



# **The Loyalhanna Review**

2022

Wee Zee



Gorge to Rim Trail © by Alicia Stankay

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**Ligonier Valley Writers presents the  
2022 edition of its literary magazine,  
*The Loyalhanna Review.***

## From the Editor

Last year at our Publication Party for the 2021 *Loyalhanna Review*, our plans were to return to a full slate of in-person programs and workshops. The Covid variants and resurgence of illnesses dashed those hopes. But two distanced programs carried on.

Our 2021 Flash Fiction contest did go on as scheduled, minus a gathering for the Halloween readings by the winners. In the spring of 2022 our Student Poetry Contest marked a step toward normal when winning students gathered to read their works at Barnes & Noble for our awards ceremony.

Thank you to all the members and contributors who have resolutely supported Ligonier Valley Writers throughout the pandemic while enduring another year of no meetings, no workshops, and no fundraisers. Faithful members and friends donated anyway, especially to see the *Loyalhanna Review* continue to spotlight the talents of local authors and artists. Your generosity has made this issue possible. Thank you so much. Now here's to the future!

*Ruth McDonald, Editor-in-Chief*

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## Special Thanks to All Our 2021 and 2022 Members, Contributors, and Friends

Editorial Staff of the *Loyalhanna Review*, especially Judith Gallagher. All Donors and Judges for the Flash Fiction and Student Poetry Contests. Tara Ewanits and Anita Staub for Website and Facebook work.

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Marjorie Tavoularis

Paul Turtzer

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Christine Aikens Wolfe

These gifts were received as of June 30, 2022. Thank you for your generosity.

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## In Memoriam: Lou and Barb Steiner

We are deeply saddened to share the loss of Louis A. Steiner, a founder and past president of LVW, on October 15, 2021, and of his wife, Barbara Johnstin Steiner, on May 7. Lou was 90 years old; Barb was 88.

The Steiners helped get LVW off the ground and keep it going for the past 35 years. For decades, they shared their knowledge and skills to help make LVW a resource and a haven for writers and readers throughout western Pennsylvania.

They supported LVW generously with both their time and their money. Long after formally retiring as president, Lou continued to fundraise for the organization on a personal level.

Lou and Barb made LVW a family affair when it came to service. Their daughter Sally Shirey served as president for several terms and was a key member of the conference committee for many years. Their daughter Ann Holmes edited the *Loyalhanna Review* in the 1990s.

Our condolences to Sally, Ann, and their brother, Ted, and to all of the Steiner family. Lou's and Barbara's deaths are a great loss to the community. The two leave a legacy of support for LVW's efforts to share the deep pleasures of reading and writing with our members and friends.

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## Art Credits

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**Beyond Words**

© by Louise Vrable  
bio on p. 28

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**Gorge to Rim Trail**

© by Alicia Stankay  
bio on p. 12

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bio on p. 28

Back Cover:

**Wisteria**

© by Jan Sady  
bio on p. 21

# From Farm to Farm

© by Marge Burke

Two months after my mother turned eighteen my father swept her off her country, farm-raised feet with a whirlwind courtship and marriage. Then he planted her in Greensburg.

It was quite an adjustment to go from bare feet, horses, and feeding chickens to riding a street car, living in an apartment, and being home alone all day while Dad was at work.

But we always said Mom was a chameleon and, relying on her faith, could be happy in whatever environment she found herself. She threw herself into her surroundings and was soon ensconced in a circle of best friends, an active church community, and two little girls.

We took it for granted that Mom would be perfectly content living out her days in the “city.” Never take anything for granted.

When my mom remarried after Dad died, we found ourselves facing as much change as Mom was facing. She packed up her household goods and transplanted herself back to her roots: a hundred-year-old farmhouse, complete with forty acres, a barn, and a plethora of cats, three hours away.

And she left us standing on Greensburg’s city sidewalks in awe and confusion.

But it’s important to remember her tendency to be chameleon-like. Before the ink on her marriage license was even dry, Mom was again surrounded by a circle of friends, was teaching children’s Sunday school, and was an active member of the Grange.

Now, instead of her daughters and grandchildren taking her to the mall, visiting the local theaters, or swimming in her above-ground pool, we were all going on new and varied adventures into uncharted waters, as well as farmland. And guess who was leading the pack?

When the boys wanted to sleep in the camper, Mom lugged the blankets and pillows and snacks out to the field and shared ghost stories.

When the girls went looking for the newest litter of kittens, Mom tramped through the abandoned pigpen and horse stalls to find them. She climbed with the kids up the rickety ladder to the hayloft, sitting on the edge to dangle her feet over the side, watching the bits of hay drift slowly down to where I stood solidly on the barn floor.

We now spent weekends and vacations at the farm, planning trips to Presque Isle or Raccoon Park. Mom had snacks and beach chairs and sun umbrellas and coolers full of drinks, not to mention canvas bags full of beach buckets and shovels and sand molds.

We spent hours building sand castles, picking up rocks, and looking for tiny seashells on the beach.

One sunny afternoon a stranger approached my daughter Kelly with an interest in her shell collection. Mom negotiated a fair price of two bucks for the

entire bucket. Everyone was happy with the sale.

Mom was a great sport about going with us wherever we planned to go. I love history. The neighboring town had a history walk on Saturday nights, and we would walk the streets of Girard and learn about Dan Rice, the Underground Railroad, and the historic Battles houses from the 1800s.

We went on Halloween tours after dark through the cemetery, meeting some of the town’s nefarious citizens, long dead but joining us for the evening.

On an afternoon tour we learned about Dan Rice’s baby daughter Lottie, who was buried in an outlandish (for its time) tomb in Girard Cemetery. When we heard the description of the memorial, we were determined to see it.

After the tour, Mom, my cousin Susan, and I set off walking down Route 20 toward the cemetery, convinced it was just down the road.

By the time we found the tomb, read some notable grave markers, and returned to our car, we had clocked seven miles—on foot. And my little, 4’11”, pushing-sixty-years-old mother never faltered! Susan and I, on the other hand, asked for Band-Aids.

I believe that was the same day the Burton Funeral Home hosted an open house, and we spent a pleasant hour looking at vaults and caskets and eating ice cream sundaes on the front lawn. The funeral director was really cute. Just saying.

Saturday morning garage sales in the country were far different than in the big city of Greensburg. Country sales were spread over the house, the porch, the driveway, the barn, the garage, and possibly even several tents.

We parked in the ditch, haggled over prices, almost always purchased something we didn’t need or want, and left feeling like we should send the sellers a Christmas card.

The next sale wasn’t on the next block; it was on the next road over, which was actually several miles away.

I often found treasures on those trips, and my son Nathan usually doubled his Matchbox car inventory on garage sale adventures with Gramma Dot. Thanks to Mom, we never got lost. Well, almost never.

Neighbors popped in at the farm for visits unannounced. They settled in, and stayed. And stayed. And stayed.

Meals were postponed or shared. Work stopped but lively conversations didn’t. Photos were snapped. All in a day on the farm.

Our adventures were outside and in, and even inside out! Like the evening Nate was playing with Matchbox cars on the carpet while the rest of us watched Friday night TV.

The next thing we knew, Mom was squealing and squirming in her chair, pointing to the door frame.

Kelly dived under the afghan. Nathan just gaped. I threw a pillow on my head and ducked.

My stepfather quietly stood, went to the kitchen for a small pair of needle-nose pliers, and pinched the bat from the door frame. Without a word he opened the window screen and threw the bat outside.

I didn't sleep very well that night.

But then, sleeping at the farm was always an issue for me. Once the house got quiet, I could hear all of the typical country noises.

But mostly I heard the squirrels scampering across the attic floor above me. I could just picture them up there, throwing a party with nuts and acorns and inviting the night-loving bats to join them.

I knew the door to the attic was soundly sealed, but I kept imagining all sorts of squirrely creatures falling from the ceiling, landing on my bed, and burrowing under the covers to keep me company.

I seldom got a good night's sleep in the entire 36 years we went to the farm.

Even the trips to and from the farm held adventures. A snowy February night found me traveling alone to visit Mom, who was recovering from surgery.

The farther north I got, the darker it got, and the heavier the snow fell. By the time I got off Route I-79, the snowflakes looked like linebackers and there were no visible markings on the roads at all.

At one point I followed a street light—or so I thought—until I realized just in time that it was attached to the side of a barn in the middle of a field! Never was I so glad to see the soft glow coming from the parlor window at the farm on Crouch Road.

As the years passed, the adventures slowed, then stopped altogether. Our visits were spent doing household chores like sweeping and cleaning and laundry and cooking.

Kathy and I lugged fallen branches to the woods, picked up walnuts, gathered tomatoes, raked leaves, harvested blueberries, and shoveled snow.

We went on "flower walks" through the yard, admiring Mom's gardens, which grew more overgrown with each trip.

Walking seven miles was out of the question now, but we could share laughs at Andy Griffith and Gomer Pyle and listen enraptured to Lawrence Welk.

But whatever the adventure, each moment was cherished. From the very beginning, Mom's life *was* the adventure, and we were along for the ride. We watched her chameleon colors change and adapt to wherever she was, and her faith never wavered.

From standing by Dad's side as he built the cabin in Home, PA, raising her girls, loving her grandchildren, and making the Greensburg house a home, to standing beside the finality of Dad's grave.

To slipping back into her teenage years again when she started dating John: wearing halter tops, sitting on his lap, giggling on the phone. To planning her wedding and finally moving to the farm.

Even reliving each memory with her again and again as her own memory slipped away quietly. We morphed into her life of adventure to cheer and support and love. Always love.

Now they are gone: Dad, John, Mom. The farm is sold. But those adventures, and our adventurous chameleon-like mother, left us filled to overflowing with wonderful memories of happy days, of her steadfast faith and life's lessons learned.

And to think it all started—and ended—on a farm. Never take anything for granted. ♦

(See Marge's bio on p. 28.)

## Tricky Time

© by Tamara DiBartola

Oh, thirsty eyes, you never see  
Time hatch its escape from me!  
A tick tock, trick clock, vanishing recurrently.  
I must ask Time for its time, quite earnestly  
imploping a halt to zippy slippy leave.

## Nana's Ladle

© by Tamara DiBartola

(See Tamara's  
bio on p. 28.)

If only this ladle  
could speak. Reminisce  
over countless times  
Nana used it to nourish me.  
Since it lacks speech, I dwell  
in memories alone,  
hungering for her  
beef stew, pastina soup,  
only a few  
delicious meals prepared  
for our weekly gatherings  
with my father.  
After he passed, we continued  
tradition, helping  
one another through grief.  
On one special occasion, I brought her  
Dad's gold crucifix. She in turn  
gave me her wedding band,  
a priceless exchange of love.  
Now she's gone,  
leaving me unsure  
as to how I recreate her food.  
Although each attempt  
has turned out fine, it lacks—  
a special ingredient, *her*.  
Without Nana's loving preparation  
it will *never* be the same.  
Nevertheless, I think of her  
each time I use this ladle, hoping  
she's proud of my efforts.  
Although I cannot chat with Nana,  
I can have a one-sided conversation  
with an object touched by her,  
remembering, it still connects us.



# The Lonely Old Man's Club

© by Jim Busch

*"We bereaved are not alone. We belong to the largest company in all the world—the company of those who have known suffering."* — Helen Keller

I've never been much of a joiner. I never felt the need to join the Rotary Club, the Kiwanis, or any similar group. For most of the last fifty years, I satisfied my need for human companionship by spending time with my wife and our family.

It may sound cliché, but she was more than my wife and my lover, she was my best friend. Nothing made me happier than sitting on the couch with her after dinner, watching *Jeopardy* and talking about how we'd spent our days.

I am not antisocial; I like talking with others. I just preferred my wife's company over anyone else's.

This past year I was forced to join a very exclusive club. A club that I never wanted to join. A club that no one ever wants to join. The initiation to this club is brutal—some don't even survive the ordeal. Anyone can afford the dues; no cash is required. The cost of membership in my club is only one broken heart.

I am now a card-carrying member of the lonely old man's club. I was granted a lifetime membership on July 15, 2021, when my wife, Glenda, succumbed to pancreatic cancer. She lost her fight with the disease exactly two months before our 49<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

She had what many people would call a "good death." After months of enduring terrible pain, she passed away in her sleep, in the home we shared for over four decades, with our two children each holding one of her hands.

As far as I'm concerned, there was nothing "good" about my wife's death. It wasn't supposed to happen this way. We were supposed to grow old and gray together.

If one of us was going to go first, it was supposed to be me. My wife watched what she ate and carefully monitored her health; I lived on red meat, sugar, and soda and worked in a stressful, high-pressure job. I was the poster child for a self-destructive lifestyle.

I never contemplated being left alone. I always assumed that Glenda would survive me. This made perfect sense. She knew how to take care of herself ... and I didn't. She had always taken care of me and our kids. How would I go on without her?

I had never done a single load of laundry and my culinary skills were sorely lacking. But beyond all practical considerations, what would I do without someone to share my life with?

I found myself feeling very homesick in the house where I had lived for over 47 years. I realized that

my home wasn't a structure of wood and shingles, it was any place where my wife was. With her gone, my house was an empty shell with memories hanging in the corners like cobwebs.

In addition to learning how to cook, I had to learn how to be sad. I've always been a happy person. I'm naturally upbeat and positive. I had a job I liked and, largely because of my wife, I had an idyllic home life. Why wouldn't I be happy?

All that changed when I lost my wife. I felt empty and found myself struggling to get out of bed.

---

*I preferred my wife's  
company over  
anyone else's.*

---

Never one to wear my heart on my sleeve, I took pride in my ability to hide my emotions. But suddenly I felt like I was walking along the crumbling edge of a deep canyon of grief.

I never knew what might bring tears to my eyes. A John Denver song on the radio, one my wife and I used to sing together, forced me to pull over on I-79 for a good cry.

Holidays and family events were impenetrable emotional minefields. I was torn between my desire to be with my family and my wish to spend the day alone in bed.

At first I thought I was alone in my grief. Like a teenager experiencing their first bout of puppy love, I was convinced no one had ever felt this way in the history of the world.

It did not take long to learn that I was a member of the Lonely Old Man's Club (LOMC) and that each of my fellow members also concealed a shattered soul behind their sad countenances.

The LOMC is a rather unusual organization. Our meetings seldom attract more than two members, and they are always impromptu.

I attended my first meeting in Des Moines, Iowa. During a business trip, I stopped at the Des Moines Art Center. While I was looking at a piece of sculpture, the volunteer docent came up to me to tell me about the piece.

Making conversation, I mentioned that I was from Pittsburgh.

He asked me if this was the first time I had visited the museum.

I replied, “No, my late wife and I were here a few years ago.”

Our club members don’t wear pins on our lapels or funny hats like Shriners in a parade. We have no secret LOMC handshake, but we know how to recognize one another. We use a system of secret code words like two Cold War spies in a Moscow park.

One spy says, “The brown dog barks at the half moon,” to which his contact replies, “Yes, but the orange tomcat remains silent!”

The LOMC password is not so colorful or mysterious. We simply mention our late wives. This is not difficult to remember. We are always mentioning our wives; it is an obsession with us. The gaping hole in the fabric of our lives always dominates our thoughts.

---

## *We are the Gloominati.*

---

Our LOMC brothers respond by giving the countersign: “I’m sorry to hear that. I lost my own wife last year.” Our meeting begins.

A club is a gathering of people who share a common interest or who have had a common experience. The LOMC is no different. Only our members truly understand the pain of losing one’s life’s partner. We understand each other’s secret sadness. We are the Gloominati.

With our children and our friends, we hide our emotions. We try to be upbeat and quickly learn to fabricate a convincing smile.

But when we meet with an LOMC brother, we can let our masks drop. We don’t have to explain how sad we feel inside, how close we always are to shedding the tears we’ve been taught never to shed.

To convene that first meeting in Des Moines, we lowered our voices and shared our stories. We had traveled parallel paths, he in Iowa and I in Pittsburgh. We were the same age, had married in 1972, and had both lost our wives to cancer in the summer of 2021.

We talked about things that men do not talk about: loss, love, and learning to do laundry. This was the first and likely the only time we would ever meet, but we had made a connection. He was my brother. We parted with a long, firm handshake and wished one another well.

Since that first meeting, I’ve attended many others. I had no idea how large the membership of the LOMC is.

There was the man I met while writing a story about a model train show. His name was Bill and he told me all about how his wife, Sarah, shared his hobby with him.

Bill said with pride, “She loved making scenery. Once our club built a circus and she hand-painted a hundred spectators for the grandstand.”

He pointed to a row of trees on his display, “There were supposed to be ten of them, but she never got to ...” His voice trailed off, and I saw the tears forming in the corners of his eyes.

I felt a lump forming in the back of my throat. He never did finish his sentence. I stood silently, trying to hold back my own tears until he regained his composure.

We shook hands and parted without a word, neither of us embarrassed by our display of emotion.

There was Tom, a man in his eighties I met at the library. I was checking out a couple of cookbooks when I casually mentioned that I was trying to teach myself to cook.

I joked, “I’ve gone from the best cook in the world to the worst.”

The old man came up to me and told me about his experiences in the kitchen after losing his wife. We talked about our wives’ specialties and the wonderful meals we enjoyed for decades. Our discussion reminded me of the “In Memoriam” reel at the Oscars, fond memories tinged with sadness.

I have attended LOMC meetings at the supermarket, at the auto-parts store, and on the walking trail. Every meeting is different and every meeting is the same; the stories and names are different, but the undercurrent of sorrow never changes.

---

## *We talked about loss, love, and learning to do laundry.*

---

I never wanted to be a member of the LOMC. The entry requirements are far too painful. But now that I’m in, I’m grateful for my brothers-in-grief.

I always feel a little better after encountering another LOMC member. It is good to not have to force a smile and hide my grief. It is good to spend even a few minutes with those who understand why we treasure our grief. The members of the Lonely Old Man’s Club understand the source of our pain.

Our grief is the price we pay for having loved deeply and for having been loved. When all is said and done, we know that grief is a small price to pay for a lifetime of love. ♦

**Jim Busch** is a freelance writer and journalist who contributes to several local newspapers. Jim has been published in the *Loyalhanna Review* and is principal author of *The Corona Diaries*, a collection of essays published by Point Park University’s McKeesport Community Newsroom. He lives in White Oak.

# My Life as a Word Junkie

© by Candace Kubinec

I search them out, put them  
on lists, hoard them for myself.  
I secret them away on scraps of  
paper and keep them in rows in  
the depths of old journals.  
I snatch them from the pages  
of books and catch them as they  
tumble from the mouths of friends  
and strangers. I hum them to myself  
even when there is no music. I seek  
their meanings in a tattered dictionary  
and find their relatives between the covers  
of a thesaurus. They comfort me  
in the middle of the night and sooth  
me during storms. Each one is unique,  
perfect as it is, and sometimes I string  
them together into poems.

---

## Exotic Notions

© by Candace Kubinec

I may never get to take a trip to Spain  
or stroll exotic markets in Algiers,  
but I have felt the sun and falling rain  
that touches other places less mundane  
than my small garden nibbled on by deer.  
I may never get to take a trip to Spain  
or soar above the Alps in silver planes,  
but I have watched the seasons, year by year,  
and I have felt the sun and falling rain  
that nourishes the flowers and the grain.  
I've traveled tree-lined roads of forests near.  
I may never get to take a trip to Spain.  
I've been around the block and back again,  
a local Rambler and a keen sightseer—  
and I have felt the sun and falling rain  
and sowed and planted and maintained  
some native plants so they won't disappear.  
I may never get to take a trip to Spain  
but I have felt the sun and falling rain.

**Candace Kubinec** lives in Greensburg, where she writes from a comfy chair with a cat on her lap. She is the Grand Prize winner in the Pennsylvania Poetry Society's 2021 contest and the creator of the Waltmarie poetic form.

**Nicole Bradley** is a perpetual student of life, enjoying the many lessons unfolding on a daily basis. Her inspiration is found through her experiences as a craniosacral therapist and her experiences in nature.

# This Old World

© by Candace Kubinec

I will not be needing a new world, for  
I have not finished with this old one.  
It fits me well, like an old pair of shoes—  
worn in but not worn out.  
Its soul is a little thin and there  
are some cracks forming along the edges,  
but that can all be mended. There are still  
many miles left in this old world, many hopes  
and dreams, many adventures waiting,  
many kisses in the moonlight to exchange.  
I will not be needing a new world—  
I have not finished with this old one

---

## Liminal Spaces

© by Nicole Bradley

Earth is the cosmic birth canal.  
Our experience in flesh, the contractions  
Pushing us to be born unto ourselves.  
Life lessons tighten like strong  
Muscles, ushering us to the light.  
Pulled by the gravity of our soul's  
Purpose into greater understanding.  
This life, in muted hues of dusk  
and dawn, rolls over us like mist.  
We inhabit these bodies in the liminal  
Spaces of our existence.

---

## The Cuckoo Nest

© by Paul Turtzer

A weekly assemblage on porch in Ligonier  
Never quite certain what lunacy will appear  
No topic is off limits  
Alcohol aids the flow  
How behavior remains civil  
Only the psychologist knows  
Unfavorable weather seldom merits concern  
Amazing storytelling  
A nonsense medal earned  
Easily a highlight of participants' week  
A comical respite that wise people seek  
Plenty to look forward to journeying ahead  
May this ritual continue until we're all dead

(See Paul's bio on p. 11.)

# Seasons

© by Jan McLaughlin

Seasons: I've known and loved them all in their own way. Then have forgotten them as they passed into the next, too busy to appreciate what was right before my eyes. However, I wait impatiently each year to feel winter's refreshing touch and marvel at the snowflakes as they fall against my window and pile lightly with marshmallow love.

Today a January snowfall brings remembrance of beautiful winters past. I may not live to see another one, but I need to enjoy what's left of each season to come.

It's four a.m. The snow is a thick, heavy snowman snow. Reliving the thrill of youth and sledding down the hills. Should I go out this late to touch the snow? To marvel at the new budded trees reaching up to welcome what they usually do not know.

## RECIPE FOR HAPPINESS

### Ingredients

Warm clothing, including coat, hat, scarf, mittens, and boots  
1 carrot and 10 cherries from refrigerator  
2 chocolate Tootsie Pops  
10 or more toothpicks  
Birdseed, apples, and raisins  
The plastic bag stored in the closet from last year  
2 skewers (hatpins or crochet needles)  
Long scarf, cowboy hat, gloves, etc.  
8 pieces of charcoal in a Ziploc bag  
A broom from the back porch  
2 long twigs from the woods

### How I Do It

The snow has fallen in huge heavy flakes, the first snowman snow of the season. I dress in my warmest clothing. I get a carrot and ten cherries from the refrigerator. I gather the plastic bag from the hall closet. Then I put on my boots, coat, scarf and gloves and step out into the crisp air.

I take the old broom from near the back door, then gently put my bag of goodies on the lawn and go into the nearby woods for two sturdy branches. At the corner of the house I make my first snowball and start rolling it. I want it just the right size when I get to the spot I've picked in front of my living room window.

Then I roll another for the mid-body, careful not to make it too large for me to pick up. (These get smaller every year.) I wish my project could be larger, but already the spasms in my back are reminding me that I am *not* six years old. At last I manage to set it on the base and begin the smallest snowball for the head.

At this point the real fun begins! Smiling, I open the bag and enjoy seeing the contents. I set aside the old cowboy hat. Eight large pieces of charcoal in a Ziploc bag are for buttons going down the two largest sections. Then I chip back into the body base and place the old rubber boots.

Now I stick the branches in the sides. Old mittens from the bag are perfect hands. The two Tootsie Pops sticks push in nicely for the eyes. The carrot of course is the nose, and ten cherries (toothpicked into place) make a very nice mouth. If you use fewer, you may eat the rest.

I draw an old scarf from the bag and place it around my snowman's neck. Then the *pièce de résistance*: I put the old cowboy hat on his head and push two crochet hooks through the holes I made in the hat many years ago. Now it will not fly away in the wind.

I place the broom against the arm. He is almost complete. Stamping the snow down around him, I sprinkle a thick layer of birdseed, apple chunks, and raisins.

Standing back to admire my creation, sighing with pain and happiness, I wonder, will this be my last snowman year?

I go in for a quick shower and nap, hoping it stays cold enough for him to last at least a week. Maybe tomorrow I'll hook up the hose and spray him to firm him up. My whole body aches, but it was worth it.

After the birds have enjoyed all his edible parts and the sun has warmed him to a mound of ice, I'll pick up my crochet hooks, charcoal, etc. I'll dry out the boots, scarf, mittens, and cowboy hat and put them back in the plastic bag to wait in the hall closet till next year.

I don't mind growing old, but I hope never to grow too old to enjoy the thrill of that first snowman snow. ♦



# Rain

© by Jan McLaughlin

Destructive

vs.

Restorative

## Ozone and Rose Petals

Rain drenches the driveway  
 Oppressive gray curtains batter down  
 Engulfing the flowerbeds.  
 Rain assaults the windows  
 Drums on the roof  
 Grumbles and growls through gutters.  
 Rain overwhelms the downspouts.

Howling winds assault the treetops  
 Thunder booms down the valley  
 Lightning stabs and slashes trees  
 Torching limbs, starting fires.  
 The clean smell of rain now  
 Overpowered by a layer of nitrogen.

Hard spikes of destructive rain  
 Nail the night to the city.  
 Shattering rain drives staples  
 Into quivering shadows.  
 Hammering, heart pounding terror  
 Bombards, shreds and tatters rose bushes.  
 Aftermath—ozone and rose petals.

## Rapturous Rain

Diaphanous silvery curtains of rain  
 Wash the driveway  
 Kissing and nuzzling the flowerbeds.  
 Raindrops slide off the windows  
 Patter gently on the roof  
 Whispers through gutters  
 Giggles and trickles down the spouts.

The caressing touch of nourishing rain  
 Embraces the oncoming night  
 Knitting shadows together  
 Frothy mist creates a patchwork  
 Of hazy shadows—haloes around streetlamps.  
 Light fog eddies in lazy patterns  
 Softening objects, offering comfort.

Cottony mist encircles lilacs and rosebushes  
 And cuddles softly in corners.  
 Musical, crystal rain dances gleefully  
 While sleep falls swiftly  
 On the quiet purr of distant thunder.

**Jan McLaughlin** is now doing layout, design, and book covers. She is also working on her ninth children's book with a companion coloring/ activity book. She recently published a poetry book titled *Darkness Falls* and is working on another one titled *Reflections*. She loves research and learning and believes that as long as you are learning, you are alive.

## Winter Greeting

© by Sally Witt

This morning  
 before the clouds had any chance  
 to read the weather report  
 and learn the day is scheduled sunny,  
 —their gracious services unneeded—

earth turned to let the sun appear,  
 a soft bright circle in the clouds.  
 Then, as rays slipped through,  
 one bounced to a cloud nearby.

It made an arc of muted color,  
 a whispered winter rainbow  
 hardly there  
 yet there before me:

this, the love that greeted me,  
 first sight from the window  
 after a night when sleep was scarce;

this—a hint of color  
 in a gray sky slowly whitening  
 into day.

## Kiss of Peace

© by Sally Witt

An afternoon rest  
 in gray December  
 and into it arrives  
 a dim brief breath  
 of gold  
 woven into clouds  
 outside my window.

Perhaps this element  
 of gray sky's fabric  
 is always present,  
 but seldom does it reach my eyes,  
 and even less my heart,

bestowing such a quiet  
 unexpected  
 kiss of peace.

**Sally Witt, CSJ**, is a Sister of Saint Joseph of Baden, PA. She lives in Ambridge and writes history and poetry.

# Book Banning Backfires

© by Louisa Fordyce

Book banning has occurred for centuries. The Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang had 460 Confucian scholars buried alive (259 BC to 210 BC) because he disagreed with Confucianism.

The great philosopher Plato didn't want the youth of Greece to read Homer's *Odyssey* because he didn't want their minds corrupted with vices.

In 35 AD, Roman Emperor Caligula didn't want the populace to read the *Odyssey* because he feared it would give people notions about being free to do as they wanted. At least Caligula didn't execute them.

Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* (1637) was banned by the Puritans because Morton criticized the Puritan way of life. Morton was friendly to the Native Americans, contradicting the Puritan attitude.

Not only was Morton's book banned, he was banned from Massachusetts and denied entry back into the colony. At least he wasn't executed, either.

I don't know if earlier book banning increased interest in the forbidden tomes, but by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, book banning backfired. Banning a book very often increases interest in the book and can lead to crimes such as smuggling.

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## *If you want to increase a book's popularity, ban it.*

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In the 1920s, American-born Sylvia Beach, an editor and publisher in Paris, published James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which was promptly banned pretty much everywhere.

Enterprising souls, including Ernest Hemingway, conspired to smuggle the book into various countries.

Copies of the book first entered the U.S. in the 1930s through a friend of Hemingway's who took the ferry from Windsor, Canada, to Detroit, bringing over one or two copies at a time to avoid detection.

There is another famous anecdote about Bennett Cerf, the founder of Random House publishers, having the book smuggled into New York City in 1933. If you want to increase a book's popularity, ban it. People will sometimes go to great lengths to acquire what they have been told they can't have.

Other books have faced censorship in the U.S. *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Lolita*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* are all now regarded as great classics and are in the literary canon. And so it goes. There is nothing new under the sun, Horatio.

When I was a teenager in the mid-1960s, I bought a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye*.

My mother was an avid reader but wasn't well read in literature. She favored Alfred Hitchcock's and Ellery Queen's mystery magazines, as well as cheap novels featuring scantily clad women on the cover

who were usually victims in the books.

She saw my copy of *Catcher* and knew it was "bad" based on what she had heard from others. She started to read the book when I wasn't reading it and got to the famous F-word before I did.

She confiscated my copy of *Catcher* and told me not to buy anything like that again.

What did I, a rebellious 14-year-old, do? I bought another copy of *Catcher* and hid it, probably under my mattress or under the cushion of the chair in the living room where I lounged to read, and read it when my mother was at work.

I bought other trashy novels and hid them from my mother's view, further violating the edict of not reading "junk" and "garbage." Yes, I was quite the criminal back then.

Speaking of mattresses, shortly after Mother tried to interfere in my reading escapades, I was changing the sheets on her bed. This was before we had fitted sheets, so the bottom flat sheet had to be tucked under the mattress.

Imagine my surprise, when I pushed my hand under the mattress, to encounter a copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. We were two peas in a pod.

I started to read *Lady* and found it too boring to bother with. I still found it boring when it was required reading for a college literature class.

Nabokov's *Lolita* also left me cold when I was a teenager; I didn't make it past page 2. I don't know how I would feel about it as a mature adult today.

Book banning is again a hot topic in America. Current books under fire include the graphic novels *Persepolis* and *Maus*, as well as the old standards *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Catcher in the Rye*.

There is a waiting list to borrow these books through the Westmoreland Library Network's online catalog system. That fact warms the cockles of this retired English professor's heart.

To paraphrase a famous movie saying: If you ban it, they will want to read it.

So let's ban some other books that deserve to be read so that book banning continues to backfire.

This quote is attributed to Stephen King: "Read whatever they're trying to keep out of your eyes and your brain because that's exactly what you need to know." ♦

**Louisa Fordyce** is a retired professor of English who was published in academic journals during her career and now submits articles and photos for fun. She has been published in *Garden Gate* and *Green Prints*, as well as local newspapers and the Penn State Master Gardeners' annual calendar.

# Occam's Chicken

© by Walt Peterson



Last night I saw a lady give a chicken a bath on television. She washed the chicken under its wing pits and put a little red diaper on it and even rode the chicken around in her convertible in a ritzy neighborhood sitting in a baby seat with a seatbelt. This was no ordinary chicken, I gather, but

a blue-blood bird with a pedigree and papers and white fluffy feathers. The lady hugged the chicken, then took it for a swim in her outdoor pool, and I have to admit, I think the woman was naked, at least from the waist up. It was a big swimming pool with a palm tree at one end, and the only thing I wonder is, what does that chicken have that I don't?

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## Quarry

© by Walt Peterson

"We figured Marika and some of our other friends was sitting on the ledge near the woods above Quarry Field, Mrs. Holowatyj, so we got flashlights and snuck down through the trees on the path that leads to the rocks. It's where all the kids drink and watch softball games; they were down there Tuesday night drinkin' quarts and watching Stan's Bar down on the field, so we kept lookin' for them but with our flashlights off till we saw their fire. Some of the kids was drinking Iron City, but I didn't see Marika with no bottle.

"Well, then we turned on our flashlights and started yelling things like 'Freeze!' and 'Drop those bottles, yunz kids! We're the cops.' But we were laughing, but I guess, ma'am, Marika was so scared she didn't hear it was us and just forgot where the cliffs were.

"You boys see that girl over there? That's Marika's sister. You tell her that! She's been standing there by the coffin combing Marika's hair all day. Ask her to stop. Then tell her that."

**Walt Peterson** is a teacher and writer from Pittsburgh. His book *Talking Smack to the Dead* will be out in August. The prose poem "Occam's Chicken" will preface the short story "The Chicken, the Road and the Widow."



# Angler Yin-Yang

© by Paul Turtzer

Addiction—

Air temperature well below freezing, snowdrifts measured in feet.

Desperate to locate fishable water, a spring creek is possible solution, though perilous road trip is required.

Casting awkward, fly line far from supple, rod guides frozen, as well as extremities.

Treasure down deep, weight essential, one lively tug—worth all the suffering.

Abstinence—

Local water open year-round by regulation. Warm winter temperatures bring temptation, creek flow hints possibility of success.

The spirit suggests otherwise.

Content to embrace an off-season, appreciation through sobriety.

**Paul Turtzer** is a retired tennis professional and an avid hiker and fly-fisherman. He resides in Ligonier with his wife, Ruth.

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## Invisible

© by Carolyn Cecil

Every day it was  
Kate this, Kate that  
Then Kate was gone  
Never to come back,  
So sudden,  
So permanent  
So rat a tat tat



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## Spent

© by Carolyn Cecil

I spent the whole day running,  
Strumming my way, Two hundred miles  
Singing, winging my way,  
Not a Penny would I give back  
For cruising, abusing the highway  
Trying to get away  
Rubber on road.

**Carolyn Cecil** writes from Baltimore, Maryland. Her chapbook, *Taken Away*, was published by the Broadkill Press. Her poems have been in the *Broadkill Review*, *Backbone Mountain Review*, *Free Sate Review*, *Loyalhanna Review*, and *Gunpowder Review*, among others. She is a member of Ligonier Valley Writers.

# Cantwell Cliffs or Bust!

© by Alicia Stankay

Usually, older people who start down the trail at Cantwell Cliffs decide not to chance a hike after they see the first stairway.

“Stairway” is a misnomer because the trail starts down with various sizes of small boulders squeezed between two large boulders. It’s officially called the Fat Woman’s Squeeze, which prepares hikers for the difficulties ahead.

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## *I’d turn back if I were you.*

Have you ever heard the warning: “I’d turn back if I were you?” I think it was coined at Cantwell Cliffs.

At age 71, I debated whether to take a chance, but I’d already hiked the other five trails at Hocking Hills State Park, so I didn’t want to wimp out at the last trail. As they say, “Nothing ventured, nothing gained” and I figured I couldn’t stop now.

So I followed my intrepid husband through the Fat Woman’s Squeeze, holding my breath the whole time. (I fit, but I didn’t want to think of the consequences if I fell.)

Things looked up when the next section actually resembled steps. Unfortunately, I discovered, the rim trail traveled way down into the gorge before heading way back up to the cliff rim.

Evidently it was a way to make the entire experience much more adventurous and/or dangerous to the hiker!

Thankfully I had brought my hiking poles with me because I needed them both for balance as we continued on.

Although I tried to focus on the sunny blue sky on this early November day, I was unhappy when a section of the hike downward consisted of a series of large roots in place of steps.

My husband went down first, somehow managing to stay on his feet. He waited for me with an encouraging smile. As I tried to step down between the roots and avoid tripping over them, all I could think about was tumbling head over feet and crashing into my husband. There we would lie until rescue came and carted us off to the hospital.

Imagining that scenario, I finally gave up the vertical approach. I sat down and scooted over the roots until I could get a stable foothold beside my husband.

As we continued onward, actually downward, I thought of that British saying, “In for a penny, in for a pound.” I guessed that meant I had to finish this hike, no matter how difficult it got.

But I wasn’t prepared to come across my nemesis. Several times we found large tree trunks fallen across the trail.

The first time I managed to sling my left leg over to straddle the trunk and then get my right leg over to stand on the other side.

The next time the trunk was even bigger. I let my husband go first. Then I struggled to get my left leg over to sit on top.

As I fought to pull my right leg over the trunk, I began sliding down! Thankfully Red grabbed onto me before I crashed to the ground. All I can say is that it’s good to have a husband on hiking trips (and everywhere else).

After I caught my breath, we started up the trail. I felt safer going upward, but I forgot I would still have to deal with tangled roots and rocky steps.

After falling on my knees to stop from sliding backward, I concentrated on my steps and tried not to think about how far I had to go.

Sometimes I paused to actually look around me at the cliffs. I noticed how some amazing trees grew out of them at impossible angles. The sky above was a deep blue accented by gold and orange autumn leaves mixed with dark-green pine trees.

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## *Amazing trees grew out of the cliffs at impossible angles.*

When we finally reached the end of the Cantwell Cliffs rim trail, we congratulated ourselves for actually surviving four days of hiking all six trails in the Hocking Hills State Park.

Before Cantwell Cliffs we had mastered Old Man’s Cave, Rock House, Conkle’s Hollow, Cedar Falls, and Ash Cave.

Meeting the challenges of the hike, observing nature in all its glory, and just being together made each day perfect for us.

As we relaxed by the fireside in our cozy cabin, we were so thankful for this wonderful getaway. It was the ideal gift from family and friends for our fiftieth wedding anniversary! ♦

Alicia Stankay focused on her fall adventure at Hocking Hills State Park to write stories to go with the photos she took of the trails and the amazing natural rock formation wonderland. She recently finished the final touches on her eighth book, *Winter of Challenges*, which should be available on Amazon this summer.



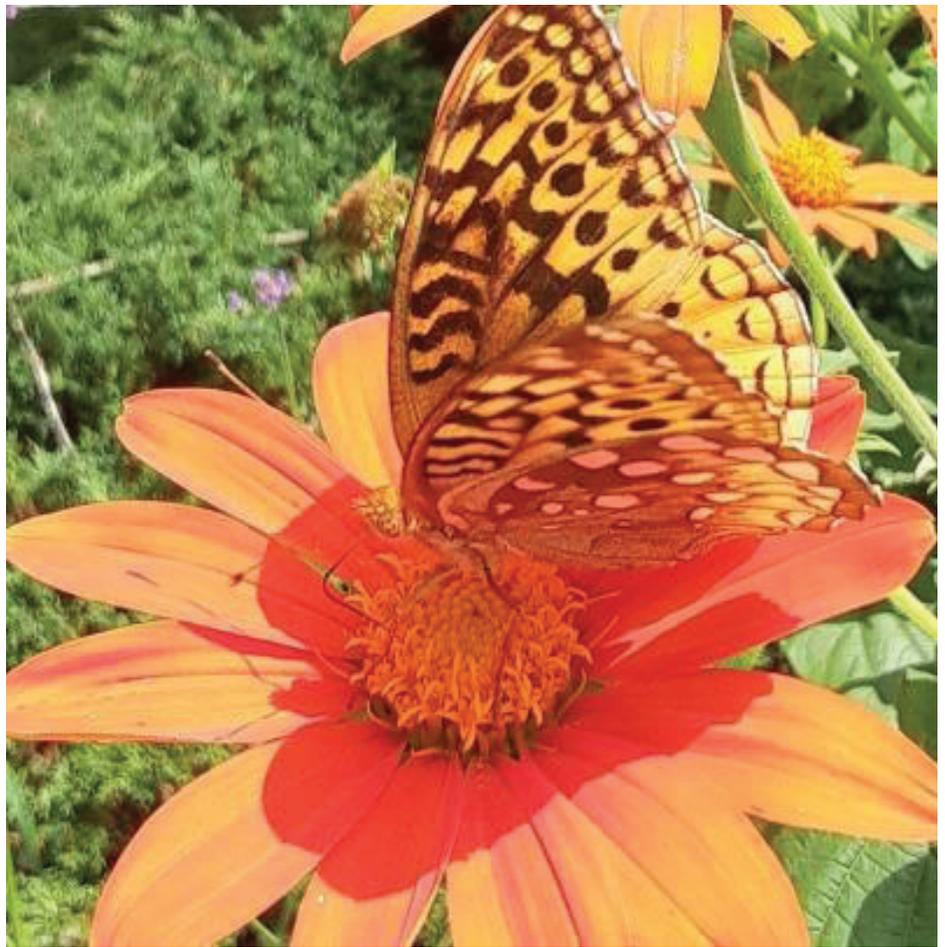
**Fat Woman's Squeeze** © by *Alicia Stankay* (bio on p. 12)

*“To plant a garden  
is to believe in  
tomorrow.”*

*— Audrey Hepburn*

*“If you truly  
love nature, you  
will find beauty  
everywhere.”*

*— Laura Ingalls Wilder*



**Me and My Shadow** © by Louisa Fordyce (bio on p. 28)



**Reach for the Sky** © by Louisa Fordyce



**Angie’s Azalea** © by Janet Sady (bio on p. 21)

*“Unclose your mind. You are not a prisoner. You are a bird in flight, searching the skies for dreams.”*

— Haruki Murakami

*“To sit in the shade on a fine day and look upon the verdant green hills is the most perfect refreshment.”*

— Jane Austen



**Oriole in Profile** © by Tamara DiBartolo

*“To walk in nature is to witness a thousand miracles.”*

— Mary Davis

*“When your children are teenagers, it’s important to have a dog so that someone in the house is happy to see you.”*

— Nora Ephron



**Adorable Autumn** © by Tamara DiBartolo (bio on p. 28)



**Beautiful Ballerina** © by Susan Potts (bio on p. 28)



**Jumping for Joy** © by Susan Potts



**Blowing Bubbles** © by Susan Potts

# Penmanship Lesson

© by Katherine Sadakierski

Rain leaves its signature  
In tears,  
Like fingers  
That you run slowly  
Down your window,  
Retracing  
Where the light once was,  
Dull prints left behind  
Like ghosts of ink  
On parchment.

Perhaps rain  
Leaves invisible notes  
Disappearing into the dirt,  
Whispering  
In unintelligible words.

But I can read its desperate scrawls,  
The dots and dashes  
Typewriter-clacked,  
With pings like falling beads.

This is a language I know:  
Remember me,  
Don't let me go.  
It just may be  
That oblivion  
Is what scares us most.

Perhaps rain  
Wipes clean the slate,  
And its signature  
Is impermanent.  
Its messages  
Not cast in stone,  
But reshaped  
Into double rainbows,  
Arching into letters  
That seem to spell hope.

# Where You Left Off

© by Katherine Sadakierski

Late afternoon light  
Meanders through the sunflower fields,  
Past quasi-sunset skies of pink and indigo,  
Remnants of past storms,  
The shadow of last night's tornado.  
Lashing rains gave way  
To golden streaks of sun,  
New ripples of paint.

A boy of seven or so,  
Sandy-haired and freckle-faced,  
Peeks out the backseat window  
Of the pickup truck in which he sits,  
Craning his head, looking out at the world curiously,  
Like the kid in Norman Rockwell's painting  
Of a summer station wagon

On the way home,  
Dreaming of the next vacation,  
Even while still in the parking lot.  
The world passes by,  
Time slips through your fingers,  
Uncontainable as threads of water  
Catching reflections,  
Flints of sun,  
Like strands of gossamer webs that glint,  
Sparkle, and splinter in the sun.

Still, you don't forget  
Amidst these threads that connect  
You to your past, and present,  
A tapestry of dreams,  
Hopes of where next to begin,  
Where to throw the dart on the map  
And start your next road trip,  
Sewing a new path in the quilt squares of memory,  
Picking up the threads where you left off,  
In late afternoon light, among the sunflowers, tall as trees,  
Among your roots, still strong,  
After the storm.

**Kathryn Sadakierski's** writing has appeared in *Agape Review*, *Critical Read*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, *Literature Today*, *NewPages* blog, *Silkworm*, *Songs of Eretz*, and elsewhere. Her micro-chapbook "Travels through New York" was published by *Origami Poems Project* (2020). She holds a B.A. and M.S. from Bay Path University.

*I am what time, circumstance, history  
have made of me, certainly, but I am also  
much more than that. So are we all.*

— James Baldwin

# A Bear Run Thanksgiving

(A fictional holiday liberally spiced with facts)

© by Rod Cross

The gravel crunched under the wheels of the big Packard automobile as Harold Jones drove Edgar and Liliane Kaufmann down the drive toward the house over the falls of Bear Run.

The flowers in the cutting garden were dry and retreating from the cold winter that was closing in on the Laurel Highlands. Autumn colors had been washed away by the wind and rain to float down the stream and over the falls, over the brook trout, on the way to the Youghiogheny River.

In contrast, the light ochre-colored terraces glowed softly in the late afternoon sun. The understory of shiny green rhododendrons framed the house and the site, bringing it to life. The couple felt a sense of relief at the sight of their weekend home.

Fallingwater was a refreshing respite from the smoke and grit of a 1930s Pittsburgh, and from the glitz and glitter of the upcoming holiday season. The Kaufmanns were thankful, though, for the thousands of Christmas shoppers who would visit and hopefully find delight in their downtown department store.

Even the dachshunds in the car responded to being back at Bear Run. The younger dogs sat in the front of the car with Harold the chauffeur, yipping and squirming with excitement.

Only Moxie, the matriarch of the pack, sat with dignified enthusiasm between Edgar Sr. and Liliane in the back. Fortunately, her frantically wagging tail was hidden under Liliane's fur coat.

The Kaufmanns loved entertaining, but they had decided to keep this Thanksgiving gathering small in anticipation of how busy they would be for the next month with a store filled with shoppers.

Smoke from the chimney told them that Edgar jr.\* was already at the house, along with the industrial designer Paul Mayen. A crackling fire would be warming the living room and the mulled wine in the kettle ball swung into the fireplace.

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*The house had taught them  
the poetry of repose.*

---

They had also invited the artist Peter Blume and their good friends Alexander and Tillie Speyer. By now the house designed for them by Frank Lloyd Wright was warm and inviting.

The sun had set below the trees in the glen, and the indirect lighting had the house floating over the waterfall.

Elsie Henderson, the cook, was in command in the kitchen, and it hummed with the holiday dinner preparations. She loved the house too and was thankful to work for the Kaufmanns, who truly treated her and the staff with respect.

The Kaufmanns had eclectic European tastes, but the Thanksgiving meal was largely based on traditional dishes that were favorites of the family and guests.

Traditional American families celebrate with roast turkey, but the Kaufmanns were of German ancestry and preferred the customary dish of roast duck. The cornbread stuffing was baked in a pan instead of in the bird.

There would be two sweet potato sides to the meal. The first would be a sweet potato soufflé that came from a recipe of Bernardine Hagan. Along with her husband, I.N. (Isaac Newton) Hagan, she owned Hagan Ice Cream Company in nearby Uniontown. They would build the Wright-designed Kentuck Knob in Chalk Hill.

The second side was a favorite of the family, Elsie's sweet potato pie. The dish supplanted the traditional pumpkin pie and was a nod to Elsie's mother's upbringing in the South. The family always looked forward to this holiday treat, which glistened with the liberal use of country butter.

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*Good conversation was  
accompanied by the  
music of the waterfall.*

---

After dinner warm mulled wine would be sipped in the crisp night air on the west terrace. The stars glistened through the bare trees. Good conversation was accompanied by the music of the waterfall that played beneath them. More substantial drinks would be served later from the chestnut-stump bar next to the fireplace.

From this warm glow of good food, drinks, and friends the Kaufmanns would reflect and be thankful for the house designed and built for them on that remarkable site. The house that had taught them the "poetry of repose," as Edgar jr. described his experience.

Oh yes, the dogs enjoyed their usual dinner of prime-cut meats and whatever bits Elsie let fall onto the floor from the kitchen table.

That evening all at Fallingwater raised their glasses or wagged their tails in thanks to Elsie Henderson, the designer of another Bear Run Thanksgiving.

\* *Edgar jr. did use a lowercase letter for his suffix.* ♦

(See Rod's bio on p. 28.)

# Time and Co-Motion: The Industrial-Pastoral

© by Joshua Penrod

Time changes one's perspective; if one is careful, perspective also changes one's time.

The American pastoral is wilderness, or at least woods. The British pastoral is the garden, mark on the earth showing cultivation and order. Conceptually constructed, the garden represents a tending, a maintenance of nature that comes equipped with an expectation and understanding of what it means to be cultured.

Even the American wilderness, even as maintained by laws such as the Wilderness Act or the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, instills an order on top of nature by proscribing certain human action. Nothing is left untouched, even by dint of mandating no contact.

The history of Britain and the United States incorporates several industrial revolutions, with the development of capital and production processes, situated in a network of market forces, incentives, and competition.

By accident of history and geography but also by intent, areas such as western Pennsylvania found themselves fertile ground not only for farms and fields but for mines and mills.

Powered by burgeoning finance the likes of which the world had never before seen, the momentum of the growth of the big mills turning huge and the deep mines dug deeper, the region changed the world: the way it looked, the way we worked, where people lived—all of it enveloped in smoke and steam, covered in dust.

But in the Loyalhanna Valley, a connection between two large industrial footprints, there is an unexpected contrast, complete with a historic amusement park: Idlewild Park, itself constructed of technology and steel and located in a top-tier scenic valley.

This Loyalhanna, the glade and the river, represent both a connection and a pause, a connection between people and industry in western Pennsylvania and also a connection to the social past and the social present, a curated garden, some woods, and a river in a gorge between the folds of this complex topography.

It both facilitated the country's industrial production and provided a respite from it, at least for some.

The respite is the pause, Idlewild amusement park, with the noise of the park rides, the laughter and chatter of adults and children, the smell of the fullness of peak summer sunshine on green leaves dancing in the breeze mixing with popcorn and cotton candy, the air cooled just a bit by the nearby Loyalhanna easing past.

Idlewild itself formed from an accretion of technology, finance, and the natural world. Formed

first as a park adjacent to the local railroad, financed by the Mellons (bankers to the industrialists), over the decades the park would add diversions and amusements.

Beginning with a carousel in the early 1930s, the park eventually included a roller coaster, multiple rides, Storybook Forest, and many other places for families to visit.

I personally have fond memories of visiting Idlewild numerous times when I was a child. How I would bounce in excitement as we headed west from Ligonier, the rolling surface and gentle curves of

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*Idlewild is a park formed  
by industry and providing  
an escape from it.*

---

Route 30 triggering my anticipation.

All good things, even giant steel and giant coal, must end. I was born and largely came of age during the long, agonizing fall of the steel and coal industry in Pennsylvania.

In Johnstown, where I was raised, the death of several large steelmaking facilities took more than a decade. The final bit of operations of Bethlehem Steel—this company and its ancestors that had been the main employer in Johnstown for a century or more—closed the same year that I graduated from high school.

Growing up amidst a pervading sense of decline and loss created a dynamic and view of how things work in the world that has likely stayed with me all my life.

Of course, as a child at Idlewild and Storybook Forest, I was unaware of all that.

What I was quite aware of, even when so small, was the aesthetic of the park. I wouldn't have put it in terms of the "pastoral" but controlling for vocabulary, I think my 10-year-old self would agree with me now, decades later.

Cambria, Somerset, Westmoreland, and Allegheny counties, certainly along with their neighbors, are not strangers to the marks of industry, and they are also not strangers to outstanding natural beauty.

At different places and different times, each would have shown the British or American pastoral. They still could in major ways.

These counties also have this unique dualism, however, removed from the original pastoral into what I would call the industrial pastoral.

This is the result of a unique part of history

and a unique geography. The glaciers of the last Ice Age didn't make it quite as far south as Route 30 in western Pennsylvania. As a consequence, the hills and valleys that remain would have been recognizable for many tens of thousands of years, until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There would be woods, wildlife, clean-running rivers, and a Native American population.

With European colonialization in the late 1700s and through what I would term the "heavy" Industrial Revolution, focusing on steel and coal, the landscape changed. Agriculture grew, as did the traffic, human and human-made, following the growth of the heavy industry.

And with it, the wealth ... and the middle class ... and the garden or the park, the meaning of the escape from the steel and the coal, yet financed by it. The green spaces—*manicured* green spaces—flourished in the midst of the machinery.

Leo Marx's late 20<sup>th</sup> century work *The Machine in the Garden* is a book-length exposition on the relationship between technology and culture in the U.S. It analyzes much of the dynamic as it unfolded, complete with the idea of the "interrupted idyll" that shows the divide between the natural and the constructed.

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*All good things,  
even giant steel and  
giant coal, must end.*

---

I wonder, however, if there comes a time when someone who grows up in the idyll wouldn't recognize it to be interrupted. Like the much-heralded "Internet generation," children born since the mid-90s who have never known a world without the Internet (or the mobile phone, or Netflix), I never witnessed an era in which such a declared idyll was, in fact, interrupted.

The same goes for my parents, and my grandparents, and quite frankly, their parents. Instead, my idyll was Idlewild, and I've never known any different.

I can imagine what such non-interruption might feel like, but even if I got "away from it all," I'd still be conditioned by the clock and by my relationships with other people who themselves are conditioned by the clock. There's no escape from it; it's just a new baseline.

Even under the early industrial-pastoral circumstances, even the Loyalhanna had a railroad, with steam locomotives plying the tracks on a

timetable.

The landscape has changed and is changing once again. The move from wilderness to cultivated garden to some post-industrial reality speaks of the dualists of the pastoral both being vanquished by something new.

Erupting out of a valley floor, girded by rivers and green trees, Pittsburgh today is hardly "hell with the lid off," as it was once described.

Johnstown, on a smaller scale, has the same industrial legacy, though it still lags behind its far bigger sibling in terms of economic reconstruction.

Time marches on, as it did for those who came before us and will for those who come after. Some people still, all these years after the industrial heyday, pine for the return of big steel and big coal the way it once was.

Such circumstances are unlikely to recur. Even places themselves timeless have connection to the places deeply connected to time, at least according to the weak eyes of human recognition and existence. What was once needed is no longer in demand.

Yet here remain the river, the trees, and the hills, standing watch over many millions, perhaps billions, of separate memories of time spent here. Generations of people and generations of trees while the river flows ... and while the machines and rides at Idlewild make their gleeful noises on warm summer days and cool summer evenings.

Here is this mix of the garden and the mill, the finance and the leisure, the people and their creations, the history of social change, and the resoluteness of nature, all combined into something the likes of which had never been seen, a true *sui generis* region and *sui generis* people.

If you watch carefully here, at the park, at the river, in the valley, you can see time both speed up and slow down.

Turn your head one way: children grow older and bring their children. Turn the other way: the river and trees always change but always stay the same, the human traces mere ghosts among the longer time.

Still, the now is what counts for us all.

The now is ultimately what this entire industrial-pastoral may mean for us, those who came before and those who will come after. There will be the valley and everything it has: the river, the trees, the steep hillsides, the park formed by industry yet providing an escape from it and the clock that commands it.

For now, just now, the combination creates the timeless. ♦

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**Joshua Penrod** is a native of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and still makes his home nearby. He works for an international organization based in Washington, D.C., representing a specialized area of the biomedical products industry. He holds a Ph.D. from Virginia Tech and is an adjunct professor at the University of Baltimore.

# Monongahela Valley

© by Michael Comiskey

Mills and coke works lined the river  
from Pittsburgh to Monessen.  
We was the city that didn't sleep—  
it was dark in the day and light in the night.  
The mill whistle blew at seven, three, and eleven.  
But now the only whistle in this Valley  
is the cry of the wind.

The union couldn't do nothin',  
and the politicians wouldn't. The gains  
from trade must of went somewhere else,  
'cause all we got here was the pain.  
We all hoped steel would come back like before.  
But when they shut the last furnace,  
I didn't need no raven to tell me No More.

The G20 come to Pittsburgh and met  
in shiny corporate castles downtown,  
to show the world how an old  
steel town could bounce back.  
They didn't come to Braddock or Duquesne,  
where the jobs went out and the heroin come in,  
and now the only whistle is the cry of the wind.

I was gonna retire at fifty-five.  
They laid me off at fifty-three.  
The government lady said  
Go to School and You'll Retool!  
But computers and nursing wasn't for me.  
At least in the mill you made good money,  
but I don't need no raven to tell me No More.

Now I sell stuff at Best Buy on commission.  
My wife cleans a doctor's office at night.  
I told my boys they had to go.  
One's a teacher in Texas,  
the other deals cards at an Indian casino.  
I'd love to have 'em back again.  
But I don't need no raven to tell me No More,  
'cause now the only whistle in this Valley  
is the cry of the wind.

**Michael Comiskey** is a retired professor of political science and economics at the Penn State Fayette Campus. He lives in Connellsville, PA, with his wife, Mary Ann. When not writing, he bikes, skis, reads, cooks, and travels.

# Home

© by Janet Sady

**"I was born very far away from where I'm supposed to be,  
so I'm on my way home."**

My siblings say, "You don't belong in this family."  
I ask my mother, "Was I adopted?"  
She smacks me—not too hard, but enough to say,  
"Don't be ridiculous."  
Why would they say I don't belong? I don't know.  
Is it because I'm the only one with my nose in a book?  
The one who has to be called multiple times for dinner  
because I'm traveling to the Orient with Pearl S. Buck,  
or off with Jack London in the *Call of the Wild*?  
Is it because I'm never quiet—questioning why?  
Not quick to accept blind reason—  
Using my imagination to make up stories to tell.  
What am I looking for?  
Is it strangers who use words to convey their thoughts?  
Or memoirs—even though my older sister says, "When did that happen?"  
This world is not my permanent home.  
I know I have a home not made with hands—eternal.  
But here, and now, I've found a home with writers—people like me—  
who are striving to get closer to home, by painting pictures with words.

*The power  
that makes  
grass grow  
and fruit  
ripen and  
guides the  
bird in flight  
is in us all.*

—Anzia Yezierska

**Jan Sady** is an author and lay speaker. Her poetry, short stories and devotions are published in dozens of magazines. She won the bronze medal in 2021 in North Carolina State's Silver Arts for a short story. She is the author of 16 books in various genres. *Rachel's Story* was released in 2022. You can purchase it on Amazon.com or janfran@windstream.net.writing.

# Music in the Ear of the Beholder

© by Nancy Clark



“I love a *pie-ana*, I  
love a *pie-ana*, I love to  
hear somebody play.”  
My sainted mother always  
sang along when the notes of this  
Irving Berlin tune wafted through the  
cloth-covered speakers of our big freestanding Philco  
radio.

She never learned to pronounce the word *piano*  
properly, and she couldn't carry a tune in a bucket,  
but Mom had a deep hankerin' for a *pie-ana* in our  
house.

And so it came to pass that on a cold, snowy  
December day, when Christmas excitement hung like  
icicles in the air, I came home from school to find a  
gargantuan, scuffed-up, second-hand player piano  
leaning against the entire width of the narrowest wall  
in our pretend dining room.

“How did *that* get here?” I asked, fingering the  
yellowed keys.

“Santa made an early delivery,” Mom replied.

“When?”

“While I was in the cellar wershin' clothes.”

“B-b-but how did it get here?” I gnawed on, like a  
dog with a bone.

“The way he *always* brings Christmas presents.”  
Mom was resolute.

Picture it: One jolly fat man in a red suit  
shimmying down a sooty two-by-two-foot coal furnace  
chimney, with a ginormous *pie-ana* strapped to his  
back. REALLY??

The veil separating childhood fantasy from  
reality got a little thinner that day.

---

## *Entertainment was home-grown when I was a young'un.*

---

Entertainment was home-grown when I was a  
young'un, and the player *pie-ana* was the catalyst for  
hours of good clean fun.

Burned into my memory are the times we  
kiddies surrounded Dad when he wrapped a sheet  
of perforated paper around a metal cylinder and  
inserted the cylinder into a specified niche at the  
front of the music maker.

We giggled as he wiggled his wide seat onto the  
narrow surface of a three-legged swivel stool to plant  
his size 9s on the foot pedals beneath the keyboard.

Then with a wink of an eye and a twist of his  
head, Dad pumped those pedals and bellowed, “Ho,

ho, ho! Here we go!” A few huffs and puffs from the  
*pie-ana's* innards, and music was born.

We added our thready, pediatric la-la-la's  
to Dad's rich baritone and Mom's off-key vocal  
contributions. We belted out the lyrics of familiar  
folksongs and clapped our hands to the beat of Polish  
and Slovenian polkas.

The routine never changed, and it never grew old.

Equally entertaining was how the discolored keys  
danced in response to the score. By observing which  
depressed keys created bass chords, I figured out  
how to *chordinate* them with my one-finger melody  
method to make music manually.

In no time I became the keyboard accompanist to  
neighbor Dave (on violin) and uncles John (on guitar)  
and Frank (on accordion) for impromptu Saturday  
evening jam sessions at our house.

---

## *Practicing scales was a chore and a bore.*

---

Anytime was a good time for our good times, but  
my favorite times happened when we gathered to sing  
Christmas carols.

When the aging instrument lost its tune and gave  
up the ghost, it was replaced by a second second-hand  
piano, one that relied totally on human phalanges to  
produce sound.

The less ornate, sleeker upright model appeared  
in much the same way as had the colossal one. It was  
simply there one day when I came home from school.  
This time I didn't ask—and they didn't tell—how it  
came to live with us.

Playing the *pie-ana* was fun until a bona fide  
music instructor, hired to teach me the correct way to  
tickle the ivories, sucked all the fun out of it. I hated  
playing sharps and skipped them when Mom was too  
busy to monitor.

Practicing scales and proper fingering for an hour  
every calendar day was a chore and a bore for a girl  
who preferred Nancy Drew capers over music scores.

I endured many years of “Do it again, Nancy”  
rebukes only because my mama loved a *pie-ana*.

But my God is a God of second chances, and if  
one day the Great Conductor of Heaven's Symphony  
offers me a chair in the orchestra, with an affirmative  
nod from my mom, I'm heading straight for ...

... the cymbals. I'm told there are no sharps in a  
cymbalist's score.

\* With apologies to Irving Berlin, composer of  
*I Love a Piano*, copyright 1920. ♦

**Nancy Clark** and hubby Tom are living the good life as retirees, grateful for good health, just enough wealth, the affection of a growing family, and a treasure trove of friends. Nancy also loves the piano, but sharps? Not so much.

# Part Friend, Part Ogre

© by Marjorie DeAngelis

If “A friend in need is a friend indeed,”  
it has often shown itself a friend!  
When we need to be in touch with someone  
quickly,  
it is there!  
If we need to search for something  
or even buy on the Internet,  
it is there, a faithful assistant, in the palm of our  
hands!  
When we need to send money overseas,  
it is there at our beck and call— magically  
relaying our gifts to their destination in mere  
seconds!  
Friends in Kenya can now stay at home and wait  
for a call  
that visitors are near when they used to wait at  
the bus stop—  
for hours.  
Now they can do business from home  
that before would have taken them hundreds of  
miles  
at no small cost to their pockets and safety.  
Here at home, in the car, it can  
guide us safely to destinations near and far!  
When we are far from home  
and in danger,  
it can call for help!  
What a friend!

But in the blink of an eye,  
it can turn into an ogre,  
gobbling people up, whole at times.  
Its bite gives people amnesia, as they forget  
they have family or friend right next to them,  
near enough for their clothes to touch ...  
It has, on occasion, made me wonder whether  
family dinners—even festive dinners like  
Thanksgiving—  
are really something  
to give thanks for any more ...  
*Why did I spend all those hours preparing,  
when there was no unity at my table,  
no real “gathering.”*  
*Each one in his own separate world,  
devoured by an ogre, thinly disguised ....*



Once in a car with a driver and five friends,  
I saw the ogre turn into a five-headed monster  
separating my five friends, making them  
chattering magpies  
forgetting those they were with,  
the ogre tempting each one to reach out to who  
knows who,  
who knows where.  
The normal give and take of quiet  
conversation had succumbed  
to a cacophony of confusion.  
It seemed that the driver and I  
were the only ones left in the car,  
the others having been kidnapped and  
transported elsewhere by the ogre,  
leaving only noise behind!

Humans often excuse themselves from company  
to meet with the ogre.  
When it calls, however softly,  
or even shakes them gently,  
they follow it.  
In cult-like obedience,  
they rush outside, enslaved,  
to hide behind a tree  
or in a hallway  
or behind a closed door,  
the better to give the demanding ogre  
the undivided attention  
the ones they left behind  
longed for.

Tragically, the ogre has also crashed many cars  
as it leads drivers to text,  
often their last act on this earth ....

It also steals, robbing youth of the  
skill and joy of enjoying company,  
of soaking in silence,  
or admiring the world around them.

But where would we be without it?  
Though it often be my friend,  
when I fantasize a world without it,  
it is a pink gossamer paradise  
or a cozy family dwelling  
without walls ...

**Marjorie DeAngelis**, active in Poets & Writers Workshop, Laughlin Memorial Library, Ambridge, PA, has appeared in the *Loyalhanna Review* and other publications. In 2020, she published *Cameos of Kenya: Treasured Memories of My Life in Kenya 1974–1990*, available on Amazon. Married and retired, she loves gardening, volunteering, and helping senior citizens.

*“Let us live like flowers,  
wild and beautiful and  
drenched in sun.”*

— *Ellen Everett*

# Walking While Introverted

© by Joe Potts

Let me toss this right out into the open: I am an introvert. Truth is, I'm so withdrawn I'm nearly folded inside out. I could be called the quintessential introvert.

In fact, go ahead and call me that. I've certainly been called worse.

I'm sure one day I'll be enshrined in the Introvert Hall of Fame. The IHF may not be on a par with Cooperstown (to mix sports), but I'm loathe to turn down recognition of any trifling sort.

You can tell I'm an introvert by the way I behave in social situations: I appear to be playing living statues. I move as little as possible during these affairs, to avoid attracting attention. I resemble a gecko on a frosty night.

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## *You can assess my IQ (Introversion Quotient) by threatening me with a social event.*

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You can assess my IQ (Introversion Quotient) by threatening me with a social event. My eyes will quiver, my throat will dry up and slam shut, and, yes, my face will turn a whiter shade of pale.

The next time you're at a soiree, carefully look around the room. I won't be there. As an introvert, I don't soiree. I also don't mingle, mix, blend in, or party hearty.

By the way, if you're there, milling with people and enjoying yourself, that's a reliable indicator you're *not* an introvert.

If it's one of those rare times I'm attending a social event, you probably still won't see me. I'll be retreating into a dark corner, trying to blend in with the wall.

Someone might speak to me and, heaven forbid, expect me to engage in conversation. With any luck, they'll think I'm a floor lamp and mosey on.

A major issue for the modern "shy guy" is that introversion isn't protected by political correctness. Introverts are outnumbered by extroverts about three to one and are considered fair game.

Many people see being an introvert as a "condition" that needs to be cured. Because extroverts are energized by social situations (whereas introverts are drained by them), they are prone to pummeling the cornered introvert with exhortations to "come out of your shell." Believe me, if I had a shell, I would joyfully slink into it.

Among the more dreaded activities for the introvert is taking a walk. The extrovert may find walking an agreeable undertaking, but for the socially

challenged introvert, it can be terrifying.

*What if I meet someone on the way? What if it's someone I know? What if it's someone I don't know? Should I nod? Maybe a raised eyebrow will suffice. Good grief, what if they say something? Should I feign lightheadedness?*

A simple walk should not be burdened with such a sack of anguish and misery.

The well-prepared introvert must take into account regional cultural considerations. Unfortunately, western Pennsylvanians are notoriously friendly. Many of them, upon meeting someone they know, will attempt to initiate conversation. Can't they do the normal thing and just pretend that they don't know me?

Steeler fans are particularly to be avoided. The more rabid ones, lacking other targets, will debate last week's game with a fire hydrant. These dangerously gregarious locals will accost strangers on any pretext. Why must they inflict such torture?

My wife, Susan, and I often take evening walks. She's also an introvert, but she's a situationally extroverted introvert. She's also more naturally adept at conversation than I.

But then, so are my cats. Sofia is quite chatty, as flufferinas go. And Nefertiti the Sleek has been known to hold her own at the dinner table. But they don't come along on our walk, so they're no help.

The good news is that if we have the misfortune of seeing other people, Susan will handle the pleasantries, while I retreat behind my bleak, unnatural smile.

My multitalented wife has made my voyage through life's choppy seas more tranquil. She possesses far more life skills than I do.

I must tell you, there have been times that had she not accompanied me on the walk, it would have ended badly. Seeing approaching walkers, I would have had no alternative but to dive into the bushes and wait until they had safely passed.

When I worked in an office building, I often wished the hallways were lined with bushes. Occasionally while I was navigating a corridor, someone would approach, and there was simply nowhere to hide.

A hallway intersection provided a welcome escape route but occasionally backfired. Taking a sharp left to avoid an imminent encounter can lead to being confronted by someone at point-blank range. You see the dilemma.

As I write this, we are emerging from one of the countless spirit-crushing phases of the coronavirus global pandemic. This virus is affecting everyone globally as well as pandemically. It is causing physical, emotional, mental, and financial scars. It's also not very popular.

I don't believe we ever flattened the curve; instead, the curve flattened us like so much roadkill.

For the socially handicapped, pandemically affected introvert, however, there was a silver lining. During the Covid shutdown it became normal to sit at home for weeks, encountering no one. Suddenly I was on a lovely vacation in my private family room.

On those rare excursions into the civilized world, I blended in, as everyone was wearing disguises. I wish I could have done this all my life without seeming peculiar.

I also walked regularly inside my house. The odds of encountering a stranger were relatively low. My cats gave me annoyed looks, as I sometimes disturbed their naps. Nefertiti would grumble and crank before sashaying off to a fresh cushion or blanket. The guilt of disturbing a pampered life can be devastating.

Due to the coronavirus ordeal, I have become code-red perilously introverted. The paltry social skills I had developed over the years withered on the vine. In fact, the vine crumbled and blew away.

Use it or lose it, they say (they're always saying something, the big know-it-alls), and in this case, they're right. My conversational abilities, always questionable, have atrophied.

Walking while introverted is now more dangerous than ever. I'm hoping the scientific sorcerers who brewed the Covid-19 vaccine can concoct a potion that cures introversion.

In the meantime, if you happen to be out walking and see an approaching figure disappear, it's probably me. Just say hello to the quaking bushes as you pass by. ♦

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## Game of Chance

© by Joe Potts

The golden sun rose happily,  
And all my world was well.  
The songbirds sang, the plump doves cooed,  
In valley and in dell.

The world then changed, and shuddered.  
Now dawn makes my blood curdle.  
For each new morn we see unleashed  
A fresh, dreaded Wordle.

Easy as pie, just five letters,  
This game's a piece of cake.  
So why then when it shows its face  
Do I tremble and shake?

Curse you, curse you, foulest of games,  
Alphabet concoctions!  
How can I know which word you want?  
There are countless options!

Is it bleat, or maybe it's cleat?  
There is no way to know.  
Egad, it's pleat, to my dismay,  
And I don't even sew!

Maybe it's batch, or catch, or latch,  
Turns out it must be watch.  
This latest mean and foul trick is  
A swift kick in the crotch.

Be gone! Be gone! You evil game,  
With traps and crevasses.  
When I confront the likes of you,  
My mind's in molasses.

I hope I never see again  
Your brain-teasing hurdles.  
Haunt me no more, foul test of yore,  
Inflict no more Wordles.



## The Musical Villanelle

© by Jan McLaughlin

Rhyme and music, the villanelle  
Whispered imagery so sublime  
Where young hearts will always dwell.

Is it the potion of a magic spell?  
The reason that our souls combine?  
Rhyme and music, the villanelle.

I hear the ringing of a bell  
Calling gentle memories to my mind  
Where young hearts will always dwell.

The honeyed taste of caramel  
By destiny we were designed  
Rhyme and music, the villanelle.

The winds of time will foretell  
To this fate I'm joyfully defined  
Where young hearts will always dwell.

The chiming bells sweetly knell  
Remembering these ties that bind  
Rhyme and music, the villanelle  
Where young hearts will always dwell.



(See Jan's bio on p. 8.)

**Joe Potts** has had humor articles published in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and the *Tribune Review*. His SF/fantasy fiction can be heard on the WAOB Audio Theatre website and You-Tube channel. He lives in Unity Township with his wife, Susan, and feline fluffballs Sofia and Nefertiti.

# The Bargain Shopper

© by Keith Neill



The bargain shopper had a coupon, and as the saying goes, “It was burning a hole in her pocket.” But this time it was burning a hole in her cellphone. *Technology!*

So off we went to the big box store. I’m not usually interested in buying anything. I already have more clothes than I need.

However, I nearly always take a walk around the store. Most times I call and tell her where she can find me. Then I grab one of the chairs by the front door with the other old guys who are being held hostage by the bargain shoppers they came with.

This trip was a little different. The sale rack was calling my name.

While scoping out the merchandise, I saw a belt that I liked, but why do they try to tempt me into getting two? The deal is buy one, get one for half price. But I don’t need two.

I also didn’t need the sharp summer sports shirt in a 4X, nor did I need jeans with a 50-inch waist or a 24-inch waist. I haven’t had a 24-inch waist since third grade and I hope I never have a 50-inch waist.

I guess there are more people my size than there are BIG guys and skinny guys.

But the blue swim trunks with the red Hawaiian flowers called my name.

I usually look at swim trunks when they’re on sale. Pools with high chlorine levels take their toll on fabric. I used to swim three times a week. The swimsuit that I wore was black when I started with it, but it became orange over time as each dip in the pool bleached out some of the black dye.

Back to the sale rack. There were several blue trunks in assorted sizes. I grabbed two and trekked off to the changing area.

Lo and behold, one of them fit. The original price had been \$39.99. Now they were \$8.00. What a deal!

I was surprised when the nice lady at the checkout told me the cost would be \$8.48.

I said to the cashier, “I didn’t realize swim trunks were taxed.”

She said, “They’re not considered a necessary item.”

“They are where I swim,” I told her.

We both laughed.

Then she said, “Here’s a coupon for 15% off.”

I thanked her.

Buying the swim trunks put a smile on both our faces. This time I didn’t feel that I was being held hostage. I became the bargain shopper. ♦

**Keith Neill** is a retired high school teacher. He continues to write and spends time bicycling and teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). He also follows the school and sporting events of his grandchildren.

## Student Poetry Awards

Ligonier Valley Writers has sponsored the Student Poetry Contest for grades 4-12 since 1991, even throughout the pandemic. The contest judges award first, second, and third cash prizes in each of nine categories. They also identify a Best of the Best poem in each grade grouping (4-6, 7-9, and 10-12)

This year the awards ceremony resumed at the Greensburg Barnes & Noble, where the student poets received their prizes and read their winning poems to an appreciative audience.

On page 27, we reprint those three best of the best poems.

You can see the list of all the winners, read the other winning poems, and see photos of the student poets at both [www.LVWonline.org](http://www.LVWonline.org) and LVW’s Facebook page.

Congratulations to all of the winners! And our thanks to all of the contest sponsors and all the teachers who encouraged their students to participate.

Four teachers had multiple winning poets in their classes: Kelly Ankney of Ligonier Valley Middle School, Carol Aten Frow of Belle Vernon Middle School, Janelle Lombardi of North Allegheny High School, and Jaime Gacek of Wendover Middle School. Congratulations to them too and thanks for encouraging their students to write and to enter the contest.

# John L. Naccarato Memorial Award

Sponsored by Michele Jones

*The Best of the Best in Grades 4-6*

## All about Earth!

© by Ryan Mohnney, Ligonier Valley Middle School, Grade 6

With the grass so green  
The trees so colorful  
The ocean and seas  
So beautiful all around.  
Look up at the sky,  
Such an amazing blue.  
The delicate birds sing all day  
Inside huge forests.  
Deer sit and graze.  
Let's go past sky heights,  
Whole way to space.  
Different planets spin  
Their way around sun.  
Glorious white stars  
Wait to be wished upon.  
It's an unbelievable sight.  
I can't believe  
How lucky we are  
To be on Earth today.

*The Best of the Best in Grades 10-12*

## the prelude begins inside the mouth

© by Kathryn Mi, North Allegheny High School, Grade 11

this is how our language cultivates the dream: by  
swallowing every god-forsaken thing at once.  
tonight i open my mouth and crescendo the silence,  
let your presence be the presence that fires  
every neuron in my body, let you teach me how to breathe again  
until the distance between us becomes cyclical—  
tonight two girls mar themselves with their self-hatred and  
i want my voice back, want to wash up on your shoreline  
in the midst of all this white noise  
and scrub all my sins away.  
between the window and the archive of my body,  
i have whispered a dozen i love yous into the dark.  
tonight I have wound myself up like a ticking clock,  
have asserted the theory of sound in this unholy space  
and god, I want to sing until the six feet between us  
turn to music—  
tonight two girls martyr themselves on the altar and  
i want to kiss you until we both forget, never knowing that  
ghosts only forget in the way that god forgives,  
which is to say that they do not.

*These are the top  
three winners of  
LVW's 31st Annual  
Student Poetry Contest.*

*Congratulations to them  
and to all the winners.*

*A bird  
is joy  
incarnate.*

*— Myrtle Reed*

*The Best of the Best in Grades 7-9*

## Not a Morning Person

© by Becca Codner, Marshall Middle School, Grade 8

*A golden shovel poem based on "Calling Dreams" by Georgia Douglas Johnson.  
Read the words in boldface at the end of each line to discover two sentences  
from Johnson's poem.*

At night I feel I should have **the right**  
to sleep, **to make**  
the wonders and fantasies of **my dreams**  
in a realm where they can flourish and **come true**.  
To stay a while and watch them grow is really all **I ask**,  
and yet the voice says **nay**.  
It simply refuses to meet what **I demand**.  
Is it really too much to ask this **of life**?  
This argument has never changed, looking back at then **and now**.  
The voice refuses to cooperate or meet me where **I am**.  
This heartbreak repeats over and over, **at length**.  
I fight and protest, but against my will **I rise**.  
And, even though it's the last thing I want, **I wake**.  
I so desperately wish to stay in this land where I can fly, and play, **and stride!**  
Yet the voice keeps pushing me, and it's the real world I'm forced back **into**.  
I'm risen from my paradise with the sun rising in **the morning**.  
And, as always, my delicate illusion will fracture and **break**.

## Join Us at LVW

Ligonier Valley Writers is an all-volunteer nonprofit that has served writers and readers throughout western Pennsylvania since 1986. To join LVW and receive discounts on events, download a membership application and mail it to LVW, PO Box B, Ligonier, PA 15658. Dues are still only \$30 per year.

LVW held no in-person events during the Covid lockdown, but we continued our Student Poetry Contest and our Flash Fiction Contest. Our first event back in the real world was last year's publication party for this magazine.

Award-winning playwright F.J. Hartland will be leading a hands-on workshop, most likely in September. For details as they become available, visit **LVWonline.org**. You can also email [jgallagher@LHTOT.com](mailto:jgallagher@LHTOT.com) to get on LVW's Members & Friends email list.

We're also hoping to pull together readings of the winning flash fiction stories and several other programs in 2022-2023.

We welcome programming ideas, so drop us a note if there's a topic you'd like to see LVW cover.

*"There is no greater meaning to my life than what happens when I write." — Amy Tan*

There's still time to enter the **Flash Fiction Contest**. The deadline's August 15. This year's topic is mermaids, selkies, and other water dwellers. Readings of the six winning stories will take place shortly before Halloween. Three cash prizes plus three Honorable Mentions, no entry fee, and publication at LVW's website.

You can read winning flash fiction and student poetry from past years, as well as pieces from past *Loyalhanna Reviews*, at [LVWonline.org](http://LVWonline.org). You can also read the 2022 poems and see photos of the poets at the website and LVW's Facebook page.

*Phantom Detectives at Risk* is on Amazon as a trade paperback and an ebook. All of the stories are by local writers. The anthology is published by Greensburg Writers Group as a fundraiser for LVW.

For more about local authors who are LVW members, visit the Published Authors page at [LVWonline.org](http://LVWonline.org).

## Mission Statement

Ligonier Valley Writers is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to support and promote literary arts education and activities throughout southwestern PA.

All LVW events are open to the public; many are free. LVW provides practical tools and creative inspiration to sustain both emerging and published writers of all ages.

## Author and Artist Bios

**Louise Vrable** is a retired teacher who has explored various art forms all her life, from developing her own black and white photos to manipulating digital pictures to painting water-colors and more.

**Marge Burke** is retired from Smail Automotive in 2019 after 52 years, and currently works part time at Pinnacle Auto Sales. She loves history and historic research, and has been published in local magazines, newspapers, and anthologies. Her hobbies are working in her flower gardens, volunteering at Hannas Town, and enjoying her five delightful grandchildren.

**Tamara DiBartola** believes the arts are a blessing. She hopes to make a positive contribution through her art and poetry. Her pieces have appeared in the *Loyalhanna Review* and at Westmoreland Arts and Heritage Festival, Latrobe Art Center and Latrobe Hospital.

**Susan Potts** is a retired secretary who enjoys spending time with family and friends. Her hobbies include genealogy, photography, and collecting vintage bridal photographs. She lives in Unity Township with her husband and two much-loved cats.

**Rod Cross** lives and works in the Laurel Highlands. He is an educator/guide at Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. Rod is a longtime journal keeper and looks for new stories from his experiences recorded in those rambling writings.

**Linda Ciletti** has seven published books: *Draegon's Lair*, *Through Time for Love and Honor*, *Lady Quest*, *Dream of the Archer*, *Faerie Dust*, *Faerie Knights*, *Faerie Dreams*—and her current work in progress, *Faerie Treasures*. She loves being creative through writing, photography, drawing, book cover design, and virtual-world content creation.

*"Everything in nature invites us constantly to be what we are."*

— Gretel Ehrlich



Flaky Tree © by Linda Ciletti



Wisteria © by Jan Sadye