materials and were commercial, even if intended for small regional audiences, so they couldn’t be considered “pure” in the strictest sense. The Carter family’s work is an example. A.P. Carter, the male singer and manager, was also a collector. He scoured the Clinch Mountains digging out old songs. These he recorded directly or used as parts his own written work. Yet it all grew out from his native culture, and

in this sense fits the roots definition. The Carter Family's harmonies are so moving and authentic that I wouldn't want to ignore them just because they were written down or on commercial records and not straight off the land. The same can be said about the Dust Bowl songs of Woody Guthrie. What the revival of old-time music indicated was that important aspects of the folk tradition had survived and been transmitted and re-worked via radio, commercial recordings, and the promotion of singers and musicians, who were more recognized than those on field recordings.

Sometimes when I'm unhappy about aging I think how fortunate I am to have seen and heard Pete Seeger, Louis Armstrong, Art Hodes, and others. These musicians are touchstones. There's something in the "high lonesome" harmonies and intimate jazz phrasings that

helps me uncover and use parts of myself in my writing, teaching and survival. The intimacy of the human voice, even in instrumental music, is part of it. Also there's the authenticity of the material. The honesty of the old ballads, even if disturbing, is part of their strength. The recordings, even when commercial, seem to have a complexity and directness that distinguishes them from the set themes and phrasings of most popular music. Roots music—bluegrass, ballads and jazz—is a way of connecting with the feelings inside me and us. This is the job of all the arts, and roots music is an affirmation of human connection, reality and possibility.

On my table as I write are a CD of Hedy West singing traditional ballads and another of rare unissued masters by Bunk Johnson. I intend to listen to both, and I know they will help me to keep becoming more of whoever I am.

# In a Dream

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*by Linda Pilmer*

**A**s if in a dream, I watched a baby wrapped in a soft white shawl being thrown down a chute made of stone into the bowels of an old castle. The baby slid into the darkness, all alone but quiet. She never cried or even whimpered. I didn't know why she was discarded like that. I thought she was dead. There was no way for her to get out; the child could barely crawl.

At the top of the chute there was an area where food and water were kept ready to be lowered on a pulley to the baby below. It was clean and well organized; everything was covered with snowy white napkins. There was a small, neatly lettered sign that said:

“The bells – they ring backwards  
For you and for me.  
And for brave dunniewassals,  
Three thousand times three.”

An amorphous figure, dressed in a white shroud, approached and picked up a wooden bucket and ladle with a silver engraving that read: “Only the designated person can use these tools.” She filled the bucket with cool, crystal clear water and lowered it to the child. The water was salvation, both cleansing and thirst quenching – so inviting I could taste its refreshment without touching it and so clear you could see reflections of both the past and the future ...

I was puzzled and curious, but not really invested in the scene. I was clearly an observer in this play. I was not frightened or upset, but strangely comforted. I stood aside and watched for almost an eternity and at some point I realized that I was alternately both the baby and the spirit who went to help.



*The Königssee—Edie Urness-Pondillo*

# Making Mary a Goddess

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by Tom Schlicht

**P**atriarchal cultures that worshipped sky gods such as Marduk, Indra, Yahweh, or Zeus diminished the power of the goddess. But the people's longing for her remained.

After the first century C.E., people who had once been goddess devotees converted, or were forced to convert, to Christianity. Feeling the lack of the womanly spirit in this male-oriented creed, the people, remembering Asherah, Isis or dozens of other goddesses of the Mediterranean and Fertile Crescent regions, began to gradually transform Mary, albeit against the wishes of the church, into a goddess.

In their book *Goddess: Myths of the Female Divine*, Professor Emeritus David Leeming and co-author Jake Page tell us that the virgin Mary evolved from her image in the New Testament as a humble child-bearing and grieving mother to that of Queen of Heaven (161).

The famous church father, St. Augustine, claimed that sin was passed down through the generations from parent (i.e., father) to child as a result of sexual intercourse. At that time the general belief was that the father was the only parent; his female partner was just the incubator of the father's seed.

We learn in scholar Ute Ranke-Heinemann's book *Putting Away Childish Things* that in 1827 Dr. K. E. von Baer discovered the ovum (43). This, no doubt, was alarming news to the church, for now, Mary too was a parent and could have passed sin onto her son, Jesus. The solution to this problem was found when in 1854 the church adopted the doctrine of Mary's immaculate conception. With this decision, the newly purified Mary was rendered incapable of having transmitted sin, thus preserving Jesus' sinlessness.

In the early centuries of Christianity, folk traditions attached themselves to Mary. Special sacred cakes were offered up to her as had been earlier to the Canaanite mother goddess, Asherah. In Constantinople, the people called her Theotokos (God-bearer). As Leeming and Page state, at the second council of Nicea, 787, the church found it necessary to remind the faithful that "Mary was to be revered, but not worshipped" (162).

By the 12th century, a whole body of legend had attached itself to Mary

and was eventually collected in de Voragine's *The Golden Legend*. In the folk mentality, Mary's death was thought of as a sleep from which she was assumed bodily into heaven. There, she is a wife-like intercessor with God for human sinners. The church, our authors tell us, finally made folk legend official when in 1950 it accepted the Assumption of Mary (162).

As Queen, Mary grew in power and became the church itself. Our authors write "She became, in a sense, the bride of Christ and was often referred to as such." Suggesting Inanna or Cybele "once again Goddess had emerged with the sacrificed son-lover" (162).

The folk mind tried to fashion Mary along the lines of earlier goddesses, while the church insisted that her image be that of obedient peasant girl and sexless perpetual virgin. But goddess power, despite protests of bachelor church fathers, kept growing. In images of

Mary, she "is depicted more often as a crowned queen than as a humble maiden," and churches were more often named for her than for Jesus. The sites of her miraculous appearances (e.g., at Fatima) have become shrines for yearly pilgrimages, which is, our authors say, "in effect, Goddess worship for millions of Christians annually" (163).

What have been the effects of the repression of the goddess by the church and other patriarchal sky-god cultures throughout history? Leeming and Page say that it has left a hole in the collective human experience, "a gap reflected in our inability to move from a war-like to a nurturing mentality, in our systematic destruction of the earth [Mother Earth] . . . and in the relegation of women to an inferior position in human society (161).

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#### References

- Leeming, David A., and Jake Page. *Goddess: Myths of the Female Divine*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 161-163.
- Ranke-Heinemann, Ute. *Putting Away Childish Things*. San Francisco, Harper, 1995.



## Lost and Found

*by Gwen Pangburn*

My jeep bounces across the desert  
past prickly cactus and tumbleweeds.  
I look back to see I've driven  
across a lost cowboy hat  
that must have traveled windswept  
for miles, I imagine.  
I squeal to a stop  
bend to pick it up.  
Although a bit crushed  
it's decorated with turquoise stones.  
It still looks good.  
Almost new.  
I look around  
but I'm alone.  
So I slap it across my knee  
to dust it off  
and then set it on my head.  
It fits perfectly.  
As if waiting for me.  
I'm another person now.  
A cowgirl.  
Free to roam and be who I am.  
Whoever owned the hat is in me now.  
I smile and don this new confidence  
granted to me by this neglected hat.  
Forgetting my troubles  
I gallop away  
leaving a swirl of dust  
from the past behind me,  
as my old hat blows off the backseat.



*Her Hand--Felicitus Ferington*

# 1947: Summer of the Bug

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*by Richard Radtke*

**H**arlan Schwabach tosses a hardball from his front porch, across Osewski's yard. I get a bead on it and settle under its arc. "Flop," it says as it strikes the pocket of my Lou Boudreau fielder's glove.

"C'mon, Dickey," Harlan taunts. "Ya chicken?"

"Am not chicken." I slap my glove three times and heave the ball back to him. "Just careful. Can't even see that lousy bug."

I call it a bug, afraid to say the other word out loud, one simple, five-letter word, more terrible than Frankenstein or Dracula, Polio.

Two weeks ago the city turned off the drinking fountains on street corners. Then they closed the swimming pools and public beaches. On my tenth birthday, the news came over the Crosley radio on our kitchen shelf: kids were to be quarantined in their yards. The bug stalked the city like a nightmare.

"They're trying to scare us," Harlan says. "Ain't no lousy bug going to get me."

"Bug got President Roosevelt, now he's dead."

Through our endless days of quarantine, Harlan and I toss baseballs over Osewski's yard, transforming ourselves into major leaguers. "DiMaggio goes back, back, makes a one hand stab against the wall." "Williams races through left-center, spears the ball on the dead run."

These were days of play-acting DiMaggio and Williams, Ralph Kiner, Jackie Robinson. Summer vacation is passing us by. Harlan goads me to sneak out, see what's happening on Burnham Street, Greenfield Avenue, Layton Boulevard.

Chicken, that's me. I imagine the bug stalking the streets like a wild animal, lurking in puddles of standing water after a rain. In the very air we breathe. So small, you can't see it. A stiff neck is a sure sign. Each morning I wake up and turn my head left and right. Each morning my neck feels—funny.

“All right then,” I finally submit to Harlan’s dare. “I’ll go. But if anything happens...”

We slip down the alley, across Lapham Street to Joey Macaluso’s hideout under the bill board on Sixtieth and National. There, a man with a mouth six feet across spews rings of white smoke, advertising Old Gold cigarettes. Joey himself, two years older than Harlan and me, smokes Chesterfields. When we drop by his hideout beneath the billboard he offers us a drag, passing the butt around until my stomach turns over.

“You ain’t inhaling,” Joey observes. “What’re ya, some kind of sissie?”

Harlan guffaws. “Had to practically hogtie him just to get him here,” he says.

I pass the butt to Joey, hoping my distress does not show.

Three days later my mother gets a telephone call from Mrs. Macaluso. When she hangs up, her face has turned ashen.

“Joe Macaluso has polio,” she whispers, wringing her hands in her apron.

I remember taking the Chesterfield from Joey’s hand and touching it to my lips. I head for the bathroom and gargle with Listerine, twice.

A day later, Joey’s picture is splashed across the front page of the Milwaukee Journal, smiling into the mirror on his iron lung as though he’s

just found a whole carton of Chesterfields in his old man’s dresser drawer. In a moment of recognition, I see my face in that glass.

One look at that picture is enough to swear me off drinking water in public places and sharing cigarettes. The iron lung proves how deadly the bug is. The machine hugs Joey’s body, looking like Captain Nemo’s one-man submarine: squared windows on top and round portholes along the sides. At one end of the machine Joey’s head sticks out, resting on a pillow.

The next morning Harlan and I are back in our yards, comparing symptoms. My stiff neck is worse today, and Harlan has a sore throat. All morning long we flex our knees and swallow through Adam’s apples big as golf balls, waiting.

Joey dies one week later. His father tells the newspaper his son was very brave. Still quarantined, Harlan and I aren’t allowed to go to the funeral. We sneak down the alley to National Avenue and watch the big black hearse pull out of Verhalen’s funeral parlor.

In the end, the bug spares Harlan and me, and seven years later tests begin on Doctor Salk’s vaccine. Pictures in the paper show kids lined up to get their shots. Children smile bravely as the nurse punctures their arm with a needle. But after all these years I still see Joey’s face in that mirror. And even as children take small plastic vials of Sabin vaccine, the words quarantine and iron lung strike fear into my heart. Sixty-some years later, I still call it the bug, never calling it Polio.

# Waiting for Godot 2019

*by M. Jane Ayer*

The blueberry squares  
are set out  
for the moving belt  
of humanity  
passing through the wait room.  
Costumes mark the compliant  
weary passengers  
sitting in resignation  
staking their claim to a  
self and to a place  
among the living.  
The man, a Cubs baseball cap  
set at a rakish angle  
worn and stained stating  
its role in a journey  
perhaps now coming to an end.  
The woman furiously knits  
hardly lowering her eyes  
x-rays, labs, charts, potent meds  
take form in subtle patterns  
in a sweater  
too painful to be worn  
when it's over, really over.

The boy not quite able  
to color within the lines  
colors mix, random strokes  
illegible form  
his baseball cap, Seahawks,  
covering a bald shiny scalp  
eyebrows and eyelashes gone now  
in the flood of chemicals  
drip, drip, drip.  
Time in this room  
passes inexorably  
a parade of x-rays, caustic pills  
and more surgeries.  
And the Cubs play ball  
and the woman knits  
and the boy colors  
on and on and . . .



*Float--Joan Kutter*

# The Future of Food: A Global Perspective

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by Paul Thompson

**W**hat's for dinner? The answer to that question will probably be very different in 2050 than it is today.

In fact, some wonder if there will be enough food for everybody to eat in the future. Will human nature's drive to survive and technological advances ensure that there will be sufficient food available? A recent report from the Washington DC-based World Resources Institute asks the question in starker terms: "How do we feed the world without destroying it?" Many people, organizations and governments are using 2050 as their target reference date to examine these questions (7).

The issue of human survivability has been around for a long time. In 1968, Paul Ehrlich, a professor in the Department of Biology at Stanford University, published his book on *The Population Bomb*, followed by another polemic, *The Limits to Growth*. His was a pessimistic view of the future. Ehrlich argued that mankind was facing a demographic catastrophe with the rate of population growth quickly outstripping growth in the supply of food and resources (1,2).

Unlike Paul Ehrlich, Julian Simon, a professor of environmental economics at the University of Illinois, Chicago, held cornucopian views. He was a futurist who thought that the key factor in natural and world economic growth was humankind's capacity to create new ideas and to build on our knowledge. These ideas would solve our problems, grow our economy and leave a larger inheritance to future generations (5).

In 1980 these men placed a bet known as *The Simon-Ehrlich Wager*. Simon asked Ehrlich to pick any five raw materials to track in wagering that their price would go down over a period of ten years. Ehrlich chose five critical metals and then watched the world's population grow by more than 800 million over the next decade, the largest one-decade increase in history. Nevertheless, by September 1990, the price of each of Ehrlich's selected metals had fallen. Simon won the bet (3).

Ehrlich dismissed the bet based on just five metals as a side issue and asserted that the main issues were environmental problems like the ozone hole, acid rain, and global warming. He proposed a second wager based on his belief that there would be significant increases in carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, and

sulfur dioxide in the atmosphere and decreases in fertility of agricultural soil, of rice and wheat yields and of available fish, along with general environmental degradation. He predicted that the gap in wealth between the richest 10% of humanity and the poorest 10% would be greater in 2004 than in 1994 (3).

These two men couldn't agree on the terms of a second wager and it was never placed. But one wonders who would win if Erlich and Simon wagered today as to whether there will be enough food to feed the world by 2050 without destroying it. Current predictions trend in both directions: a future beset by scarcity or one that flourishes due to a cornucopia of new ideas, some of which would lead to technological solutions.

Whether we can feed the planet's population adequately by 2050 hinges on the relative strength of several competing forces. The global population is increasing while climate change is compromising agricultural productivity, but technology continues to result in remarkable increases in food production. However, the public support and political will necessary to address climate change and to foster sustainable agriculture have yet to emerge.

How would food planners tackle the inquiry of will we have enough food? Current studies focus on the following questions:

### **What will our population be in 2050?**

The United Nations Population Fund projects that our current world population of 7.8 billion will increase to nearly 10 billion by 2050, an increase of 30%. This increase of 2 billion

people is equal to today's combined populations of China, the United States and Brazil (6).

### **Where will we be living?**

The entire population gain will occur in low and moderate-income countries that are already the most challenged at meeting their populations' food requirements. For many of these countries, water and arable land are already scarce resources. This projection foretells enormous pressure to migrate from food-poor to food-rich countries (6).

### **How much food will we need?**

Because of demographic and economic trends, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) predicts that the planet will need 56% more food in 2050 than it produces today. In addition to this population growth, current rising standards of living in some countries, (China and India in particular), will result in a huge increase in demand for higher-caloric diets, especially for animal protein.

### **What are the trends in food production and consumption?**

Ehrlich's followers envision many reasons why we won't be able to adequately feed a population that increases 30% by 2050. They cite the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPPC) that predicts climate change will disrupt agricultural and livestock conditions and, in many areas (including the Midwestern U.S.), reduce crop yields by 25% by 2050. By then water shortages and drought will have restricted pasture lands, reducing their ability to raise grazing animals. Productive agricultural lands



are already becoming deserts. More intensive agricultural production will translate into more pollution caused by fertilizers and animal waste. Many of our current agricultural practices will generate more greenhouse gases (4).

Simon's optimistic followers, however, point to technological progress at producing more food with fewer resources. For example, genetic innovations have resulted in seeds that are more resistant to disease and drought, among other environmental adaptations. These innovations are likely to continue a decades-long steady increase in the yields of grain crops and other staples. Improvements in water management have led to more efficient irrigation systems. Advances in farm machinery have freed up labor and facilitated harvesting more products with less damage to the crop. Integrated greenhouse agriculture has produced multiple crops a year using minimal water and pesticides while replacing sunlight with LED lighting 24 hours a day. Many agricultural practices can mitigate climate change, such as carbon sequestration (4).

There are increased efficiencies in moving crops and livestock from the field to processing centers. Improvements in processing food result in more nutrition retention and in a longer shelf life for produce. More enlightened retailing practices reduce food waste. Customer education initiatives help consumers get more nutrition out of their food budget.

Do these competing visions of the future alarm you or do they reassure you that we can meet the food challenge? Is the glass half empty or half full?

In December 2018, the World Resource Institute (WRI) published a report *Creating a Sustainable Food Future*, which explores solutions to the

potential looming crisis of a food shortfall and the consequences of climate change. The report addresses the question: How can the world adequately feed nearly 10 billion people by the year 2050 in ways that help combat poverty, allow the world to meet climate goals, and reduce pressures on the broader environment?

With collaboration from the UN, the World Bank and academic institutions, WRI identified three gaps that must be addressed regarding our food availability. The first is the *food gap*, that is, the difference between the amount of food produced today and the amount necessary to meet the demand in 2050. This gap is likely to amount to FAO's prediction of a need for 56% more crop and livestock calories than those produced today.

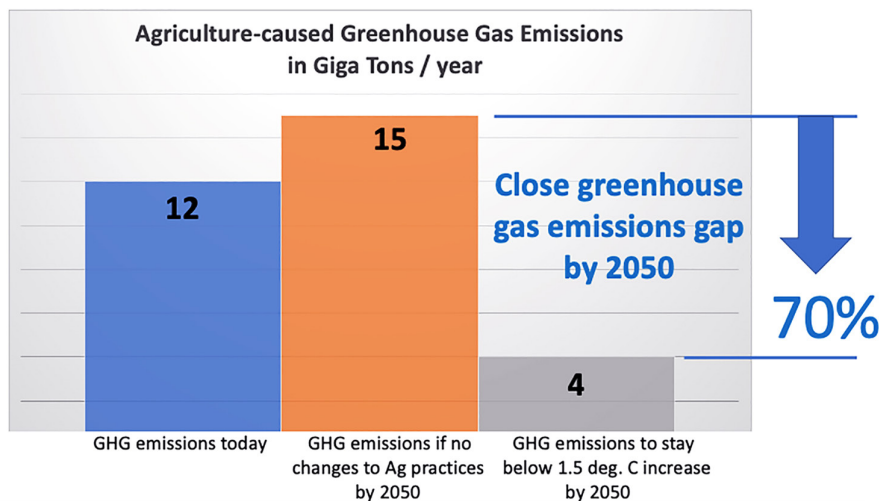
This relates to the second gap, the *land gap*, described as the difference between the area of land currently devoted to agricultural food production and the area that would be required to produce 56% more food in 2050. This theoretical increased area, the land gap, would equal a land mass nearly twice the size of India. However, the FAO and other organizations predict that land available to food production will increase less than 5% over this period.

The third gap is referred to as the *greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation gap*. Currently, agriculture contributes 12 gigatons (or 25%) of the global greenhouse gas emissions. At current levels of practice, agricultural GHG emissions are projected to increase to 15 gigatons by 2050. However, in order to hold global warming below the internationally-agree target of a 1.5°C increase, it is essential to reduce agriculture's GHG to a total of 4 gigatons. This is 11 gigatons less than what will occur without major interventions. Figure 1, on the next page,

illustrates this challenge.

efficient than red meat, such as pork, poultry, fresh produce, dairy, wheat, rice and corn.

## The greenhouse gas emissions gap



The graphic was developed by the author from information in the World Resource Institute (WRI) report "Creating a Sustainable Food Future." December 2018.

Fortunately, the WRI report presents a menu of approaches to each of these challenges characterized as five courses as in avenues to pursue. Each course addresses a related family of problems and suggests possible solutions (9).

**Course number one:** Reduce growth in demand for food and other agricultural products. The first solution to this issue is to reduce food loss and waste. Of all the food produced in the world each year, approximately one-third by weight and one-quarter by calories is lost or wasted at various stages between the farm and the fork. Globally, food loss and waste result in nearly \$1 trillion in economic losses annually. Another solution is to shift to healthier and more sustainable diets. It takes 100 times as much land to produce one gram of beef or mutton protein than it takes to produce one gram of protein from pulses (e.g., beans, lentils, chickpeas and split peas). We have to focus on producing calories and protein that are more

### Course number

**two:** Increase food production without expanding agricultural land. We need to get higher yields through improved plant breeding and more efficient methods of growing crops. The Netherlands, for example, is leading the world in developing new agriculture practices and is now the world's second largest exporter of

food, after the United States. Similarly, we need to increase livestock and pasture productivity raising more meat on less land through improved land management practices. Both of these objectives can be more achievable by implementing the improved soil and water management practices.

**Course number three:** Protect and restore natural ecosystems and limit agricultural land-shifting. Food producers and environmental managers need to work together to link productivity gains to the protection of natural ecosystems. Development assistance and agriculture loans should explicitly link programs to improve agriculture production with forest or other natural ecosystem protection. Millions of acres of abandoned, unproductive agricultural lands can be reforested dramatically reducing GHG emissions.

In addition, developed countries are producing less food for themselves and depending upon less developed countries for their food. This agricultural land-shifting often results in deforestation and other environmentally degrading practices.

**Course number four:** Increase fish supply. Even though fish provide a small percentage of total global calories, they contribute 17 percent of animal-based protein. Fish is an important part of the diet of 3 billion people in developing countries. This course proposes ways to improve both wild fisheries management and to raise the productivity of aquaculture.

**Course number five:** Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agricultural production. The goals of this course are central to managing the consequences of climate change. Four of the main agricultural contributors to greenhouse

gas emissions are rice methane, soil fertilization, energy used in agriculture and manure management. Each account for roughly 15% of the total agriculture GHG emissions. However, the largest contributor (40%) is technically referred to as ruminant enteric fermentation, – the methane produced by and emitted from the stomachs of cattle, sheep and goats. Progress is being made to reduce all of these GHG sources.

Based on these positive and negative predictions, it is clear that providing adequate food for everyone on the planet by 2050 is inextricably linked to managing climate change. The goals of providing adequate food and managing climate change are simultaneously contradictory and essential. Perhaps portions of both Ehrlich's and Simon's predictions will play themselves out over the next three decades. Each of their perspectives can contribute to our ability to monitor emerging issues related to global food availability.

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## Philosophy Comes Down Among the People

*by Vince Lavaloski*

Socrates, it was said, worked  
As a young man carving stone  
Up on the Acropolis, a craftsman,  
Perhaps working on the marble  
Metopes and friezes of the  
Mighty Parthenon itself. But in order  
To do his life work, he came down  
To the Agora, to the place of the people.

Philosophy cannot dwell on the high  
Holy place of mystic revelation  
Because there the answers come  
On bolts of thunder and brook  
no doubts. But down in the  
Imperfect, confused bustle of the  
Market, by the cobbler's shop  
Where hawkers cry their wares  
And children play, there Socrates  
Wandered and talked,  
Raising the questions that  
Lift our souls and give life  
To mere existing. He walked where  
Money ruled, smiling a gentle  
Ironic smile amidst the glittering  
Goods from many lands, saying:  
"Such a great number of things  
I do not require." Such is the  
Voice of a free man.



*Red Moon Rising--Grethe Brix-Leer*

# The Storage Shed

*by Rose Ann Findlen*

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A letter, soggy and limp, sticks out from the mailbox slot. City of Madison, it says. Peeling away sodden strips of the envelope, Mae reads the notice that the city bought the storage shed property where she and Paul rented a unit. They are required to vacate their storage shed in six months. Their 25-year conflict over dealing with the furniture and boxes from their move from a large house to a much smaller one is forcibly resolved. They now have to do something with the disintegrating boxes crammed into the leaking, banged-up shed.

“My books,” Paul mourns. “What will I do with my books?”

“Go through them and decide which ones you want to keep. Lots of them are going to be too water-damaged. The cardboard boxes they’re in are falling apart. Half the books will be unreadable and just as many so outdated that nobody would want them. Maybe an antiquarian or a flat-earther—

“Not funny. My books are my identity. They embody the story of my life.”

“I know. We’ve had this conversation and nothing ever happens. But now something has to happen. We have to go through the stuff in the storage shed and make some decisions--this summer.”

Their lives tumble out of the rotting cardboard boxes they had packed thirty years ago to move North. In a box of her son’s books, letters from his birth father drunkenly apologizing for never showing up. Mae shuts the box. When her son goes through his college books he’d left with her, he’ll find the letters and, somehow, deal with them—they’re not hers to throw away.

Paul kneels on the concrete sorting through handfuls of jumbled photos he’d hurriedly stuck in a manila envelope and packed among his books. A photo of a girl he had wanted to marry sticks to the back of his grandparents’ fiftieth anniversary picture. When he tries to separate the two Kodak prints, his girlfriend’s face rips off. After looking at the wrinkled photo a long time, he tears it in two and tosses it into the trash bin.

At night, books, papers and photos in the endless boxes scroll as slideshows under their eyelids. They are pulled awake, remembering. Mae counts—

not sheep, but the people in her life who are now dead: boyfriends, playmates, sisters. She'd seen their faded handwriting today, their faces, and now, could hear their voices as they had been back then. Her mother stands at the sink looking down into the dishwater as she tries to ask Mae how she has come to be so different from what she'd imagined. Mae hears herself half-answering, believing her mom could never understand the world she had chosen to live in.

"You really hurt our parents, you know," her brother had told her when he was dying of cancer. Thanks bro.

"I know," Mae had said. "I tried to make it up to them after I had passed through those crazy Viet Nam years." Seeing her mother's spidery writing on an index card with a recipe for strawberry shortcake that afternoon brought back the moments she could never re-do. Mae gets up at four in the morning exhausted from remembering with stabbing freshness her mother's sorrowful face.

"Why didn't we deal with this stuff before?" Paul, over-heated and exhausted, flings a box of tattered, rotting comic books into the bin.

"We had busy lives, if you remember—kids, parents, careers, vacations—and, really, we didn't want to."

"Should we give away our camping gear? We haven't gone camping for years."

They sit on the cooler on the tar drive outside the storage shed. At 10:00 a.m. the sun pounds their thinning skin. Their knees already ache from yesterday's squatting and bending as they shoved aside antique end tables and chairs to get

to more boxes.

"You do remember the last time, Mae. Our air mattresses deflated and we couldn't sleep because of the sharp rocks grinding into our butts. The next day we were so stiff we couldn't put our clothes on in the half-upright position our humble little tent required. We had to wiggle into them lying down. Then we couldn't stand up without help when we left the tent. We crawled across the gravel to the picnic table and used the bench to pull ourselves up. Meanwhile the Millennials stood around laughing. Our camping days are over. We had some really good times, though, if you remember."

Patting her rear, Paul stiffly stands, picks up the tent and tosses it into the bin destined for Goodwill.

"What's that thing under the tarp in the corner?"

"My grandmother's sewing machine."

"Keeping that?"

"I can't. It probably doesn't work anymore but it was something my grandmother handled and worked."

"I thought your grandmother died before you were born."

"She did. But still—"

"Maybe some antiquer would take it. We'll have to call around."

"I did. Becky said she has five in her shop right now that she can't sell. Nobody wants antiques anymore. Ikea and texting are in. Real wood and

heirlooms are out.”

Mae had thought they would reach a point when they wouldn't care about any of it. In some ways they had. They were tired--tired of it all. The antiques and dog-eared books could not fit into their house. Nobody else wanted them. Each box held mementos of past pain, elation, and the day to day chapters of their lives; each item they had packed in there long ago a unique encounter with their pasts.

“It's all just stuff, right?” a friend said. “Let it go. That's the essence of our lives—letting go.”  
“Does it make you feel free? Getting rid of all the weight of that stuff?” said another.

Yesterday Mae found her third grade autograph book squeezed between the grammar books. “Roses are Red, Violets are Blue, Skunks Stink and So Do You,” Benny, her snorting, giggling classmate, had written. Mae thought of Benny sitting in front of his camper on the Padre Islands at five o'clock every night and raving at

Fox News on his mini-television. No visible past or future. Just Fox News and the murmuring of neighbors he doesn't know eating their frozen dinners.

In the movies, the storage shed dilemmas would be resolved by the couple, played by Clint Eastwood and Jane Fonda, sitting in a sexy little red convertible and laughing joyously as they pull away from their unsorted, abandoned junk.

“Not sure,” she said.

They are emptied out. Staring into the bare shed, Paul wants to believe he can hold his memories inside in lieu of the books, letters and the old baseball glove he'd thrown into the trash bin, but the sensory memory will fade, failing to recreate the angle of his favorite teacher's handwriting or the smell of his glove and its fit in his hand. Paul slams the storage shed door shut. Its metal clunk echoes in the hollowed inside. Putting the padlock in his pocket, he turns toward the car.

“What's next, Mae?”



# My Mother, Turning Heads

*by Nancy Dunham*

I remember the man

behind the counter  
in the shoe store,

glancing my way  
with a cunning grin

and asking,  
“Is that your big sister?”

As he moved toward her,  
with eyes exploring

the red lipstick,  
the curve of her breasts, those  
high heels and elegant legs.

She stood upright,  
half-facing away.

Yet I glimpsed  
a puzzling half-pleasure

in her brief,  
dismissing smile.

With head then turned and lowered,  
and noticing the scuffs  
on my out-grown shoes,

my ten-year-old heart  
mutely claimed her as my mother.

But wondered ... would  
a big-sister-not-mother  
reveal all

those grown-lady secrets  
I was sure I'd never know.

## Pathways

*by Kate Dike*

I saw sun dogs this morning  
before the snow moved in,  
pieces of rainbow--prism-bent light,  
frost on the window like ocean coral.

A chickadee ate from my palm--  
weightless handful of feathered heartbeat.  
In an abandoned nest box  
I found dried berries and mouse bones,  
season's leavings marking time.

Farther away a black-masked shrike  
perched on a fence post.  
A coyote loped across the field,  
the same path where last year's fox  
would pause and look at me--  
red-furred mystery, following its nose,  
never telling where or why it goes,  
with a purpose more clear than my own.

Later the big snow came--  
nothing but white and cold  
as the heavens fell to the ground.  
When it cleared I walked a trail through the trees  
to the Milky Way,  
hickories standing ready for winter.  
Seven geese flew over, silent, fading to stars.

Soon the moon will rise  
across stark shadows of the pines.  
Here on our tiny orb  
on the edge of the Orion Arm  
flying squirrels with ice-pool eyes  
will leap and glide through dark and frosted firs,  
their soft low chirps almost a song.  
Eons before us they were here.  
Rarely-seen travelers through time  
that boldly jump and soar,  
which flight path is mine?



*Eagle Lake--Jim Albright*

# Hair

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*By Janice Golay*

Remember “Hair,” the 1960s musical hit? The 60s was a very hairy age for both men and women. For women, the longer your tresses the better, tumbling toward mid-back, reaching for the waist. Men sprouted hair everywhere: flowing beards, sideburns like wings, a big head of the wooly stuff. Ah, the hairy 60s.

No matter the age or sex, I have a particular attraction to and appreciation for hair—the longer, the fuller, the better. My family carries a gene, probably from my father, that crowns us with a thick head of hair. Hairdressers and barbers, shears in hand, sigh in resignation or secretly smile in wonder when faced with the task of clipping, taming, training the wild mop plopped in a chair before them. I still fear the sly suggestion to thin or shape. “Well, perhaps just a little,” I might concede. I’m on my guard because I like to hide behind my big hair, while at the same time feeling secretly proud of its abundance and color (natural red, but turned a gray-free brown/blond with age).

Now, this is a difficult confession. A convicted Balkan War criminal also had a big head of hair. I suspect he and my father shared the same gene pool since my grandparents immigrated from that difficult part of the world in the early 20th century. In the midst of the 1990s Balkan War (yes, one more bloody war) the story is that this hairy criminal-politician was preoccupied not with the grotesque suffering, loss of life and massive destruction inflicted upon his country, but with finding an excellent hairdresser, good enough to style his thick and showy hair. After the war and trial I wonder who did his hair in The Hague prison.

Back to my family. Baldness is unknown among us, perhaps because our hard-working lifespans were short. Everyone retained a “healthy head of hair” till the end, although sometimes commingled with a smoker’s cough or a nose the color of good claret. I have family photos to prove my case. No bald eagles.

I am attracted to men of high intelligence and height, topped off with abundant or at least interesting hair. Was it that silky aura of grey-white hair that pulled me toward my destined husband (JP)? Or perhaps his neon blue eyes, a flashing marquee announcing “brilliant, brilliant, brilliant ... but kind.” No matter. It worked out just fine, for me and for us as a couple. Trust your undercover instincts, especially if it involves hair and eyes.

For thirty-three years I was my husband's preferred barber. Being a frugal Swiss man, JP liked the idea of my taking scissors to groom his fine hair rather than paying high prices for a stranger to do the same thing. Whenever JP's white wings started to take off from the temples on either side of his head it was my job to literally clip them. This implied mutual respect

and trust: not too much, not too little, no slip of the shears. You might note the past tense in this paragraph. It's been almost six years since I last cut JP's wispy hair. I still have the shears. Not exactly memento mori, but there they are resting in the bathroom vanity drawer. Don't know why I keep them, but I do.

# Memories

*by Barbara Carson*

Memories are strewn carelessly about my house  
Like pennies that are left to tarnish in jewelry boxes  
Bureau drawers  
And on windowsills.  
But now the bank is closing  
And I search frantically to gather and protect my coins  
And to note the date of each and where each one was minted.  
I search through boxes that have set unopened in the attic  
And through photographs that are faded and smell of mildew.  
I shine my light behind baseboards and down air vents  
Fearing/knowing that some are lost and will not be found.  
And those I find in unexpected places,  
I gather and polish and stack upon my desk.



*Late Summer—Grethe Brix-Leer*

# Tales of the Leven Oaks

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*by Linda Pilmer*

**N**estled in the California foothills, the Leven Oaks Hotel was built in 1911. In those days in the spring it was almost possible to get a whiff of the blossoms from the neighboring orange groves. The hotel was named for the eleven stately California Live Oak trees that adorned the property.

The Leven Oaks was constructed as a tourist-class hotel; a retreat spot for eastern and mid-western travelers who wanted to escape the rigors of winter but were not wealthy enough for the luxury resorts of Florida. Additionally the local community leaders hoped some of the visitors might become so enchanted by the area that they would decide to relocate permanently. Originally the architectural style was that of a Swiss chalet but before too many years passed it was redesigned in a Spanish Colonial style which was much more appropriate for its California location. From the beginning, the interior was done in a Craftsman/Mission style and Gustav Stickley designed and created the furniture. It was elegant; there were stained glass skylights in the dining room and inlaid wood and Italian tile floors.

The place was an instant success and for many years most of the important social events were held there: weddings, high school proms, Christmas parties, etc. The dining room was open to the public and was the location for the meetings of all of the local civic organizations. However by the middle of the twentieth century the world had advanced but the Leven Oaks hadn't. It no longer catered to tourists; it had become a residential facility, mostly for seniors. Over the next twenty years it was sold several times, each time becoming more rundown and disreputable and eventually there was developing concern within the law enforcement community that drugs were being sold and distributed by the current owners

When it came up for sale in the early 1980's there was only a dim memory of its former glory days. The outside didn't appear too shabby but the interior suffered from many years of sloppy management and deferred maintenance. Along came longtime local residents, Lisa and Phil Magno, who were looking for an investment opportunity.

Lisa was a striking redhead with all of the personality traits and characteristics commonly ascribed to "gingers." She was passionate about what she believed in; she didn't just like things, she adored them. She was friendly and charismatic with a rare ability to make people laugh even under conditions that were not inherently funny. People were drawn to her and one of her greatest talents was



listening and putting them at ease. When she became involved in a project she went about it wholeheartedly. She was the epitome of the saying “If you want to get something done, ask a busy person to do it.” This was demonstrated in her long history of community service dedicated mainly to the needs of those less fortunate. She was clever, creative, and blessed with boundless energy.

Lisa and her husband bought the Leven Oaks with the intent of turning it into a bed and breakfast facility. She had visions of cute rooms with chenille bedspreads and chintz curtains. She could see herself in ruffled aprons, serving freshly baked blueberry muffins, orange popovers, sizzling trays of bacon and eggs along with pitchers of freshly squeezed orange juice. Southern California was filled with countless opportunities for daytime activities. So, whether the guests stayed for one night or many, Lisa was confident that her breakfasts would be spectacular and the guests would have no problem finding entertainment and plenty of opportunities for meals for the rest of the day leaving her free to pursue other interests.

But then she met the senior citizens who lived there, many for more than a decade. None of them wanted to leave, even though they all bemoaned how much the place had deteriorated in recent years. And they had nowhere to go. Lisa was so moved by their pleas she couldn't even consider asking them to move to comply with her idea for a bed and breakfast facility. Instead she determined to create the best accommodations for senior residential living in the area.

Instead of shutting the entire hotel down and doing a complete renovation in the most expedient way, everything had to be done piecemeal with as little disruption to the lives of the residents as possible. It was decided to start with the dining room because it was extremely dreadful and the

seniors had to endure it for meals three times a day. Half the room was cordoned off, starting with the side that exhibited a sign on the wall reading, “After finishing your meal return directly to your room so the kitchen staff can clean up.” The unoccupied rooms would be refurbished immediately and the others as they became vacant; the residents could choose to move into newly redecorated rooms if they wished. Most importantly Lisa wanted each of the seniors to understand that this was their home and they were loved and welcomed.

Over time Lisa got to know the residents and through hearing the narratives of their adventures, their ups and downs, joys and sorrows, she developed a profound appreciation and respect for the uniqueness of each of them and the realization that they all had a story to tell. This is one of their tales.

Richard was a confirmed bachelor accountant in his late fifties when he suffered a significant stroke. He was a tall, slender, attractive man who had enjoyed an active social life. For many years he owned a craftsman style home, which he had remodeled extensively with special care taken in the kitchen where he devoted much of his spare time to gourmet cooking. Months of care in an excellent rehabilitation facility had restored most of the physical damage although he still walked with a slight limp. His doctors insisted he move out of his home ‘temporarily’ in order to devote his full attention to his regimen of therapy. More importantly, he was basically not capable of handling the ordinary tasks of everyday life without considerable assistance. Their opinion of his long term prognosis was noncommittal regarding his potential to return to independent living and full employment but Richard was adamant and stubbornly insisted that he would one day go back to maintaining his own home and

garden. Speech therapy and psychological counseling were continuing on a bi-weekly basis but progress was slowed by his poor attitude and persistent depression.

Typically the hotel's residents were senior citizens who had lived in the community for many years, were familiar with the environment when they moved in and possibly had friends who were already living there. There were several married couples as well as couples that met, fell in love and married there. All were in reasonably good health but no longer willing to put up with the rigors of house keeping and meal preparation. Richard presented a unique challenge, but with her perpetual good humor and determination to ensure all of the residents were uniformly happy Lisa took on Richard as a special project. Unfortunately he had some unpleasant habits to overcome.

The newly refurbished dining room was large and cheerful; the morning sun filtered through the floor to ceiling windows, soft music always played in the background. Tables were arranged in informal groups and most of the residents sat with two or three friends. Richard always sat alone. During the morning breakfast service, when he decided he wanted more coffee, Richard would simply bang his cup loudly on the table. The other people in the dining room did not especially appreciate this. So every morning Lisa took a seat next to him and patiently helped him to learn a more social way of expressing his needs. Eventually this paid off. At first he was able to request more coffee by raising his hand and then subsequently, when he was approached by the waitress, he could respond "Coffee" when asked what he wanted. As time went on, Lisa and her staff calmly sat and helped him until he was able to express his needs in complete sentences: "I would like more coffee, please."

Furthermore Richard had to re-learn some of the other niceties of social behavior. For example, he couldn't understand why the other residents were offended if he simply barged into their rooms without knocking. This was another undertaking that required weeks of practice while making inconsistent progress, but Lisa never got discouraged, even though Richard's attitude and behavior were very slow to improve. Eventually his hostility mellowed somewhat and he began to develop tentative friendships with his fellow residents, but he was still moderately anxious and easily upset.

Lisa was always looking for opportunities to increase the community involvement of the Leven Oaks and about a year after Richard's arrival she agreed to host the Garden Party Reception during the Annual Mother's Day Historic Home Tour where elegant older homes were open for the admiration and inspection of all who were willing to pay the price of admission. This long established event was a fundraiser held by the local preservation society and was the social affair of the spring. All of the preparations for the big event had been made. The menu was planned down to the last chocolate dipped strawberry and delectable tea sandwich; the flowers in the garden were freshly planted and colorfully spectacular.

On the Friday before the event, Lisa was in her office being interviewed by the society editor of the local newspaper. Suddenly the door burst open and Richard stormed in.

"Richard," Lisa said patiently, "Remember, you need to knock before you come in my office. Now go back out and try again." Although he was obviously distraught, Richard retreated and shut the door.

Meanwhile Lisa explained to the reporter that Richard had some issues but he had made great

progress and was always treated with kindness and respect by everyone he encountered.

Through the etched glass of the office door Lisa could see him trudging in circles around and around, then abruptly the door was flung open once more.

“Oh, dear,” Lisa said gently, “You forgot again. Let’s try it one more time.”

Richard left the office and wandered off. In short order he returned and Bang! Bang! Bang! on the office door.

“Come in.” Lisa called sweetly.

Richard rushed through the door frantically saying, “Man . . . man . . . man . . . man . . . man . . . man “

Lisa responded, “Richard, please use your words in complete sentences so I can understand what you are trying to tell me. You have been doing so well with this. I know you can do it. Try it once again please.”

He went out of the room and immediately barged back in.

Lisa, “You forgot to knock.”

This time Richard left the room, shut the door behind him, whirled around and knocked.

When Lisa immediately gave him permission to enter he said clearly in a loud, agitated voice, “MAN. DEAD. IN. CHAIR. ON. PORCH!”

# Weimer, Pennsylvania: October 27, 2018

*by Norman Leer*

1

After a week of news  
of pipe bombs mailed

to liberals, we woke yesterday  
to a mass shooting at a synagogue

in Pittsburgh. Eleven people  
killed, more wounded. One man,

brown-shirted in quiet rage, wanted  
to destroy the Jews.

2

On TV, the President  
said the synagogue should

have had armed guards,  
that it was too soon

for gun control. Then we saw  
him rant again, waving

his raw venom, working up  
his clueless crowds, who

because they cannot  
imagine or include the lives

of others, want to turn  
the world back again.

He has unleashed their fear  
and misplaced hate, used

their hurt to cover up  
his own cynical indifference.

3

I was taught that poetry  
should never be about politics.

Politics was lesser, only naked  
statements, had no openings

for ambiguity or soul. Auden  
knew better. In 1939, he wrote

about his own feelings after  
the Nazis invaded Poland.

Sitting in a bar, he wanted poetry  
to be a light, a healing fountain

of the heart, a way  
to imagine the lives of others,

to know our own reality  
and incompleteness. It was all

we couldn't clearly say;  
compassionate imagination

and humility the beginning  
that might end the senseless killings

and the madness. I thought  
of Auden yesterday, hope

this poem can be a part  
of the heart that he imagined.

# The Story of a Table

---

*by Lorna Kniaz*

I was helping a friend move and bought a small folding metal table. It was a part of the detritus of a household preparing to move across the country. We sorted her dead husband's books, papers and possessions to sell or discard. I asked how she was processing leaving almost everything to start anew.

She told me that she was a child in Lithuania and the transports were emptying the country of Jews. An aunt ran out of an alley and pulled her out of the column and through the maze of streets. A convent was willing to hide her. After a time, knowing that her family and everyone she knew had died in the camps, my friend despaired that Jews would no longer exist and prepared to take vows.

But in 1945, there was an end of war and Hitler. She found her brother, and they made homes and new families in the United States. Now her husband is gone, and she was moving near her brother. She told me that her family died because they could not leave their possessions, and she was now buying her freedom for a new life.

The small metal table held food at many picnics for my family but now remains unused and dusty in the corner of my garage. This summer my friend's daughter will come to dust off the table and take it. It will hold food again for picnics but now for the children and grandchildren that Hitler's hungry crematoria cannot consume.

And I will have one fewer possession to hinder my freedom.

# **My Brother**

*by Clara Lazimy*

My brother, he went away  
And is no more  
Is no more?  
He is right there, by the clock  
And teaches me  
Half past  
Quarter past  
Stands in front of the tall mirror  
In the master bedroom  
Combing his hair, straightening  
The hem of his jacket  
Takes me to the movies  
Runs by my side  
Holding on to the seat of my bike  
Yelling encouraging words  
That scatter on the sidewalk  
My brother.  
My brother! My brother!  
My brother is in the poems of sadness and pain  
Written in his small, exact script  
My brother will never answer the phone  
And will never again send me funny emails  
But in the most unexpected moments  
He winks at me  
And smiles  
From a thousand photographs  
Those kept in albums  
And those held in my heart



*Lake Mendota--Joan Kutter*



# Yes

*by David Berger*

Twilight

Gray hair

Open the wine for me

Will you please?

I delight

In saying

Yes

## Contributors

**Jim Albright** was born and raised in Wisconsin.



He and his wife, Jan, returned here after retiring. He is an engineer by degree and spent his working career in industry, all the while pursuing his love of painting. Some of his works can be viewed at his web site: [www.jimalbrightart.com](http://www.jimalbrightart.com).

**Jane Ayer** is a retired professor/administrator of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Following years of writing in a research/administrative style she is enjoying the eloquence afforded by the creative world.



**Dave Berger** enjoys writing, and he's grateful to long-time writing-group buddies Frank, Jane, and Kim for criticism. A former ad agency research director in Chicago, Dave and his piano-playing wife Barbara have lived in Madison since 1994. They are parents of four and grandparents of six.



**Grethe Brix-J. Leer** is a teacher, artist and writer. She has exhibited and published work in her native Denmark and America. She taught memoir writing and art to older adults in Chicago for several years and currently coordinates a women's writing and self-discovery class for PLATO.



**Barbara Carson's** career has been nursing and nurse anesthesia. She has written poetry since she was a teenager and published a little of



it. However this was mostly pre-computer and almost all of it was lost in a flood. After living and/or working in 15 states (she was a traveling anesthetist), she retired in Madison. Barbara is slowly recovering some of her poems.

**Kate Dike** has loved poetry ever since her mother read to her from A Child's Garden of Verses when she was small. In addition to writing poems, she enjoys birding, participating in citizen science projects, hiking, volunteering at Dane County Humane Society's Wildlife Center, and caring for her new granddaughter.



**Nancy Cross Dunham** is retired from the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. Married, mother of two and grandmother to four boys, she writes memoir and poetry, and takes photographs, as contemplative practices to discern what she's learning about herself, the world and the other people in it.



For **Rose Ann Findlen**, writing is an energizing creative outlet.

Writing is a family affair: her husband writes genealogical/historical pieces; her daughter writes poetry; her son-in-law writes fiction. For her next challenge, Rose Ann, author of three books, is creating a book of short stories.



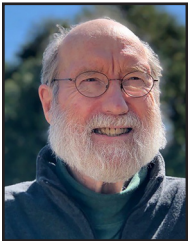
**Felicitus Ferington** was born in Buffalo, raised on a farm, studied and taught psych/mental health at several Big Ten Universities and retired from the Army Nurse Corps in 1991. In all, a life in love with photography since 1950, from film & the darkroom, to digital with prints of any color or shade.



Born, raised, and educated on the southeast side of Chicago, **Janice Golay** comes from a family of storytellers. She completed the ILS program at UW-Madison, and holds a History B.A. from Roosevelt University/Chicago. She lived in France and French-speaking Switzerland for fifteen years, and is passionate about art, music and writing.



**Vince Kavaloski** is a Professor Emeritus in the Philosophy Department at Edgewood College. During his 28 years of teaching there, he was honored with the Underkoffler Distinguished Teaching Award, the Dorothy Day Award for Building Community, and the Dane County United Nations Association's Global Citizen of the Year Award.



**Lorna Kniaz** grew up in Fort Atkinson. She attended UW-Milwaukee and UW-Madison, graduating with a law degree. Her four kids, four grands, classes, lectures, travel, family, friends, reading, concerts, volunteering, and laughter almost fill her life. She has a small space left for writing.



**Joanna Kutter** resides in Madison and Edgerton, Wisconsin where her Studio on the Edge is surrounded by woodlands that inspire her work. She holds a B.A. in Art from Beloit College where she also taught painting. Her works have been shown nationally and are included in private and corporate collections.



**Clara Lazimy** was born and raised in Rosario, Argentina. She currently lives in Madison, WI with her husband. After working for years in Human Resources and Education, Clara finds retirement very rewarding. She likes to travel, read, write, dabble in art, and spend time with her family.



**Norman Leer** has published two books and a chapbook of his own poems, as well as a critical study of Ford Madox Ford. In 1990, he received the Illinois Significant Poet's Award from state Poet Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks. He and his artist wife Grethe enjoy long walks and talks together.



**Gwen Pangburn** introduced a love for writing and the arts to her three young sons. She used her degree in Criminology to become a licensed private investigator and started her own detective agency. She still accepts cases and sifts through her sleuthing adventures to write flash fiction. Her first love is still poetry.



**Linda Pilmer** is a



transplant. She is a native Californian where she lived for 65 years. She moved to Wisconsin for the weather and also her daughter and two young granddaughters. She holds degrees in psychology, child psychology and counseling and often says she

knows.

**Julie Pretell** has maintained an interest in art throughout her career as an immunology researcher and practicing hematopathologist. Her early work was in life drawing and acrylic and oil painting, but after retirement she received a degree in Visual Communications and Media Design and became more



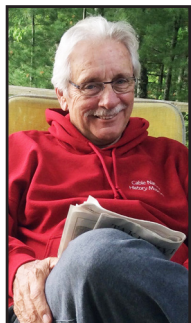
focused on photography and digital imagery.



**Dawn Proctor** is a University of Wisconsin graduate who served for fifteen years as Director of Development for Olbrich Botanical Gardens. She enjoys time spent creating art with her granddaughters, passing on all she has been fortunate to have learned.

**Richard Radtke** is

the author of six novels; two collections of short stories; and a memoir, *Persistence of Vision*. His work has appeared in the *Wisconsin Academy Review*; *Prime Times*; *Julien's Journal*; *Writers of Wisconsin* anthology; *Lines in the Sand*; and the *Wisconsin Writer's Jade Ring Anthology*.



**Fred Ross**, a retired engineer, holds a BS degree in Civil Engineering as well as MS and PhD degrees in English Literature from UW-Madison. A long-time member of PLATO, now more devoted to humanities than technology, he has coordinated literature and

history courses on and off for 15 years.

**Tom Schlicht** is one of the longest-serving PLATO coordinators. He has been a strong supporter of PLATO since the mid-nineties. The oldest of six children, he got started in teaching by helping his sibs with homework and starting them off in sports. He now enjoys the Gold Years with his long-suffering, faithful life partner, who he lovingly calls “Saint Catherine.”



**Joanne Lee Storlie** has earned a Master Degree in Humility, Gratitude and Optimism from the School of Daily Living in Madison, WI. She hopes to complete her Doctoral Thesis titled, *The Big Picture: What I've Learned So Far*, prior to entry into the School of the Great Beyond.



**Paul Thompson** was raised on a farm in Iowa, accounting for his lifelong interest in agriculture and food production. For 35 years, he worked internationally in the management of natural disasters, refugee emergencies and recovery from conflict. A *Madisonian* for 40 years, he and his wife have one son and one daughter.





**Donald Tubesing** is the author of 20 books on stress management, co-founder of two award-winning book publishing companies, and past president of the Independent Book Publishing Association. Passionate about stone carving, he is founder of Michelangelo's

Workshop, a not-for-profit initiative teaching underemployed post-release inmates the art and craft of sculpting stone.

**Judi K-Turkel** began writing nonfiction as a teenager. With an English-teaching B.A. from Brooklyn College, NY, she spent a glorious decade editing movie magazines.

Switching to free-lance writing, she wrote 20 books and hundreds of magazine articles alone and then with her partner, photojournalist

Franklynn Peterson. In 1977 they moved to Madison.



Raised on a dairy farm near Madison, **Eddie Urness-Pondillo** inherited her grandmother's eye for photography. After a short career as a newspaper reporter, she spent the next 32 years teaching high school literature and writing in both Wisconsin and Tennessee. After retiring, she discovered PLATO and enjoys the many benefits of membership and works part-time in the



PLATO office.



**Gerry Wettersten** read voraciously her whole life but didn't start writing until, at seventy, she discovered a great writing group. She moved from Coastal Texas to be near a daughter and granddaughter and found Madison a great fit. An unexpected pleasure – Her teen-aged granddaughter is also a writer.

**Allen Youngwood** hails from La Crosse, Wisconsin. After a long career in infrastructure planning and environmental studies, he took up creative writing, in particular, screenwriting. Much like a blunt instrument, the rigors of getting his scripts produced persuaded him to recast them as short stories and flash fiction.



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