



***The Loyalhanna Review***

2021



Linn Run © by Alicia Stankay

# Contents

<b>Carolyn Holland</b> , Yellow Daisies ( <i>art</i> ).....	FC	<b>Tamara DiBartola</b> , Preying Peek ( <i>art</i> ) .....	16
<b>Alicia Stankay</b> , Linn Run ( <i>art</i> ).....	IFC	<b>Gerri Grandpre</b> , High Feast ( <i>art</i> ) .....	17
From the Editor.....	2	<b>Louisa Fordyce</b> ,	
Special Thanks.....	2	Montauk Daisy with Honeybee ( <i>art</i> ).....	17
Art Credits.....	2	<b>Carolyn Holland</b> , Watch Dogs ( <i>art</i> ) .....	18
<b>Joe Potts</b> , My Incredible Shrinking Brain.....	3	<b>Janet Sady</b> ,	
<b>Susan Potts</b> , The Cardigan Sweater.....	4	Juvenile Cardinal ( <i>art</i> ).....	18
<b>Nicole Fratrigh</b> ,		Azalea Beauty ( <i>art</i> ).....	18
Mood Swings, an Ars Poetica .....	5	<b>Sue Bargeloh</b> , Echo and the Woman.....	19
<b>Candace Kubinec</b> ,		<b>Barbara Purbaugh</b> ,	
The Place Where Egrets Danced.....	5	When Death Came Calling.....	20-21
Gossip .....	5	<b>Nicole Bradley</b> , Thoughts of a Friend.....	21
<b>Christine Aikens-Wolfe</b> ,		<b>Paul Turtzer</b> , Private Religion.....	21
My Egg Boiler and Me,		<b>Joe Lesko</b> , The Image ( <i>art</i> ).....	22
the Irish Washer Woman .....	6	<b>Carolyn Holland</b> , The Image.....	22-23
The Tenth of May.....	6	<b>Louisa Fordyce</b> , Stiller Country .....	23
<b>Jim Busch</b> ,		<b>Marge Burke</b> ,	
Buying for the Dying .....	7	Entertainment in Disguise.....	24-25
God of the Moment.....	7	<b>Janet Sady</b> , The Lady.....	25-26
<b>Ruth Richardson</b> ,		<b>Nancy Clark</b> , In Search of... ..	26
Shades of Summer 1961 .....	8-9	<b>Rod Cross</b> ,	
<b>Hilary Hauck</b> ,		East of the Melting Twilight .....	27-28
Last Word.....	10-11	<b>Hilary Hauck</b> , Revolution .....	28
Ravioli Rosie.....	11	<b>Paul Turtzer</b> , Ligonier.....	28
<b>Janice Seigle</b> ,		<b>Carolyn Cecil</b> , Crowded House.....	28
A Daughter's Visit.....	11	<b>Karen Malena</b> , A Visit to My Past.....	29-30
<b>Jessica Way</b> ,		<b>Walt Peterson</b> ,	
Sugar Rush.....	12	Obtain a Medium-Size Opossum.....	30
Resilience.....	12	Last Ride .....	30
<b>Sally Witt</b> ,		Followin' Jesus Through the Eye of the Storm ...	31
Demolition of a Steel Products Mill,		LVW Info .....	32
Ambridge, Winter 2021 .....	12	Author and Artist Bios .....	32
<b>Mary D'Angelo</b> , The Ewe Lamb.....	13-14	<b>Tamara DiBartola</b> ,	
<b>Alicia Stankey</b> , Milkweed to the Rescue.....	14	Rose-Breasted Grosbeak in Tree ( <i>art</i> ) .....	IBC
Monarch Caterpillar ( <i>art</i> ).....	15	<b>Gerri Grandpre</b> ,	
Monarch Butterfly ( <i>art</i> ) .....	15	Morning Has Broken ( <i>art</i> ).....	OBC
<b>Carolyn Holland</b> ,			
Sunset ( <i>art</i> ).....	16		
Feathery Flowers ( <i>art</i> ).....	16		

**Ligonier Valley Writers presents the  
2021 edition of its literary magazine,  
*The Loyalhanna Review.***

## From the Editor

We're back! Ligonier Valley Writers was founded 31 years ago. Because of Covid, the *Loyalhanna Review* is marking only 30 years of publication. Still quite an accomplishment. Thanks to all of our members and supporters who have patiently stuck by Ligonier Valley Writers throughout the pandemic shutdown. No meetings, no workshops, no fundraisers, but many of you donated anyway. Thank goodness, and thank you!

All authors and artists who had submitted work for the canceled 2020 issue were invited to resubmit for this year. As a result, we received more stories, memoirs, poems, and art photos in 2021 than in any previous year. The arts are alive and well in the Laurel Valley and beyond. Enjoy!

*Ruth McDonald, Editor-in-Chief*

---

## Special Thanks to All Our 2020 and 2021 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

Christine Aikens-Wolfe	Jack Harris	Joe Potts
Susan Bargeloh	Hilary Hauck	Susan Potts
Paul Brittain	Michael Hayduk	Barbara Purbaugh
Marge Burke	Hempfield Church of Christ	Barry and Therese Santavy
Jim and Glenda Busch	Michele Jones at AIW Communications	Ronald Shafer
Carolyn Cecil	Claudette Kane	Sally Shirey
Nancy and Tom Clark	Candace Kubinec	Helen Sitler
Craftique Collections	Gretchen Landis	Alicia Stankay
Marjorie DeAngelis	Mary Marcum	Anita Staub
Tamara DiBartola	Patrick and Bernadette McDonald	Louis and Barbara Steiner
Rebecca Dunn	Ruth McDonald	D.J. Stevenson
Tara Ewanits	Jan McLaughlin	Samantha Stewart
Sandra Finley	Mary Ann Mogus	Judith Sturges
Mary Lou Fleming	Randy Mollomo	Natalia Sturges
Foothills Writers Group	Keith Neill	Vicki Thomas
Louisa and Ronald Fordyce	Walt Peterson	Paul Turtzer
Tara Fritz	Mike Podgor	Sr. Sally Witt

These gifts were received as of June 30, 2021. Thank you for your generosity.

---

## Art Credits

Front Cover: **Yellow Daisies** © by Carolyn Holland (See Carolyn's bio on p. 23.)

Inside Front Cover: **Linn Run** © by Alicia Stankay (See Alicia's bio on p. 30.)

Inside Back Cover: **Rose Breasted-Grosbeak in Tree** © by Tamara DiBartola (See Tamara's bio on p. 30.)

Back Cover: **Morning Has Broken** © by Gerri Granpre (See Gerri's bio on p. 30.)

# The Incredible Shrinking Human Brain

© by Joe Potts

My phone recently blared a news alert that the human brain is shrinking. Being a modern American, I was offended. Was this rude news source insinuating something foul by directing the alert at me? I decided to give them the benefit of the doubt, as it's possible they sent it to other people as well.

I might not have looked at the story at all if they hadn't called it "breaking news." A recent survey, conducted in my head, revealed that the news media labels about 60% of stories "breaking." Today's news-hawkers are like the boy who cried wolf, except they cry, "Breaking news."

Still, who can resist? The alert promised to reveal that my brain is smaller than a caveman's, which I must admit is fascinating stuff. I also thought any news item that's been waiting a hundred thousand years to break deserves to see the light of day.

You can understand why I decided to go to all the bother of trying to read the story. Like most Americans, I usually get my information from headlines and hearsay. As an aside, or detour, or plunge down the rabbit hole—pick whichever you like—I'll point out that people today are much more clever than I ever was.

Had I realized that learning via headlines was an option, I would have read only the titles of my college textbooks. I could have completed my degree in a fraction of the time. That is, if there are still fractions. Does modern math allow fractions? At least a fraction of the time? No matter, it's too late. I already wasted all that time reading those books.

Besides, we all know that in a few years, we'll see an article that says, "Whoa! Remember when we said the human brain is shrinking? Boy, is the joke on you! We meant expanding."

Nevertheless, I knuckled down and scanned the first paragraph. (I believe that's the first time I've used "nevertheless" in my musings. Do you love it? It's three! Three! Three words in one!)

Okay, we've sufficiently meandered and gotten lost down that bunny burrow, so let's continue with the main point. Does anyone remember what it was? No? I'll just make up a new one, then. That's so 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Evidently some people did some science and discovered that Neanderthal brains were bigger than the modern human brain. Or maybe it was Cro-Magnon brains. Well, in science, the details are unimportant. The gist of the article was our brains are getting smaller.

Doesn't surprise me. Mine's been dwindling for

years. The other day I said to my wife, "Does this hat make my brain look small?"

She replied, "Yes, it does, which makes you look chic and trendy." She always knows just what to say.

Besides, this is the age of miniaturization. Computers have been shrinking for years, so it seems to me that brains should be shrinking as well. I arrived at this conclusion by something called "critical thinking," which is profoundly lacking in today's world.

The article didn't say how skilled Neanderthals were at critical thinking, but with those big brains, I imagine they were curing cancer in the morning and inventing calculus in the afternoon.

Truth be told, I believe the human brain has outlived its usefulness. Nature experiments with all sorts of survival mechanisms: speed, teeth, claws, stealth. Come to think, that sounds a lot like my cat, whose survival skills surpass mine.

I believe Ma Nature has concluded that human intelligence is an experiment that has gone horribly awry. (Even if I didn't believe this, I might have said it, as it gave me the opportunity to toss in one of my favorite words, awry. For years I thought it was pronounced "R-ree." I still think that sounds better. Feel free to go ahead and say it that way. People may look at you funny, but in my case they already do, so nothing lost.)

---

*Human intelligence is  
an experiment that has  
gone horribly awry.*

---

I have no idea what the science people expect me to do about this shrinking brain state of affairs. I have enough problems of my own. Isn't that just like them, to barge in and hail on my parade? It's not as if I can enlarge my brain.

I mean, why are people of the science variety always so negative, with their colliding asteroids and exploding stars and boiling oceans? I was taught to be positive, and if you can't say something nice, well, silence is golden.

So maybe the science types should only tell us the happy science news. The feel-good science news. The "put a smile on your face and a spring in your step" science news.

Yes, these science people could certainly learn a lot from me and my shrinking brain. ♦

**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 YouTube channel. Joe's humor blog is at [www.joepottszone.com](http://www.joepottszone.com). He lives in Unity Township with his wife, Susan.

# The Cardigan Sweater

© by Susan Potts

I gathered my cardigan sweater around me in an attempt to stay warm. It was another chilly, wet day. As I entered the double doors, the bustling mall surprised me. Maybe everyone was like me, tired of looking out at the gray, gloomy landscape, so they decided to go shopping.

I wasn't used to navigating crowds. Plus, I was tired. Not "I just finished a couple of sets of tennis" tired, or "I just finished a marathon" tired, or even "I just finished mopping the kitchen floor" tired. Yeah, like that would happen. My kitchen hadn't seen a mop in weeks.

No, I was just tired. There are days when being a middle-aged woman is just tiring. Wait. No. Being *past* a middle-aged woman is tiring.

The grandkids weren't tired; they were hopping and jostling among the crowd. We had an ice cream date with a very important person at the food court, and we didn't want to be late.

There were too many mirrors in the cosmetic section. I caught a glimpse of someone who looked vaguely familiar. My great-grandmother?

Wait—that was me. And hey! Those mirrors add ten, maybe twenty pounds, right? My shapeless cardigan seemed to emphasize those extra pounds.

The mingled smells of spice, flowers, and musk assailed my nostrils. The grandkids covered their noses by pulling up their shirt collars.

"We can't breathe, Gibby!"

"This stinks, Gibby!" Lots of giggles.

We hastened past the perfume counter.

---

## *In the mirror I caught a glimpse of my great-grandmother.*

---

The fancy-dress section at Macy's loomed ahead. I had no collar on my cardigan to cover my eyes. I tried to avert them from the sequins and the sparkling gems. And, oh! The tulle and organza! The lace! Oh, dear. I gazed hungrily at all the beautiful frocks. Prom gowns! Perfect gowns just waiting to be worn to the ball!

I couldn't stop myself. My mind went back to high school: 1969. It was spring, prom time. But for some girls, like me, there were no prom invitations. We had dreams of wearing the perfect dress. But unlike Cinderella, we had no fairy godmothers.

I wistfully watched a young lady looking through the racks of dresses. She searched and searched, looking for her perfect gown. She was so pretty, so young! I knew she wouldn't see her great-

grandmother in the mirror.

I felt sad. Was I ever that young, that pretty? No, I wasn't. And I certainly wasn't young or pretty today.

The grandkids were getting restless. They gently reminded me that it was time to move on. We were meeting Gup-up at the food court. Time for ice cream! Things to do! Places to go!

The mall's music system was blaring away. Suddenly I was hit with another blast from the past, the song "Elusive Butterfly."

It was 1966. The lyrics of that song haunted me. I was a girl of 15 who felt the pangs of loneliness in the high school atmosphere, where it seemed everyone was in love—except for me. I was convinced I was the homeliest girl in the school. Maybe I was, maybe I wasn't. But I believed it. And often what we believe, we become.

The grandkids skipped ahead of me. It was time for their ice cream treat. Where was Gup-up?

One granddaughter danced along to "Elusive Butterfly."

---

## *How could life be any more perfect than this?*

---

"Gibby, I *love* this song!" She twirled with abandon.

The song that had caused me such anguish and sorrow turned into a song filled with joy. How did the homeliest girl in school end up with the world's most beautiful grandchildren?

Off in the distance, the grandkids saw Gup-up. He was also searching the crowds. The kids walked even faster.

In my haste to keep an eye on these precious grandchildren, I quickly turned a corner and caught another glimpse of a grandmother wearing a plain cardigan sweater in the store window's reflection. No sequins. No lace. No tulle.

But all around me were dancing, twirling grandkids. And my Prince Charming was waiting for us. We were all going to enjoy ice cream. How could life be any more perfect than this? For Cinderella was wearing the *perfect* cardigan. ♦

**Susan Potts** is a retired secretary who enjoys spending time with family and friends. Her hobbies include genealogy, photography, and collecting vintage bridal photographs.

# The Place Where Egrets Danced

© by Candace Kubinec

The lake is slowly going dry  
where herons fish and turtles swim.  
No rain clouds in a clear blue sky  
to give some shade, provide a scrim.

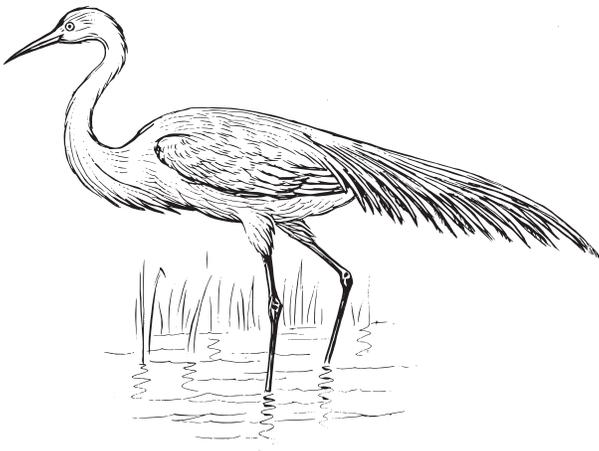
The shoreline has receded such  
that killdeer strut the dry lakebed.  
The egrets, searching, don't find much,  
must leave this place to fish instead

in other lakes, in other ponds  
with water clear. There, food is found  
among the reeds where fish are spawned.  
How I will miss their croaking sounds,

their long-legged stride, some ancient dance  
that I was privileged to view,  
their patience and their stately stance.  
The flash of white when off they flew.

The lake is starting to go dry  
filled only with the tears they cried.

— Published in Prize Poems 2020  
Pennsylvania Poetry Society, Inc.



## Gossip

© by Candace Kubinec

I hear them in the tall pine trees  
large crows that look like splats of  
black ink on the branches,

gossiping loudly among themselves  
There is no need for them to whisper,  
theirs is a language I will never understand

I wonder if they speak of murder

**Candace Kubinec** is a writer and photographer from Greensburg, PA. She is a member of the Ligonier Valley Writers, Pennsylvania Poetry Society, Westmoreland Photography Society, and Stoney Brook Camera Club.

## Mood Swings, an *Ars Poetica*

© by Nicole Fratrach

A poem is a heart,  
Scarred by the tallies of  
Pain,  
Sorrow,  
Elation,  
Inspiration.

A poem is a therapy session,  
Bleeding memories onto the page,  
Fulfilling the urge to scream in a pillow.  
Lurking in the shadows, secrets seek  
To crawl into the light  
And be carried always.

A poem is a teardrop,  
Gently remembering a heartbreak,  
Falling silently, yet profoundly.  
Always returning to express its sadness,  
Constantly craving to exorcise its grief,  
It withstands the test of time.

A poem is a single peach balloon,  
Soaring away from the crowd,  
Fleeing into the limitless blue yonder.  
Bursting with infectious excitement,  
It glides higher and higher,  
Never daring to come down.

A poem is a symphony's ballad,  
As emotions swell and blossom,  
Ears and hearts unfasten from the night.  
Crescendos flourish and life is sweet,  
Dreams float in real time,  
Never to be chained again.

**Nicole Fratrach** is a May 2021 graduate of St. Vincent College. Her short stories have been published in *The Twofer Compendium* (2019), *Mystery Weekly Magazine* (2018), and the *Johnstown Tribune-Democrat* (2016 and 2017). She has won poetry contests and has a novel in progress. Check her blog, Confessions of a Classic Soul ([www.coacs.home.blog](http://www.coacs.home.blog)).

# My Egg Boiler and Me (the Irish Washer Woman)

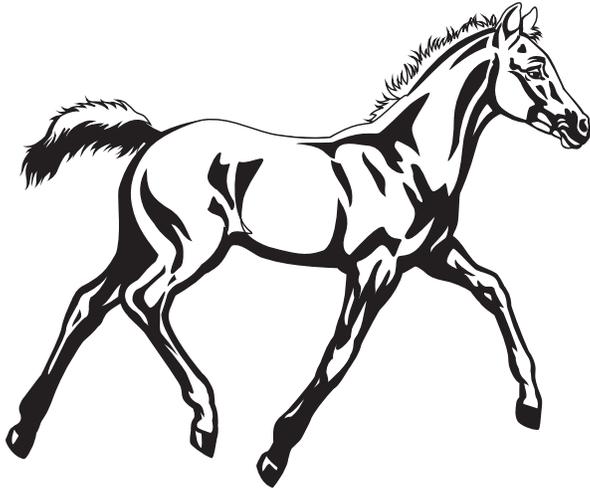
a Golden Shovel poem, after Gwendolyn Brooks

© by Christine Aikens-Wolfe

You make me chuckle, you Unique Being!  
Just the way you have of being you,  
you work at cooking, gardening, anything you  
do, you do with panache! Your cookie's cut  
from a fierce worker-bee pattern, your  
pasta pleases and your bread is poetry—  
If I were to paint your portrait from  
where I sit, your motion would be art.  
No matter that we engage in daily living. The  
Truths of Life are not made up of martyrs, boiling  
in oil while singing hymns. No, it's more of  
having patience with a partner who's just an  
effective human being, and not some Movie egg  
sitting on a wall, long legs crossed. That tale is  
tragic, ends in a fall. We're dressed in cream instead, heavy  
cream & chia seeds our oatmeal, daily chores our art.

*Note: The last words of each line add up to 2 lines  
from Gwendolyn Brooks's poem "The Egg Boiler."*

(Being you, you cut your poetry from art.  
The boiling of an egg is heavy art.)



## The Tenth of May

An anagram poem

© by Christine Aikens-Wolfe

Abraham Timmons

farmer

aye

to his bones. Each dawn, on his plot near Dartmoor heath,  
beds vegetables. Every weed pulled up  
to the nth.

Sometimes he glances toward the gorse—his yen  
to tramp into the heath.

Many a myth

told him as a child:

hoof beats, a shaggy mane,

trotting by bogs or rivers on sturdy hooves. Not  
that his farmer parents preached anything but his fate.

*Thy job is the good loam of ours, and whatever's beneath;*  
plant it, plow it, nurture the land 'til it's tame.

He spits. He wants that wild pony even today.

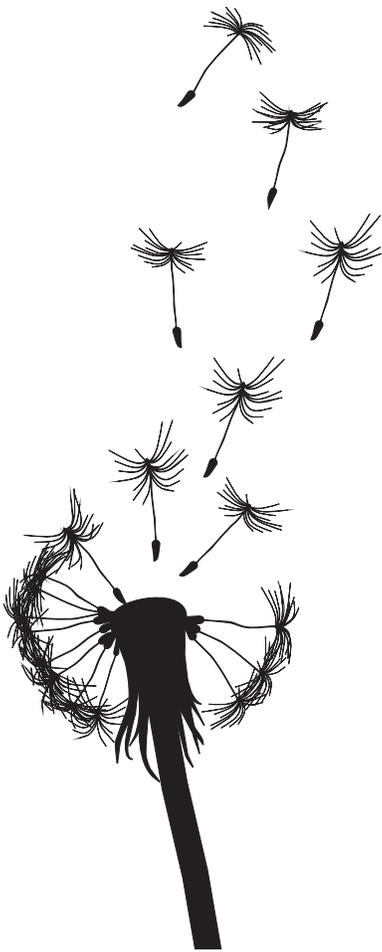
Set out a bucket of sweet oat?

Christine Aikens-Wolfe has published a poetry book, *Garlanding Green* (Dos Madres Press, 2018). Her poems appear in *Chapter & Verse*, (*Pittsburgh City Paper*), *Loyalhanna Review*, *Sonnetto Poesia*, and in anthologies: *Phoenix Rising from Ashes*, *Fission of Form*, *Love and Ensuing Madness*. She had a short story in *The Wild Hunt* (A&N Press, 2021).

# Buying for the Dying

© by *Jim Busch*

I've been buying you gifts for over 50 years now.  
I love the look on your face when you tear away the paper and ribbon.  
I recall that tight orange sweater I bought for you,  
That was as much a gift for me as it was for you!  
Once, I saved up all summer to buy you a camera  
Not the one I wanted to buy you, but the one I could afford.  
Another time I bought you a telescope  
When I really wanted to give you the stars.  
You were always hard to buy for,  
You wanted so little, always thinking of others.  
There were some standard gifts I could rely on,  
Record albums, books and tickets for shows.  
This year the doctor told us you are dying.  
There is nothing she can do to kill the cancer that is killing you.  
One unexpected side effect—cancer makes gift giving so much harder  
You are too tired to listen to music, too tired to read, and ...  
We have seen our last show together.  
You no longer would enjoy a nice dinner at one of our old favorite spots.  
I know what I want to give you, but I can't find it on Amazon.  
Does anyone know where I can find a store that sells precious time?



## Prayer to the God of the Moment

© by *Jim Busch*

Most transitory one, I praise thee and your ephemeral angels.  
Thank you for momentary joys, for brilliant red orange sunsets.  
For grey-headed dandelions ...  
For a lover's embrace when parting.  
Let the patient sing of eternity, let them sing of golden streets,  
White wings, and harp concertos.  
Deferred gratification is not for me.  
In my experience of the everlasting, nothing ever lasts.  
The world is as unchanging as clouds on a windy summer day.  
Mountains wear away and stars die.  
Everything moves on, takes on a new form,  
Breaks down into sub-atomic puzzle pieces.  
Redwoods melt into the forest floor, returning as radishes and roses.  
No, I prefer your transitory gifts, real rewards I can savor while I live.  
Sweet, "now you see them ... now you don't" pleasures  
That make life worthwhile.  
Today the scent of hyacinth blossoms fills my nostrils and spirit,  
Tomorrow that delicious aroma will drift away on the breeze.  
My faith in you tells me not to mourn the loss of today's transitory blessings,  
But rather to savor them while they last.  
My faith in you tells me that more good things will come my way,  
Until they do not.  
You teach me to enjoy each marvelous moment, each sacred second  
Knowing that someday,  
I will be no more.  
The one certain thing written in your scriptures.

**Jim Busch**, a freelance writer and journalist, writes a monthly magazine column and contributes to several newspapers. Jim has been published in the *Loyalhanna Review* and is a frequent contributor to the McKeesport Community Newsroom's *Corona Diaries*. He lives in White Oak with his wife and proofreader, Glenda.

# Shades of Summer 1961

© by Ruth Richardson



Summertime memories of my childhood swirl in my head like slow-motion, pastel watercolors. My mother is there, young and beautiful, cutting a bouquet from one of her flower gardens. She is smiling and teaching me the names of all the flowers.

Daddy is in the cellar letting me help bottle his homemade root beer that always had a slight taste of yeast. My brother and I paint our faces like Indians with elderberries we picked in the woods behind our house. There are huge weeping willow trees to climb and sassafras twigs to chew.

My summers were filled with the cliches that poets write about. We really did spend those long, hot days watching the clouds drift by and rolling down the grassy hill in our backyard. With our friends, we'd make tents out of old bedspreads thrown over the clothesline and have secret meetings in our clubhouse under Grandma Stewart's back porch.

We went blackberry and huckleberry picking with buckets Daddy had fashioned from coffee cans. He added handles made from his roll of plumbing solder. Afterward Mom baked us little pies with the berries we managed not to eat.

The main attraction was the brand-new Derry Community Pool. I remember the first time I went by myself to buy my pool pass. Mom and I went "over street" to pay her milk bill at Bergman's, and she gave me the money to run down and get my pass.

Bergman's office was in the front of their big white colonial house on South Chestnut Street. The next house was Dr. Blair's office, then Fidelity Deposit Bank (or as my mom called it, the upper bank). Brookline Savings and Loan was the lower bank on the street.

I crossed the street and ran past Fisher's Furniture, Battaglia's Produce Market, and the rest of the stores to the end of the block, where I dashed up the few steps and into P & G shoe store (right before the post office).

P & G stood for Pat and Gene, the Petraracas, and they had agreed to sell passes for the pool that summer. The price was \$7, and I was very happy to hand over all that money. Carrying that much cash made me afraid I would be robbed.

Some summers our pass was made of fabric, and we sewed it right onto our bathing suit. Next to it we put our little green Heinz pickle pin, proof that we could swim the length of the pool. It meant the

lifeguards would allow us to go off the two diving boards into the 11-foot depths. I have no idea why they chose a pickle pin, but it was the "must have" accessory at the pool.

Another summer highlight was bike rides to Bergman's Dairy Farm for ice cream. Sandy Ankney, Kathy Maus, and I would meet Cherie Roadman at West Derry School and cruise down Second Avenue to pick up Reenie Cramer and Charlene Chamberlain by the old Round House.

From there we would continue up Second Avenue to Second Ward School, where Judy Sylvester was waiting. We would all head out of town by way of First Avenue extension.

We took the back roads because we weren't allowed to ride on the highway. That long drop through Peach Hollow was quite a ride. I never got enough nerve to let my bike coast the whole way to the bottom. I always had to brake halfway down the hill because I was going so fast. How my brakes would squeal!

I was a little gun-shy of that much speed ever since I took a bad spill while flying down First Avenue in West Derry one afternoon. I turned left onto Ruby Street, but my bike kept going down First Avenue. I still have the ashes under the skin on my right knee, and they remind me of that summer every time I look at them.

After my six speed-demon friends waited for me to catch up, we resumed travel through Millwood. We sometimes saw Mr. and Mrs. Deglau at their house. He was a photographer. If you ever attended any Derry school, he took your picture. She was an art and music teacher. They were a wonderful couple.

We were all neighbors, and friends, back then, and almost everyone had relatives scattered throughout town. Someone was always handy if you needed a favor, or (unfortunately) to tell your mom on you if you were doing something you shouldn't be.

Onward we would ride, over the little one-lane bridge that still spans the railroad tracks and up the road to the farm. Bergman's had the best ice cream in the world. The dairy cows grazed right behind the building where the ice cream was made and sold. I always got banana. They used fresh bananas, not artificial flavorings.

On the way home we had to push those 10-ton bikes the whole way back up Peach Hollow Road. No wonder we could eat all that ice cream and stay thin. We certainly got enough exercise.

The most exciting adventure of summer was the annual street fair, usually sponsored by the firemen. It was held on Second Avenue, in front of the fire hall and Dr. Oliver's office.

You could feel the excitement crackle through

the air in the days leading up to this most anticipated week. Just about everyone's entire family went to the fair. Most of us went all four days.

The best ride was the barrel of fun. Come to think of it, that may have been the only ride for kids our age. I remember a merry-go-round and a lot of kiddie rides.

There might have been a Ferris wheel too, but the real treat was running around town at night and meeting up with your friends. We all had a little money in our pockets, and we were allowed to eat as much junk as we could afford.

My first purchase was always cotton candy. Why not start the festivities with a little jolt of pure spun sugar? This assured sticky fingers the rest of the evening, which I didn't mind a bit.

Daddy was a lifelong volunteer fireman, and we could always find him at the fire hall talking with the other dads while Mom and Aunt Margie played bingo. They called it a corn party.

I'd search out my mom under those strings of lights and proudly present her with the ugly candy dish I had won pitching pennies. She would place a handful of corn in my sticky little palm and let me play one of her bingo cards. If it was a winner, I could keep the money from that game.

That old brick street had corn scattered over it long after the carnival had packed up and traveled on to the next little town.

There was a parade through downtown and across the old bridge on Saturday morning, the last day of the fair. The stars were the Derry High School marching band and the Crusaders, Derry's Drum and Bugle Corps, led by Buzz Kestner.

Those boys were so handsome in their silver

satin shirts and gray pants with bright red stripes down the sides. The final touch was the red sashes tied around their waists. They would get a standing ovation every time they played "Wonderland by Night."

And those high-stepping Derry majorettes looked so beautiful and glamorous in their white boots with the big tassels and tall drum-major hats, complete with high fluffy feathers. The American Legion and VFW had their color guards, and lots of men proudly marched in their old uniforms.

My youth fellowship group at West Derry's EUB church made a float one year. The junior choir, of which I was a member, rode on the float and sang hymns the whole way through town and across that beautiful old bridge. For us 12-year-old singers, it was every bit as exciting at the Tournament of Roses Parade.

The brash, tinny music that was piped through that little carnival merry-go-round still echoes in my memories, whirling slowly around. The years have aged that tune into a beautiful and haunting symphony. I can once again see those precious faces, sweet as spun sugar.

My mom is there, too, and she is laughing and holding my hand as we stroll through her garden like we have all the time in the world.

Warm, hazy summer sunshine brings a sudden smile as we tilt our heads back and let those first rays of the season warm our faces. We breathe deeply to savor the awakening scents of summer. Those long-ago summer memories linger in our souls, and even in the coldest days of winter, they will forever warm our hearts. ♦

**Ruth Richardson** wrote regularly for the late, lamented *Laurel Mountain Post*, which originally published this essay in 2005. She says, "I guess you could call me the nostalgia columnist. I like to recall my childhood memories from Derry often."



This photo was taken at Bergman's Dairy on one of our bike rides. From left, Ruth Richardson, Cherie Roadman, Kathy Maus, Reenie Cramer, Judy Sylvester, Charlene Chamberlain, and Sandy Ankney (their maiden names). Sadly, Cherie and Judy have both passed away.

# Last Words

© by Hilary Hawk

I wonder if Dad knows Ray Bitmier is dead. It was Tommy who came to tell me. I seen him drive down the lane, get out of his car, all serious like. I could tell by the look on his face he came to say something bad, and it's Saturday so I know he's not here to talk about work.

Stay up there, Dad, in your garage with your engines and your parts. See if I care.

For the hundredth time I think the wife and me should look for another house. It's nuts renting this place from him, 'specially with him still using his garage all the time and that.

I think about telling MaryAnn about Ray, but she didn't know Ray, Dad knew Ray. Maybe he does know already and didn't come tell me.

The last time we spoke was ugly. He was yelling as usual, blaming me and my brother for getting everything wrong, even though we did the stuff exactly how he told us to. F this, F that.

I see him push the tractor out in front of the garage, start to tinker with the engine. He taught me to drive on that old thing a lifetime ago when I was still a stupid kid in awe of him. Never bothered to teach me to ride a bike like most dads, just a tractor.

Sitting behind me, his hands hovering over mine 'cause he thought I was gonna mess up. Not saying a word, breathing hard, like he was the one concentrating or something. Never told me I was doing good. I figured it out in my own time.

MaryAnn calls to say she's picking up Bobby and stopping for supper on her way home.

She's always telling me to talk to the old man, that I gotta give him another chance. A wife's gotta stick by her husband, I tell her back.

---

*Never bothered to  
teach me to ride a bike  
like most dads.*

---

Maybe her always telling me that makes me decide I'm gonna talk to him. What the hell. Just this once. Dad and Ray were friends.

Dad pretends not to hear me walk up, and then he goes and puts on his stern face. But I see I've caught him by surprise, he's not really pissed.

It feels strange after a year, talking like this without a handshake or anything physical, but I say what I come to say about poor Ray. He hasn't heard the news. He shakes his head as I tell him what I know.

*Son of a gun. So young. About my age he was.*

It's like a normal conversation, except for the bit about us not speaking for a year. We don't fill in the

blank, we don't say sorry.

*Never know when your time is up,* he says.

I stand there for a bit. Then the words just spill out of my mouth.

*You wanna come for dinner later?* Not that I want him to, 'specially when he squints at me like he always did when he was about to tell me what I got wrong.

*Got that F-150 fixed yet?*

*Forget I asked.*

*Not grown any balls yet?*

*F you,* I tell him. Not happy with myself for using his favorite phrase, but dammit, I tried.

Next day I have no work 'cept to fix that leak on my truck.

I'll have to figure something out long-term. After yesterday, I got to thinking about those days, working with my old man. I can't say I miss the insults, words slung like concrete. Nah, can't say I miss any of that, but I do miss working five days a week, six at most.

Mary Ann gets us breakfast and says Bobby could stay home with me instead of going to her mom's. I tell her it won't be any use getting called to a job if I can't get my ass to it.

I look outside first to see if Dad's up at the garage. Instead I see my brother driving down the lane. He should be at work, not here.

It looks like he has something bad to say. Maybe he's finally figured things out and walked out on Dad too. Pretty soon the old man'll have no one who'll work for him.

I meet him in the doorway. I'm still holding the knob. I have one foot in, one out. He starts to talk. I wonder if I'm letting any flies in. MaryAnn will be mad if I do.

I try to listen to what my brother is telling me, because it doesn't make sense. He's getting things mixed up. He's talking about Dad's funeral, but it's Ray who died, not Dad. Not Dad. I tell him he's got it wrong, but he says it again. Dad's gone. A bleed on the brain. Gone.

He has to come in or we have to go out, I say. MaryAnn will be mad about the flies.

He tells me he's going, he's gotta tell our sisters, and before I know it he's driving away. I don't want him to go. I don't want him to tell anyone.

Damn. Fuck. Damn.

I kick the cupboard and hope it's broke.

He can't do this. I look out at the garage. The tractor's there, Dad is not.

I go up to the bathroom where Bobby's brushing his teeth.

*Get yer boots on, you're staying with me today,* I tell him. We walk up to Dad's garage. I don't even know if Dad's body is in the house. Sure as dammit

didn't see no ambulance.

I sit Bobby in front of me on the tractor.

*Hold the wheel, son. I'm gonna teach you how to drive this thing.* I slip it into gear for him and we start to move. I can't stop myself from crying like a kid. I reckon with the noise of the engine, Bobby can't hear me. ♦

---

## Ravioli Rosie

© by Hilary Hauck

Because she used her whole self to laugh  
but just her eyes to cry,  
I thought she stored good things  
somewhere on the inside  
in a place as vital as the brain or heart,  
and that once full it could  
thrust outwards any moment,  
making her bones jiggle  
inside the cushion of her flesh,  
and I thought that as I grew, I'd start to gather  
good things of my own  
until I could laugh like that, too.

By the way she cried  
she made sorrow look easier to bear.  
I wonder if things would have been different  
if she'd let the crying spill  
the way she did laughter,  
instead of holding onto it all  
until it gnawed her, unseen,  
the way a hollowing trunk of a tree  
pushes out leaves and blossom and bark  
pretending all is well inside.

Now, as I look at our faces around the table  
and at her empty chair,  
it occurs to me that she wrapped  
a bit of herself in each ravioli she made  
like a pillow of her heart,  
that it was up to us to keep her gifts,  
and that none of us  
has done it that well.

**Hilary Hauck** is an Italian-speaking Brit living in Pennsylvania, where she found inspiration for her debut historical novel, *From Ashes to Song*. Her stories and poetry are often inspired by true stories of extraordinary, ordinary people. Follow her at [www.hilaryhauck.com](http://www.hilaryhauck.com).

## A Daughter's Visit

© by Janice Seigle

She came for the weekend;  
She brought a bouquet.  
No less lovely than she is, with her bright smile.

Just picked from her garden,  
Satin trumpets of lilies, cone flowers' dark domes;  
Dahlias, zinnias, roses, riotous in hue.

She knows my love in the garden outpoured,  
And hers is too.  
That love binds us tighter as that love is shared.

The trumpets collapse, the pale roses brown.  
Clear water turns cloudy and spent petals fall;  
They whisper of glory and the joy of her stay.

They've faded like taillights winding away from  
the house.  
But memories remain;  
Fresh as flowers in bloom.

**Janice Seigle**, a Western Pennsylvania native and writer, resides simply on a quiet trout stream with hopes of reaching readers with a bent for meaningful living.

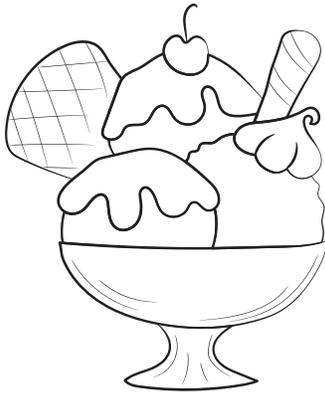


# Sugar Rush

© by Jessica Way

To feel the sweetness dissolve on my tongue,  
The temporary dissolution of myself  
As the sugar punches my back teeth.  
I want it all at once  
But it dissolves.

My fork becomes the weapon  
I use against myself  
Because I am too afraid of a knife.  
The cake becomes electricity  
Tingling in my mouth  
Surging to the tips of my fingers  
Bringing tears to my eyes.  
I want it all  
To fill me up forever  
But it dissolves.



# Resilience

© by Jessica Way

Under the searchlight scrutiny  
Of other eyes  
I tremble, fall.  
Like leaves from a dying tree  
I am trampled underfoot, unseen.  
How convenient for others I break so easily.  
But within is a seed, planted by the trampling  
Watered by the storm  
That blooms a stalk of steel, flowers of blades.

Jessica Way holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. She is an avid reader, particularly of science fiction and fantasy books. She currently resides in central Pennsylvania.

# Demolition of a Steel Products Mill in Ambridge, Winter 2021

© by Sally Witt

How long has it been  
since sun has touched this ground  
where a steel mill stood for decades?

Months ago, a fire halted all production.  
Now an excavator arm  
claws the brick and metal structure.

Beams weaken, fall—  
sun squeezes in where machines and chemicals once reigned,  
where workers walked in heavy gear.

How many decades ago  
did this land last see a spot of sun?  
Does the ground remember  
when a rush of wind  
last brushed its surface?

I pray that soon the neighbors  
will see more sky;  
that land made foul by constant productivity  
may feel the sun's caress this very day;

that all of us  
may find release from walls and roofs  
demanding unrelenting usefulness,  
that with the land beneath this falling building  
we may welcome wind's rush and sun's embrace  
on all we have ignored  
long decades deep within ourselves.

Sally Witt, CSJ, is a Sister of St. Joseph of Baden, PA. In the past year, her poems have appeared in *U.S. Catholic*, *Spirituality*, *Bearings Online*, and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. She lives in Ambridge and writes history and poetry.

*“There can be no purpose more inspiring than to begin the age of restoration, reweaving the wondrous diversity of life that still surrounds us.”*

—E. O. Wilson

# The Ewe Lamb

© by Mary D'Angelo

Anita Barbara Louise was born during a paralyzingly cold nineteen-inch snowfall on New Year's Day, 1918. The needle on the merchant's hanging scale in the pantry, usually reserved for flour or sugar, registered her weight just a twitch north of two pounds.

She was a stunning surprise to her parents and seven older siblings. Unprepared, the family focused on the pride of Mother's kitchen, a wood-burning stove. Her sisters sat watch around the clock, keeping her swaddled and warm in a roasting pan balanced on the oven door's black tongue.

Their mother called the mewling newcomer her ewe lamb.

The influenza pandemic passed. World War I staggered to an end. The Roaring Twenties brashly sassed convention. The baby grew.

At five she had brown hair as straight as rainwater falling from the eaves of the big farmhouse her father hand-built. Her eyes were large and deep blue-gray, luminous with the soft curiosity of a fawn.

She had unlimited freedom to use her legs, skinny as beanpoles with crabapple knees, to climb in the orchards, rob the strawberry beds, or patiently scratch arrowheads from the red soil.

She took pride in keeping only the best spear heads. The rest became trading chips that kept her in stubs of chalk and ribbon scraps or provided the means to acquire an essential aggie marble.

Anita-Barbara-Louise had long been contracted into "Abel" by big brother Jonathan. Their private language was composed of abbreviations and fanciful fabricated words. She held onto the name even after an older sister teased that her fate might mirror the relevant Bible passage.

The world she inhabited was called Wildwood. And it was. Johnny, her adoring protector and confidant, was only three years her senior. He held the permanent responsibility of keeping her away from trouble.

She knew her Eden held serpents. All outings to pick the wild blackberries were preceded by stern admonitions of vigilance: "It's fine to come home smeared with berry juice, but not blood!"

The way to the patch was uphill through long, wild grasses. It was a slippery, steep, hot walk that promised root-cellar shelves full of glistening jars of put-up fruit and the prospect of warm pie for supper tonight!

The taste of sunshine the berries held would make a meal on a grey winter evening.

Each sibling carried a dented but clean empty bucket. The competition was always fierce. Who would bring home the fullest bucket? The biggest, sweetest berries? Constant sampling along the way

was necessary.

The patch had sprawled its thorny arms farther afield since last year. In order to pick the most heavily laden canes with the least damage to their hands and arms, they flopped down in the sunshine to consider strategy.

Abel grew bored scanning the clouds while Johnny wasted time "considering." He was just catchin' his breath!

She grabbed her bucket and eased, just a bit, into the bramble, ignoring the time-honored precautions of stamping her feet, waving a stout stick under the bushes, and clanking the buckets together.

As she reached in for the first taste, she felt a sharp piercing pain where her socks chronically drooped. She froze in place, terrified and ashamed of violating the cardinal rules. No words were necessary.

---

## *She knew her Eden held serpents.*

---

Johnny lifted her like a twig and began running and sliding down the hill toward home. "Abel, it's okay to cry. You didn't do nothin'! It's on me!"

No words were needed to communicate the threat. In silence, she clung to him like sin all the way home. He ran steadily, reassuring her over and over that it would be okay.

He had seen the glinting, metallic copperhead. A big one, not a hatchling. Good news. Young copperheads had not yet learned to ration their venom like their granddaddies could.

Johnny raced for the kitchen door, screaming, "Mother!"

She knew some native medicine. She would know what to do. She had seen them running hell-bent through the pasture and guessed what had happened. She rapidly swept the kitchen table clear. Johnny released Abel and collapsed in ragged sobs.

Older brother Paul was working in the toolshed when the commotion occurred. He bridled the horse and raced bareback to get the doctor. The family collected in horrified silence.

As their mother swiftly cut the poison out, she prayed, "Lord, she's such a little thing. Please let me keep her!"

By the time the doctor arrived in his splendid Ford, Abel's leg was swollen. An ugly dark bruise had spread almost to her hip.

Doc shook his head helplessly as he examined her. He correctly predicted a coma would follow. "If she survives that, she may keep the leg."

Eventually most of her body swelled. A numb, joyless period of worry and exhaustion held the family

ransom.

There were no recriminations. Their family had lost four children in infancy long before she was born. They knew the tenderness of young life and had endured the caprice of sudden loss.

Then, so very slowly, Abel began to return to them. The white scar, so finely stitched by her mother's hand, would remain forever.

I know. As a child I traced it with my finger on my own mother's leg.

The Great Depression passed. World War II ended and in came an era of hope.

Granddad needed us. We city slickers moved into

the little house he had built for himself across the road from the big house.

Equipped with snow boots in summer, my siblings and I picked berries on that same hill. We never left the house without a warning: "It's fine to come home smeared with berry juice, but not blood!" ♦

**Mary D'Angelo** has published humor articles in the *Tribune-Review*, craft how-tos in *Family Circle* magazine and other national publications, and consumer protection columns in the *Contra Costa Times*. She lives in Carnegie, PA, with her husband, Bob. She is a certified Zentangle teacher and artist.

## Milkweed to the Rescue!

© by Alicia Stankay

It all started because my friend Marjorie had a milkweed plant in her yard that was too small. Since it hadn't grown much, she had despaired of having any monarch butterflies lay eggs on it.

In early August she called me in a panic. She had noticed a few eggs on a leaf one day, but suddenly she had two caterpillars and then one more. One tiny milkweed plant would never fill the bellies of three hungry caterpillars.

My milkweed plant had served as a nursery for multiple caterpillars, but they had already stripped it bare and made the metamorphosis to butterflies. My milkweed was regenerating leaves, but too slowly to be of any help to Marjorie.

Fortunately, my husband and I remembered seeing a group of milkweed plants the year before in a local park where we sometimes walked. So we set off to find the elusive milkweed and do our part to increase the population of endangered monarch butterflies.

We drove to the park and left the car in a shady spot. Since we couldn't recall the exact location of the milkweed, it took time to search the plants along the roadway that circled around the picnic area. We perused dogbane, wild grapevines, and goldenrod, but no milkweed.

Just when we were about to lose hope, we spotted the telltale large milkweed seedpods. Filled with elation, I took several photos, including a grouping of seedpods and a caterpillar munching a hole in a leaf.

The park was surprisingly empty that afternoon, so we decided to implement our plan. It was a matter of life or death to cut down a stalk of milkweed and smuggle it to Marjorie's house.

We walked back to the car, where we luckily had a water bottle half filled with water. After we drove back to the milkweed location, my husband jumped out and used his handy Swiss army knife to cut off a stalk, making sure he chose one without caterpillars or eggs.

We stuffed the bottom of the plant into the water bottle, and I rested the bottle on the floor while I kept the plant from falling over. Then we slowly drove back through the park and onto the main road. We continued sedately on toward Marjorie's starving caterpillars.

Suddenly my husband exclaimed, "There's a police car behind us!"

We looked at each other and then at the milkweed between us. "We're fine," I said. "Just drive carefully and don't go over the speed limit."

Up ahead we saw a man holding up a stop sign. For a few heart-pounding seconds we thought it was a roadblock for us milkweed thieves. Then we realized it was a one-lane section of the road under construction.

Acting nonchalant, we surreptitiously checked the police car in the rearview mirrors. What would we do if the officer confronted us about taking the plant from city property?

"Why, yes, officer, we were taking a walk in the park." We'd nod solemnly.

When he pointed to the milkweed plant in the front seat, we'd look down in surprise. "That's not ours! We have no idea how that got into our car."

When he carted us off to jail, all our hard work would be for naught. The poor innocent caterpillars would be left to starve, and nature would have three fewer monarch butterflies to carry on the species.

But all was well. After we were allowed to drive through the construction area, the police car pulled off onto a side road.

We continued to Marjorie's house and delivered the milkweed plant to the hungry caterpillars. Sadly, they didn't even wriggle their tails in thanks.

Marjorie was left to offer her thanks. Then she asked if we'd be willing to procure another milkweed. ♦

(See Alicia's bio on p. 32.)



**Monarch Caterpillar** © by Alicia Stankay (bio on p. 32)



**Monarch Butterfly** © by Alicia Stankay (bio on p. 32)



**Sunset** © by Carolyn Holland (bio on p. 23)



**Feathery Flowers** © by Carolyn Holland (bio on p. 23)



**Preying Peek** © by Tamara DiBartola (bio on p. 32)



**High Feast** © by Gerrie Grandpre (bio on p. 32)



**Montauk Daisy with Honeybee** © by Louisa Fordyce (bio on p. 23)

*“The earth is so richly endowed that the least we can do in return is to pay attention.”*

—Robin Wall Kimmerer,  
*Braiding Sweetgrass*



**Watch Dogs** © by Carolyn Holland (bio on p. 23)



**Juvenile Cardinal** © by Janet Sady (bio on p. 26)



**Azalea Beauty** © by Janet Sady (bio on p. 26)

# Echo and the Woman

© by Susan Bargeloh

I took the border collie and the Aussie to the greenway again this morning to walk through the damp grass and scraped earth that mark the trail along the creek.

Birdsong and moving water don't quite muffle the sound of traffic, but the tired weeds and shaggy trees in this slim urban oasis are thick enough to hide the sight, at least, of cars. And the dogs are free to sniff without leashes.

We walked happily alone, until we rounded a bend and came across Echo and the woman.

The woman, wrapped in introspection, sat on a log overlooking the creek. Echo lay in the grass busily gathering sunshine into her faded coat. She did not get to her feet as we approached, but she smiled and wagged her tail.

---

## *I was reaching into a halo of sunshine and light.*

---

The woman also smiled once she noticed us. We were, after all, somewhat familiar, having met once or twice before on the trail. We had already exchanged the only important information between us—the names of our dogs.

"Beautiful weather," the woman responded to my greeting.

Together we watched a jaundiced leaf float through the late-summer air to the ground. After a brief sniff with Echo, my girls wandered into the bushes. Echo continued to gather sunshine.

"Yes," I ventured to respond, "although I've noticed some early signs of fall in the gathering flocks of birds and the softer sounds of insects."

The woman turned on the log to face me. "You have more insight than most." Echo looked up from her gathering and smiled again.

I shrugged, embarrassed, and scanned for the dogs, the woman mistook the movement of my eyes.

"Don't read into my morning drink, now." She laughed, pointing to a beer can near her feet that I had not noticed. "I work third shift, so this is my after-work cocktail."

"Makes sense," I managed, wondering how best to move on.

"I have this rash." The woman continued talking, though I blinked in confusion. "I've actually missed work the past few days because they think I might be contagious."

She considered a tall weed next to her log. "I may have been bitten by a tick a while back, so maybe I have Lyme's disease."

I wondered why she shared these things and why she thought I might care.

I wondered where my dogs were.

I wondered, uneasily, how to escape.

But the sun-wreathed dog on the grass looked at the woman with love, so I tried again. "I had Lyme disease once," I said. "The tick bite often leaves a circular rash that can spread. I got pretty sick—flu-like symptoms, you know—but I wasn't contagious."

She was ecstatic. "I knew it! I thought it could be something like that!" Her face shone with relief.

Who knew that having a tick-born illness could make someone happy?

"You should probably see a doctor." I offered hesitantly. "The symptoms might disappear, but the illness won't go away without treatment."

Echo's woman disagreed. "Oh, I think I'll wait a few days, now that I'm certain of what it is. I've been feeling sick, and I'm always cold, and it's hard, lately, to really eat a meal, but that sounds like flu. The rash runs along my cancer surgery scars."

She shrugged happily. "But I know it's Lyme's disease."

Echo paused once more in her sun-gathering and looked at me. Then she licked the woman's hand.

"I've had cancer three times in my life and beaten it every time. I can beat this." Echo's woman took a defiant sip of beer.

I leaned over and put my hand on Echo's warm, soft fur. It seemed to me that I was reaching into a halo of sunshine and light.

Then I got a sudden chill. I remembered a friend of mine who told me about the rash she was dealing with as part of her Stage 4 breast cancer. She had the rash until she died.

"You really should see a doctor," I said.

"Oh, I will, I'm sure, at some point."

We were silent for a moment, listening to the gurgle of water, the faint roar of traffic, and Echo's sigh as she repositioned herself to press closely against her woman's leg.

"Thank you for having this conversation," the woman said.

"I'm glad to talk with you." I awkwardly swallowed my grief. I was saved from further words when my dogs pushed back through the bushes. "We'd better be going now."

I could offer nothing more.

The woman smiled. "I probably won't be here when you come back this way. Have a wonderful walk." She turned back on the log to face the creek.

I nodded to Echo, resting in her halo, about to take sunshine and warmth home for her woman. I walked away slowly, with the dogs ahead of me, careful not to stumble on the uneven trail, hard to see through my tears. ♦

(See Sue's bio on p. 32.)

# When Death Came Calling

© by Barbara Purbaugh

It was yesterday—no, it was the day before yesterday when death came calling for the first time. Ina was standing on her front porch, clutching her big black purse with her Social Security money inside an envelope safely wrapped with a rubber band, when death first appeared.

---

*Death peeked out from behind the apple tree and waved at Ina.*

---

Death peeked out from behind the apple tree and waved at Ina. Like a darn fool, she waved back. Death danced around the apple tree until Ina's great-grandson, the ugly one with the fuzzy hair, showed up. When the great-grandson stepped from his car, death disappeared.

It wasn't that Ina was surprised to see death. After all, she was ninety-three years old. She had lived through two world wars and several conflicts, the flood of '36, and the one in '64. She had buried two of her eight children: one in '81 from cancer and the other, Little Georgie, only two years old, with long blond curls and bright blue eyes.

There was no explanation for his death. No time for mourning it either. There were seven other kids to raise. Somewhere in a dusty photo album, she had preserved a single golden curl.

Two years after Georgie's death, Ina's husband, Ralph, died. There was no time for mourning then either. Ina had a farm to tend to with cows to be milked, hogs to be butchered, horses to be watered, and eggs to be collected. She had a garden to be tilled; tomatoes, corn, pumpkins, and zucchini to be planted.

Up until ten years ago, Ina had always had a beautiful garden.

Then old age finally caught up with her. It walked into her life hand in hand with crankiness. Together, they skipped into her head. They made her hands shake, her knees wobbly, and her tongue sharp.

"Nana's grouchy again," the children said. Ina's house used to be a hive of activity filled with generations of children.

Now hardly anyone came around except Ina's third daughter, Mildred. She stopped by once a week to say hi, check Ina's pulse, and estimate the net worth of her estate.

"Mother, how old are these dishes?" she would ask. "Mother, where did you put that old sewing machine?"

Ina swore that when death came for her, she'd light a match and burn it all before Mildred got her

hands on it. Now, with death's visit, Ina might get the chance sooner than she'd thought.

It wasn't that Ina minded dying. She just minded her family waiting for her to die. Once a year they dragged Ina out to a family reunion, where they stared at her like she was a museum piece, poked her flesh to check for decay, and shouted at her like she was deaf.

The only one who treated her with respect was the ugly great-grandson with the fuzzy hair. Once a week, if not more, he came to visit her. When he took her to the grocery store, he let her take as much time as she needed. At the doctor's office, he'd sit and talk to her, not leave her alone to run errands like the rest of them did.

Ina had 30 great-granddaughters. She never remembered their names. She just called them by their physical appearance and personality traits: the short, fat blonde with the loud laugh, or the tall redhead with the gap between her teeth.

Ina had four great-grandsons: the ugly one with the fuzzy hair, the tall one with Ralph's nose, the snobby one, and Ina's favorite one, Sammy.

Sammy was handsome, with dark hair and blue eyes. Ina thought he could've been a movie star. She hadn't seen him in several years. She thought he was probably off chasing women and getting into trouble.

---

*Ina had 30 great-granddaughters. She never remembered their names.*

---

It was late at night when death visited Ina again. She was sitting in her big stuffed chair, the one the ugly great-grandson had given her for her ninetieth birthday. Death entered the room. He twirled merrily around her head, laughing with a little elf giggle. Then he was gone.

Ina was scared. There had been few times in her life when she was scared: once when one of her kids swallowed a handful of pennies, the night her house burned down in '46, every night while her first son was away in World War II, and for the entire first year after her husband died.

It was 2:00 a.m. Ina thought for a moment, then called the great-grandson with the fuzzy hair. She didn't want to seem foolish, so she told him she was just feeling a little sick.

He came over right away. His fuzzy hair stood straight up on one side and was flat on the other. He sat with Ina, talking to her, listening to her. He told her about his kids, about the night his wife left him, about the time he wrecked his car.

Ina told him about Little Georgie, the night the house burned down, how Ralph loved to play practical jokes, and how she thought Sammy was so handsome he could be a movie star.

When she talked about Sammy, the ugly great-grandson got quiet and stared at his hands. A pained look crossed his face, like someone had hit him. And Ina knew why Sammy never came to see her anymore.

“How long ago?” she asked.

“Three years.”

“How?”

“A motorcycle accident.”

“Why didn’t anyone tell me?”

“He was your favorite, like Little Georgie.”

The ugly great-grandson sat down on the footstool in front of Ina.

“Everyone thought it was better not to tell you. I didn’t agree. They thought it would hurt you too much. I loved my brother, and I miss him every day.”

Ina stared at him. His head was bent. His fuzzy hair glowed in the light from the lamp. She reached out slowly to touch him, but he stood up without looking at her.

“Nana, haven’t you ever wondered why I spend so much time with you? Because you still talk about him. You loved him as much as I did.”

Ina sent him for the photo album, the one with the golden curl.

“Keep this, Henry. It’s yours,” she said. “But don’t let Mildred know you have it.”

Henry smiled. Death waved at Ina from outside the window.

At 5:00 a.m., Henry stood in the doorway, ready to go home. Ina squeezed his hand. He kissed her cheek and promised to come back at noon to take her to lunch.

At 1:00 Ina was standing on her front porch waiting when death appeared again. He wore a top hat and sat in the apple tree.

Ina waved him over, wanting it to be done, but death shook his head, tipped his hat to reveal a tuft of fuzzy hair, and then disappeared.

Ina turned and walked back inside her house. Henry wouldn’t be coming today. ♦

**Barbara Purbaugh** lives in South Bend, Indiana. Her books *Crossties* and *Ms. P’s Guide to Going to Hell* by Babs Parker are available for purchase from Amazon and Barnes & Noble. For more information, contact her at [www.barbarapurbaugh.com](http://www.barbarapurbaugh.com).

## Thoughts of a Friend

© by Nicole Bradley

We sat on the edge of vastness.  
Our feet dancing in mid-air, our bodies  
resisting the allure of the desert scrub.  
Our eyes reach over the central plains  
of Tanzania like tiny fingers searching  
for Mother’s milk. Her swollen belly,  
Kilimanjaro, 118 kilometers ahead.

We make smoke rings with our lips  
and talk about Bob Marley. You  
tell me what it means to be  
a “City Maasai” and I tell of my childhood  
in Southwest Pennsylvania.

The sky is a great fire, melting  
The tallow of complacent living  
Rendering me unwilling to return  
to the life I knew.

**Nicole Bradley** finds restoration and inspiration in the rhythms of the natural world. She spends a lot of time exploring Linn Run and Laurel Mountain with her five children. The most amazing treasures are found in the details of nature.

## Private Religion

© by Paul Turtzer

A bum on park bench or suit in city office?  
Rather hear birds sing.  
An enigmatic soul, non-conformity befits me,  
prefer to pee outside.  
The voices are real, flowing water has language,  
the mindful converse.  
Sitting by campfire, gazed into the star-filled  
heavens,  
swear moon winked at me.  
Hiked far for wild trout, understood the commitment,  
true love has no boundaries.  
Alike or diverse, eventually we all bleed.  
Why not compassion?  
Jesus or Buddha, the message is identical,  
love is the answer.  
Heaven might be here,  
a finite number of days...content up to you.

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

# The Image

© by Carolyn Cornell Holland

During our early years, my older sister and I lived with our grandparents in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Mother lived in a Boston community across the Massachusetts state line, an hour away.

In December 1948, when I was five, Mother came to Portsmouth and packed some of our clothes, including fancy new holiday dresses stitched carefully by Grandmother. Grandfather drove us to the bus station in his new Chevrolet.

A Greyhound bus took us to the Boston bus station. From there a city bus ride completed our journey to the private home where Mother rented a room. Big Sister and I know these facts but recall only a few details.

The adventure included attending the Ice Follies. We have blurry memories of the crowd and the dizzying activity flowing all over the ice. We were enchanted by the colored lights accenting costumes worn by dancers gliding smoothly across the ice. We laughed at the garish clowns falling over each other or their props.

Yet these fuzzy images aren't my only recollection of that weekend. Another image languished in my memory for sixty years, appearing occasionally with the clarity of a brand new photograph taken with a prime lens.

The image was that of an ordinary life activity: a mother fixing a child's hair. The child was me, standing on a closed toilet seat. I was dressed in my new plaid dress with its full gathered skirt, fitted waist, and short sleeves.

Mother stood beside the throne, working my hair into braids that hung shoulder length. She likely used a ribbon, tied into a bow, to secure the braids. After all, she was dolling me up to attend an extra-special holiday event.

Still, it wasn't the hair-braiding that stood out in this image. It was her big belly pushing against me. Maybe my hand rested on it. At age five I had no idea what a big belly meant, but it must have impressed me, since it never left the cubicles of my brain.

Through the years my sister and I discussed the image. What did it mean? Why did it not fade? If our mother was pregnant, where was our sibling?

~~~~~  
Fast forward to the end of January 2012. Hyperaction on my Wordpress blog, *Carolyn's Compositions*, caught my attention. The post hits focused on my parents. (Here the posts use "Mother" and "Father" for real names.)

Forty-one hits on *In Memoriam: [Mother]*, written by my husband for Mother's funeral, roused my curiosity, since I considered it to have little general interest. Three posts written by Mother, viewed multiple times, were *My Autobiography: [Mother]*, 27



The Image © by Joe Lesko (bio on p. 32)

hits; *Decades: An Autobiographical Sketch*, five hits, and *Reflections on Motherhood*, two hits.

Two other posts viewed repeatedly were *A Father-Daughter Reunion after 30 years* and *Two Photographers: [Father] and Me*, 17 and 6 hits, respectively.

Why were there so many hits on these limited-interest posts in less than a week? My husband suggested "Perhaps someone is researching genealogy."

"No," I said. "This researcher is already familiar with the family. Only time will offer an explanation."

It didn't take long. On February 7 the following comment appeared: *Last month I requested, and received from Massachusetts, a copy of my "non-certified" pre-adoption birth record naming [Mother] as my birth mother.*

Experts direct us to delete messages starting this way. They are usually scams leading to a plea for funds. However, I ignored their advice. Instead of hitting the delete button, I read on:

*I was born December 30, 1948, at Mass. Memorial Hospital. The birth record shows [Mother] was born in Quincy, MA, and was 26 and living in Readville at the time of my birth. No father is listed.*

*Very much by accident I stumbled upon your blog while attempting to locate any information about [Mother]. It's taken some time to get off the emotional rollercoaster and muster up the courage to write this. I will be more than happy to email you a copy of this birth record, along with pictures.*

Note the birthdate. Missing Sister was born about two weeks after the ice show adventure. *She* was the big belly.

I contacted Found Sister, who immediately sent me a copy of her birth certificate and a photo. We met seven months later.

Sitting on my patio, I told Found Sister about the image in my head.

She looked at me, tears in her eyes. "Someone knew me before I was born."

~~~~~

The image stored in my mind for 60 years has become a washed-out version of the original memory, but it doesn't matter that it's faded.

It served its purpose. ♦

**Carolyn Cornell Holland**, a writographer with journalism and photography experience, facilitates the Foothills Writers group, which meets at the Coffee Bean Cafe in Latrobe. The Ligonier resident is writing a historic novel set in the 1790s and compiling a collection of cat and dog stories. (See Carolyn's photos on front cover and color insert.)

## Stiller Country, 1996

© by Louisa Fordyce

So I sez to my cousint Bobby,  
I sez to him, I sez,  
"Bobby," I sez to him,  
I'm gonna go to the far hall  
to check on their chimley  
to see if it's OK after that last storm we had.  
After that, I hafta go acrost  
the crick and go to the lie-berry  
because my car needs warshed  
and the high school kids are  
havin' a car warsh today."  
Then I sez to my cousint Bobby,  
I sez to him, I sez,  
"Bobby," I sez to him,  
"I'm buying the ol' lady a new  
colored TV for her birthday.  
I seen a nice one at Sears t'other  
day—fitty-two-inch screen  
and all kinds of crap  
like three hunnert channels  
and stuff like 'at.  
I'm goin' up air after the  
car warsh.

So then I sez to my cousin Bobby,  
I sez to him, I sez,  
"Bobby," I sez to him,  
"they're gonna deliver it just  
in time for the Super Bowl.  
The Stillers are in it this year.  
They're goin' all the way,  
I can tell. Margie has to  
get the house reddy up in time  
For are party on Sunday.

## Steelers

"The guys are comin' over and  
we're gonna have Arn City and  
chipped ham sanddiches  
and yell for Car Par. I woulda  
went for the beer earlier  
but, ya know, the cellar  
flooded again from all this  
rain we had. Boy, it sure was  
comin' down thother night."

Well, then I sez to my cousint Bobby,  
I sez to him, I sez,  
"Hey, Bobby," I sez to him,  
"would yinz like to come over  
on Sunday? I woulda ast ya  
sooner, but I bin busy—  
ya know how it is."  
And then my cousin Bobby, he sez to me he sez,  
"Geez, Mikey," he sez to me,  
"I'd like to, but my  
car's broke, and right about now,  
I think my face is froze, too.  
But mebbe next time, OK?"

And that's what life was like in Stiller Country, circa 1996.

**Louisa Fordyce** is a blissfully retired professor of English who now spends her days walking her dogs, working in her gardens, reading, knitting and crocheting, and doing way too much volunteer work. She is also married to Ron, her long-suffering partner in crime.

# Entertainment in Disguise

© by Marge Burke

These days, kids expect the adults in their life to provide entertainment and activities and, well, stuff.

They have a list: buy me this, take me there, gimme. It's an expensive and exhausting process. But that's not how *we* grew up.

We made our own fun when we hung out at home. But the best place to hang out was Grama's house in the country. We spent a lot of time playing. But we spent a lot of time helping Grama too. *That* was our entertainment!

One of the chores I remember best was working in the truck patch. I can still see Grama in her sunbonnet, hoeing around the cornstalks or pulling weeds, working hard.

I know we kids dislodged quite a few healthy veggie plants trying to be farmers. We loved working in the yard and gardens. We took a personal pride in helping to grow the side dishes placed on our family table at mealtime.

---

## *Grandma's House: the place cousins go to become best friends.*

---

We eventually advanced to snapping beans, shelling peas, pulling up beets and carrots, husking corn, and picking tomatoes. We cut the grass in the summer, raked leaves in the fall, and shoveled snow in the winter.

We washed dishes and learned hymns for singalongs and begged for a turn to pump the pedals for the player piano.

In season there were always vases to fill with flowers: zinnias, lilies, roses, hydrangeas, daisies, and more. Tending those gardens was a delight, not a duty. I dreamed of getting married in Grama's flower gardens, but they had passed out of the family long before I was ready to marry.

Another chore we helped with was laundry. We went out the kitchen door, down two sets of steps, and into the cellar, which housed the wring-er washer. This task was closely monitored, as the wringer could do horrid damage to both grandchild and garment.

We would take turns standing on a little wooden stool and watch the cakes of lye soap bob around among the clothes.

Once the laundry was fed through the wringer and squeezed almost dry, the clothes were plopped into a bushel basket with metal handles and carried out back.

A shallow stream crept almost directly under the clothesline, and our antics there occasionally resulted in the re-washing of carelessly pegged items.

It was fun just to wiggle our toes in the grassy flow, especially on warm days and after a good rain.

Occasionally we had to answer the phone, which took real skill on a party line. Two longs and a short? Two shorts? Long-short-long? An error in judgment would have us listening in to someone else's conversation, or getting the wrong person on the line.

Grama insisted on perfect quiet during the noon radio broadcasts announcing local deaths, funerals, and hospital admissions and discharges. It was our strict task to self-enforce that quiet as we tiptoed through the house, giggling.

When we could sneak away from all this backbreaking work, we begged access to Grama's old-timey swimsuits. We would quickly change and head for the creek.

Fashion statements we weren't, but time spent chasing water skippers, looking for crayfish, and damming up the creek far surpassed any of today's X-box games or iPhone apps.

At special family gatherings it was always exciting to help make the ice cream. There were no power cords; we were the power. We added the rock salt to the chopped ice in the barrel, secured the lid, and churned by hand. And churned. And churned. We took turns because it was a long, tiring process.

We were rewarded with bowls of ice cream topped with chocolate syrup or strawberries. And sometimes we could lick the paddles. *That* was a rare treat!

But back to work! It wasn't easy watching the bread or buns rise and bake, taste-testing the cookies, or sampling the cinnamon rolls, but we kids did our part to keep the inventory fresh.

It was tough playing Uncle Wiggly or Racko for hours, along with the never-ending games of Monopoly strewn across the dining room table.

It was also not easy to forge playhouses in the tall grassy field across the road, or put on plays in the old garage, or make homemade popsicles out of Kool-Aid. But we did it. Sigh. We had to keep Grama—and each other—occupied every minute of the day.

There were times when we actually did share in the entertainment: variety shows or Lawrence Welk on Saturday evening. We loved the Lennon Sisters, but our grama got starry-eyed over Glen Campbell. She often said that he could put his shoes under her bed any time.

My very young mind wondered why she would want his shoes under her bed. When I got old enough to understand, I was both embarrassed and delighted at our feisty little grandmother!

We loved spending the night and vying to see who would sleep in Grama's room and sometimes even in her bed—other than Glen, of course!

We occasionally even branched out to local

ponds, swimming with the snakes and fish and frogs, jumping off the dock to avoid the muddy, cattail-tangled banks. Across the road from my aunt's house were woods filled with trees for climbing and grapevines that were perfect for swinging on.

Grama often joined us for a hike back to Rock Springs to fill jugs with clear, fresh water. We'd go berry-picking by the maple grove, and she would tell us tales about her childhood or share ghost stories. We believed (and still remember!) them all.

In winter we would sled-ride down the hills, ice-skate on those same ponds, and build snow forts in the fields.

Yes, entertainment of the best kind was always found at Grama's house, whatever the season. We shared and helped and learned, and we were never bored there.

We formed bonds of family and friendship at Grama's house, and I venture to say that today's kids will never know those bonds. Even today, I have a framed quote in my family room: "Grandma's House—the place cousins go to become best friends." We did, and we still are.

I am forever thankful for Grama and the entertainment (disguised as hard work) that she provided, whether she realized it or not! ♦

**Marge Burke** retired from Smail Automotive last June 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 her flower gardens, volunteer work at Hanna's Town, and her five delightful grandchildren.

## The Lady

© by Janet Sady

Benjamin Sadosky spotted the lady with her lamp lifted high above the horizon. Hope filled his heart. A new beginning was about to happen for him. America! No one ever would know he had escaped from prison.

His clothes reeked of sweat and grime from having slept on the lower deck with two dozen others who couldn't afford a berth. Rats had crawled around the grain barrels and woken him in the night as they raced across his feet.

He breathed in the fresh, salty air and sighed.

So much for making an impression on his cousin Michael, who was supposed to meet him when the ship docked.

Benjamin hoped he had not brought his snooty wife Sarah with him. She had never liked Benjamin when they lived in Poland. She always avoided him at family gatherings. That was all right with him; there was no love lost there.

Benjamin smoothed his balding head and cursed the gene from his father's family that had caused thinning and baldness even in his teens. Now, only in his late twenties, he had very little hair left except on the sides.

How would he ever find a wife? Maybe through his singing and accordion playing, he could attract someone.

He strained to see the lady better, and Ellis Island. They had told him that he would need to register at Ellis.

Perhaps he should change his name. Yes. "Sady" would be better. It meant "green park" in Polish. It would be easier to write and say—and harder to track if the authorities came looking.

He doubted they would bother over the petty burglary charge for which he had been locked up.

Poland would be glad to be rid of him. He would not be a drain on their society any more.

The ship docked and he grabbed the tarp containing his accordion, his extra change of clothing, and a few miscellaneous personal items. He threw it over his shoulder and got ready to go.

Ship personnel directed the first-class passengers off the ship first. Only then were the lower-deck people permitted to disembark.

All the passengers were taken into the facility on the island for health screenings. Benjamin knew that the sick and diseased were often sent back. He felt fine and wasn't too worried about it.

Registration took all day, and many of the passengers fell asleep from exhaustion. It was finally his turn. A number of translators stood nearby, and when Benjamin said, "Polish," a man stepped forward and took his information for the registration.

That was when Benjamin Sadosky became Benjamin Michael Sady.

A smaller ship took those who had completed the requirements to the New York shore. How would he ever find his cousin? Apprehension and fear filtered into his brain. Fortunately for him, his cousin knew the procedure and was already waiting for him—without Sarah!

Benjamin breathed a huge sigh of relief. "Michael!" he shouted.

His cousin embraced him, and then stepped back and said, "Whew, you need a bath really bad. I can't take you home like this. Sarah will have a conniption. Come on, I know a place. I brought some clean clothes. Are you hungry? We can get something from one of the street vendors. They're all over the place."

He grabbed Benjamin's arm and pulled him along through the crowds. They stopped at a vendor cart

where Michael purchased four bratwurst sandwiches on buns and a greasy paper filled with potato chunks. Nothing had ever looked or smelled so good.

After eating, they found the public bath. Benjamin discarded his filthy clothes and got a hot bath and a shave. He felt like a new man.

The future was looking up. What would the next few days look like? Would he be able to find a job? How would he and Sarah get along?

He said a silent prayer that luck would smile on him and his new life—in America—the home of the lady with the lamp! ♦

**Janet R. Sady** is a much-published author, poet, storyteller, and speaker whose work appears in 12 anthologies, as well as newspapers and magazines. She is the author of 13 books (four of them biographies for other people). Her books are available at Amazon. Contact her at [janfran@windstream.net](mailto:janfran@windstream.net).

## In Search of ...

© by Nancy Clark

Forget “Where’s the beef?” What millions of locked-down-at-home bread bakers wanted to know in 2020 was “Where’s the yeast?”

As if we needed a culinary pandemic alongside the viral one.

Covid-19 has adversely affected life and livelihood for millions on this planet. In 2020 it also created frenzy and fear regarding accessibility to articles we heretofore



had taken for granted. Take TP (toilet paper), for example.

And *take* we did! Within hours of Stay Home orders, the only TP in sight were the bundles being loaded into shopping carts and wheeled out of the store to idling get-away vehicles.

There is the story of a man who scarfed up all the TP in a local warehouse and sold it on a streetcorner for \$10 a roll. It’s rumored that the scarfer is living the life on a South Pacific island he purchased with his privateered profits.

But I digress.

Covid had led mobs of moderns to develop PS (Pioneer Syndrome). Countless numbers of PSers were enticed into building lean-tos, churning butter, cobbling their own shoes, and baking their own bread, making the leavening agent as rare as hens’ teeth.

The woeful scarcity of yeast frustrated those with AHPS (Always Had Pioneer Spirit). With no yeast in the cupboard, we AHPS kitchen queens were forced to feed our grilled-cheese sandwich lovers bologna on crackers.

I’d have gladly traded my two coveted hen’s teeth and thrown in an unopened 24-year old bottle of Chanel #4 (a smidge less potent than Chanel #5) for just one three-pack strip of Red Star yeast.

Because Hubby and I are lumped into the “most vulnerable” age group, kinfolk kept our larder loaded, bless their hearts. But no one could find yeast, the #1 item on our must-have” list.

Desperation eventually forced me to lay down my crochet hook, don Covid gear and head out to the nearest supercenter in pursuit of at least one strip of yeast.

Hubs kept the engine running at the door while I wrangled my way through the masses hunting TP to put in their BRs. The first hurdle meant cutting through traffic tie-ups in the aisles where one-way arrows painted on the floor were perceived as suggestions.

No one was squeezin’ the Charmin in Paper Products because there was no Charmin. And the fellow blocking three lanes of cart traffic was a quicker picker-upper than those of us behind him.

Up ahead, a pack of Energizer bunnies broke speed barriers rounding the endcaps, most of them on track to Baking. I just had to get there before they did.

Tapping into the reserved energy powered by a breakfast of champions, I upshifted into third and flew through Cereal, ignoring the mournful snap, crackle, and pop emanating from the only box of Rice Krispies on the shelves.

Two bedraggled women dropped out of the race in the Cookies and Crackers, creating an open lane to Baking, where I was only third in line behind the local insurance agent.

His cart was already overflowing with “you can’t eat just one” chips. His good hands were reaching toward the top shelf for what appeared to be the only three-pack strip of Red Star yeast in the universe.

“Hey, wait!” I yelled, raising my voice to a pitch not unlike that of a screech owl.

But I had to broadside my cart into his to get his attention and less than a nanosecond to pitch my plea for just one of those three little packs.

No cigar. And if looks could kill, I would have dropped like a stone.

It appears we’re moving in the right direction as regards civilized shopping these days. However, inquiring minds want to know the fate of those thousands of unopened yeast packs lying dormant in the kitchen cupboards of PSers around the country.

If you—or a Pser you know—are willing to trade some yeast for a couple of hen’s teeth and a bottle of provocative *parfum*, give me a call: I’m in the book, under AHPS. ♦

**Nancy Clark** is a contented wife, mom, granma, great-granma, needlecrafter, reader, writer and dreamer, living life to the fullest and grateful to God for every minute of it.

# East of the Melting Twilight

© by Rod Cross

The cold December wind shook the bare trees and carried the woodsmoke down through the valley. The wonderfully fragrant smoke hung low and mingled with the forest until it was gone, like the spring, summer, and fall past.

As I looked out the cabin window I was not melancholy, just reflecting on a year gone by, a year of a good life. A year with gains and losses.

Turning from the frosted window, I walked across the small comfortable room toward the heart of the cabin, the stone fireplace where a busy fire crackled and popped with warmth and life.

I chose a piece of dried split cherrywood from the wood pile and thought about how from the dead wood come the lively flames that heat the cabin and make it possible to live in the frigid temperatures that have swept down from the faraway Arctic.

Leaning against the thick wooden mantel, I stared at the chunk of wood in my hand. Two years dead now, but still a lovely pink in color and tight of grain. Heat and life locked inside the age rings, a record of the years. A record of history within my own life.

What else might be locked inside the wood? I took it outside and worked it down with an axe. Paying close attention to the grain and the color changes in the wood, I got it down to a nice piece of whittlin' wood. It had the right weight, and the right feel of possibility.

Back indoors I picked up a soft leather pouch. Inside were two carving knives, familiar and friendly tools. The rosewood handles had a soft glow that came from long hours of contact with hands that love the feel of wood. The nickel silver bolsters shone with a soft richness.

I put more wood in the fireplace. Before I sat down, I looked out the window. Linn Run flowed in front of the cabin, bouncing down the boulder-strewn streambed. Fresh from the mountaintop, the water was clear and so cold it flowed like liquid ice.

While the forest stood grey and windswept, the flowing waters promised life. Two months before, the native brook trout had made their bid for immortality by spawning and populating the gravel bottom with hidden eggs.

The sharp steel gently curled pink chips from the stovewood. Just whittlin' and thinking. One ear listened to the snapping fire, the other to the music of the trout stream, and my thoughts wandered as the knife made its random progress.

I thought back to last spring's trout season. The best time of all has to be late May, when the beautiful little mayflies that flyfishers call the sulphur begin to hatch. After work, after the grass is cut, after dinner with my wife, I'd gather the objects of my affection: a

bamboo fly rod, a great English fly reel, my worn vest and boots. And I'd be off to the Falling Spring.

There, east of the melting twilight, I sat and waited for the cycle to begin. It was so relaxing to watch muskrats and ducks and wait for the little, pale yellow mayflies to flutter around and perform the ritual mating dance in the air. Then the females touch their egg-laden bodies to the surface, starting the cycle over again.

Before they die, some float downstream with their wings erect, looking like the sailboats that they are often compared too. Then a trout takes the fly and leaves only the telltale ring of the rise.

Then I am alive and love the moment, an exquisite moment when I cast the weightless artificial with as much poetry as I can. If the poetry is good and true, the fly falls as lightly as an ash from the fire. It drifts toward the discerning wild rainbow that will be the final critic.

---

*From the dead wood  
come the lively flames  
that heat the cabin.*

---

My hand rubbed the wood piece as I remembered the noble trout caught and released throughout the year. It dropped to scratch the ears of a dear, departed friend. Molly Dogg died last summer. She left a hole in my soul that is filled only when I am lucky enough to have the dream.

In the dream, I'm walking in a perfect October woods. The sky is cobalt blue and I am following the blue heeler, watching her graceful gait, her tail tucked between muscular legs that could carry her for hours.

Suddenly she is alerted by a chipmunk's sneeze or the swish of a squirrel's tail, and she is launched through the forest, gleefully scattering dry oak leaves, flying over logs, pure speed, joy, and love.

The crashing leaves get softer and more distant, and I wake up, smiling. It was wonderful to walk with her again.

Sometimes I dream about my father. We sit and talk, usually by a lake as we fish. I am a boy in the dream. We talk about things that concern men, and the talk is free and easy, and when I wake up, I feel refreshed.

That is how I came to believe in ghosts and why I welcome them when they come.

The pink curls fell to the floor as the carving progressed. The knives cut into the wood's history and into my own.

The age rings reflected the terrible drought year

when the bare rocks stood out like dried bones, the skeleton of the steam. This year my son moved away to start his own life, to write his own history.

The wood began to take on a familiar shape. Now I could see what was locked inside, besides the beautiful memories. The cherry had lent itself to the blades' caress and let a sleek trout emerge.

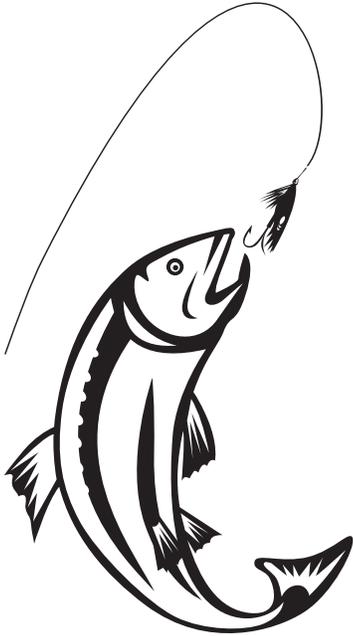
The form was very familiar, one that I love to hold and release into cold, clear waters. The curves, the muscular tail, and the sleek efficient form, all in the glowing pink wood.

The year was over, the woods still and cold, with ice locking up the stream. But that day at the cabin

was alive for me. Full of memories of wonderful days, gliding waters, and stressed bamboo.

There was a lot more work to do on the trout carving, and it went home with me when I left the cabin refuge.

Now the cherry trout sits on my bookcase. When I see it I smile, and the warm spring breezes blow the young dogwood blossoms, and the coltsfoot blooms. ♦



**Rod Cross** is retired but now enjoys his new job as an educator/guide at Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater on Bear Run. Before reporting in at the house, he always spends time spotting the native brook trout in Bear Run and wishing that someday he could write a sentence as perfect as those trout dealing with the natural earth.

## Ligonier

© by Paul Turtzer

Bought a brick  
Committed to stay  
Everything is here  
Even trout  
Tavern of pleasant comrades  
Pedestrian heaven  
Room with a view, cat approves  
Fifty miles from my origin  
Worthy of my ashes

(See Paul's bio on p. 21.)

## Revolution

© by Hilary Hauck

I hate this day  
she says, as though the sun could be blamed  
for sitting in place as the earth spins

I can't wait for this year to end  
he says as though a cosmic lap  
could be the cause

of overcrowding  
sickness  
a world on fire

as though after a sunrise  
drop of a ball  
page of a calendar turned

the earth will go back  
to revolving  
round  
and round  
our every whim.

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

## Crowded House

© by Carolyn Cecil

The brick ranch that used to house six children  
and the Hopkins professor,

his wife's gray hair visible  
every night with her back to the window

through a not fully drawn shade,  
that little bit of gray-white bobbed head.

The backyard stand of bamboo grown,  
the whoever-lives-here-now, not seen,

just their cars. Some kind of warm missing,  
like her side yard collection of twigs,

now a newly outfitted garage. What was she  
thinking back then, every night with her back

to the window. Lamp dimly shining.  
Children grown, husband deceased; she alone.

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

# Visit to My Past

© by Karen Malena

Heart pounding, palms sweating. Anxiety, I wear you well.

Steps on the sidewalk of my youth. Chalk drawings are now faded, hopscotch blurred in chalky memory, but uneven pavement still tries to trip me. Yet I do not falter.

Closer now, I feel so big, so tall. Eleven is little, small, tiny, not this giant I have become. Everything is dwarfed because I am older. Yes, there was a patch of dirt where two girls made a mud pie. The countless journeys on bicycles, as if they were cars: stop on red, go on green.

My house is now before me.

Dad had it built for my mother. This is where hopes and dreams were going to come true. Right next door to his mama and papa. The properties touched and merged almost magically.

The hedges are gone. They used to catch my clothing, and the rosebushes with their thorns reached out their slender tendrils. The scent was intoxicating, from every color imaginable. Gone now too. Four o'clocks and the pinchy juniper bush Dad called a Pfitzer.

But there's the huge picture window. And the porch, yes. One, two, three steps. I am standing where I haven't stood since 1972.

Tears flow freely. I knew they would. Mom and Dad, I feel you here, but you are not. I loved you here, and that lives on.

The lady whose home this has been for many years welcomes me, a smile on her face. Tears make hot trails down my cheeks. And then I enter.

Our living room. Lots of living went on here. Dad sat by the window in a recliner. Mom preferred the couch across the room.

I liked the floor, sitting cross-legged watching *Gilligan's Island*, *Mannix*, *The Carol Burnett Show*, and more. They talked, laughed, sang, and taught me about life in this room of living.

Our stone fireplace is still there, with its small cracks and crevices. Heaping wrapping paper was placed there after a big Christmas morning. My father would light it later that night while I watched for sparks to spit beyond the screen. I touch the cool grey stone, and my dad is there too.

We walk into the old kitchen, now the new one, so updated and lovely. She decorates beautifully.

We lived a little plainer, but I see the back door that led down, down, down steps to play with my cousins between the two houses. The walkway made of bricks and the shaded, cool old grape arbor, now only a single-stemmed vine.

And my grandparents are there.

I turn back into the kitchen and see where Mom stood many hours cooking, baking, making magic.

Her appliances are in the same spots. I see the cupboards turn to light wood once again. And my mother is there.

The basement is next. It is here that I see the most changes. Our cellar had a concrete floor and cement block walls painted light green. Now there are paneling and flooring and different rooms. I can no longer roller-skate around and around the wide open basement.

Yet one thing remains untouched: Dad's little workshop. I can smell the old leather and polish of his shoemaker supplies. In there the old cement blocks are untouched. I feel the coolness under my hand, and it warms me. I take my dad's hand in my heart, and he squeezes back gently.

When we take the stairs to the second floor, they creak in all the right spots. The sounds that were such a big part of my life now bring me to life again and share their secrets with me. *Little girl*, they whisper, *you've come home*.

At the top of the stairs I see my old playroom. It's a craft room now, lovely and perfect. It was perfect in my time too, with dolls, games, child's vanity set, record player, View-Master, Color-forms, Barbie, and Beautiful Crissy.

And then there is my bedroom. The sliding closet doors with the wood grain looked like scary faces to me as a child, but now they look happy, as if they approve of my arrival. I make peace with them and give away all the scary thoughts I held so close.

I give away a portion of myself—the sad little girl—and a new butterfly emerges from her cocoon and flies free.

---

*“Little girl,” they whisper,  
“you’ve come home.”*

---

The bathroom is fairly unchanged. Our old tub looks amazing. It's the one place I feel a chill run through me as I picture the day Mom went into cardiac arrest and fell there.

But I think of her near-death experience and amazingly good life. No, your life didn't end here, Mom. In many ways, it began.

We are in my parents' bedroom next. There is a huge butterfly on the wall, a decoration that practically bowls me over with its meaning. Mom, you loved butterflies. They were special to you.

I stand where I used to watch my mom and dad sleeping, making sure they were there, making sure they were breathing.

It's a good room, filled with sensory memories: a jewelry box of my mother's that I loved looking through and her Evening in Paris perfume; Dad's

little cedar chest of army medals, lemon Pledge.

Mom always sang “A Bushel and a Peck” to me in this room, and “Little Lamb.” She called me her shining star.

Down the steps, my hand grazes the wrought iron railing. I used to play with the bottom part, which moved. I reach out and slide it up and back, and I am eleven all over again.

My visit is almost at an end as I wander through the backyard. It looks so small to me, and the big tree is gone, and nothing is the same.

But my eyes wander to the flowerbed where beloved pets are laid to rest. My heart cracks as I honor them with a prayer of thanksgiving for the comfort they brought.

I say goodbye and whisper, “I love you” to my house that is no longer my house. But I will always love you and treasure our time there, good and bad.

I say goodbye to Mom as she disappears into the wind and the swaying flowers, and then to Dad as he follows her where I cannot go. My grandparents blow a gentle kiss and they, too, are gone.

It’s taken fifty years, but my peace is made. Fifty years in the blink of an eye. But I am changed, I am better. ♦

---

## Obtain a Medium Size Opossum

© by Walt Peterson

Skin, cut, clean.

It is usually best to prepare the *mire poix* before hand. You may substitute shallots for onions. Choose an agreeable white (pinot grigio, perhaps), add half cup and a quarter stick of butter, double wrap aluminum foil, double lock the seams.

Remove the heat shield from the exhaust manifold (if present). Place the bolts in a baggie and store all in the trunk. (Upon reassembly, consider coating bolt threads with anti-seize to facilitate future removal.)

Place the opossum on the manifold for one hundred fifty miles. If the engine is turbocharged, cut the mileage by one third.

**Karen Malena** comes from a close-knit Italian family that has given her the inspiration to breathe life into stories, some humorous, others a bit thought-provoking. She’s active in her community, encouraging new writers through local library programs and one-on-one mentoring. She also writes for *Guideposts* magazine.

---

## Last Ride

© by Walt Peterson

*I don't want a plain box  
I want a sarcophagus.  
– Sylvia Plath*

Forget the sarcophagus,  
Sylvia baby.  
I need a pickup truck,  
Lincoln pearlescent white with  
six champagne Arabians in harness,  
black shakos dancing,  
tires rollin’ big as a Prius  
and a rope ladder to get in.

Lay me out like Donna Mae,  
her pink Corvette with Marilyn  
airbrushed across the hood,  
a Corvette cortège following  
carbon footprints  
to the banks of the Lethe.

When some sweet sales gal whispers:  
*and has an unlimited mileage warranty.*  
tell ‘er, *But I don't ...*

Just a little pick’emup, ma’am, to make  
Texas schoolgirls in cowboy boots  
squeal, and NASCAR mamas  
vote two thumbs up.  
Order up an engine-turned dash,  
a plastic leather steering wheel, a power plant  
named Cummins, Hemi or Power-Stroke,  
stacks risin’ from the box,  
amber clearance lamps, a serious lift-kit with  
blue neon under running boards.

I’ll need Roseanne Cash breathing *Black Cadillac*,  
with Leonard Skynrd or Willie for intermission.

Goin’ gently into that good night?  
I don’t think so.  
Let life rage, rage, Syl, rage  
down the highway.

# Followin' Jesus Through the Eye of the Storm

© by Walt Peterson

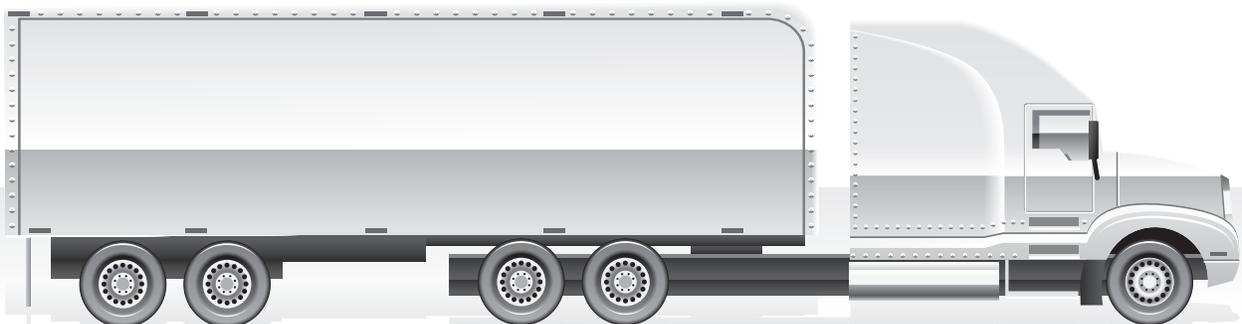
Somewhere around Sandusky,  
he blew by in the fast lane—  
a white-streak, dually pickup,  
car hauler in tow.  
Something written big on the back of the box.  
Being a sucker for even a bumper sticker,  
you drop down to fifth & catch him:  
*If a man doesn't know Jesus  
what can he say he really knows*  
I ask you, what kind of man would say a thing like that?

Bare arm dangling from the Hemi's cab window,  
a barbecue cooker bound with bungee cords  
under a flapping green tarp. Then the box trailer  
about big enough for a red neck pole dancer's wedding.  
You follow for miles wondering under  
gathering doubt toward the Pennsylvania line.

The afternoon darkening since Michigan,  
then drops across the Cuyahoga,  
then rain and lightning, headlights & wipers, summer thunder  
then darker, harder still.  
Cars pulled over—flashers in the splash of Sunday—  
wipers a full-tilt riot now. Back off  
from water flooding the interstate's underpass.  
He slows to seventy-five then holds it steady;  
the man was damn good.

You had to give him that. The man was good or crazy  
as hell or following Jesus as a Black & blind DJ  
hollerin' psalms and secret commands over AM radio static.  
Then you figure, "What the hell ..."  
crank it up, pull in and catch his slipstream tow.  
Close enough to read the psalm in a swirl of storm-grey contrail.  
Two ghosted forms across Ohio's landscape.  
Sweet baby Jesus, did you have a drive till the storm passed  
that spindrift Sunday afternoon.

**Walt Peterson** is a writer and teacher from Pittsburgh who has graced the pages of this mag before and is darn happy *LR* is back in operation after the Seasons of Our Discontent: CV 19. He has won awards for his poetry and fiction and is currently restoring a 1950s Jabro sports racer, thus the poems that go Broom-Broom.



## 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 send 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 the publication party for the magazine you're reading.

We're busily planning events for 2021-22:

- readings of the winning flash fiction stories
- a playwriting workshop by F.J. Hartland
- a reading by Damian Dressick from his new book of flash fiction
- a workshop on journaling by Marge Burke
- a panel discussion on self-publishing and how to do it

We don't have dates or venues nailed down yet. Check [www.LVWonline.org](http://www.LVWonline.org) for developments. We welcome programming ideas from members.

There's still time to enter the Flash Fiction Contest, deadline August 15. This year's topic is Evil Twins. 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). Or you can read the 2021 poems and see photos of the poets at 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.

If you're an LVW member and you have news about what you're writing or reading, send it to us. Send your news to [jgallagher@LHTOT.com](mailto:jgallagher@LHTOT.com).

**Student Poetry Contest.** Check out the Ligonier Valley Writers Facebook page to see the faces of our talented young poets. Since we couldn't hold the awards ceremony this year, we invited all the winners of the Ligonier Valley Writers' 30th annual Student Poetry Contest to send us photos of themselves with their awards. We already have lots of views, comments, and likes.

## Author and Artist Bios

**Sue Bargeloh** has written and produced four short plays and is currently struggling to complete a novel. A prior resident of Ligonier, she enjoys the art and literature found in the *Loyalhanna Review* and frequently chooses pieces for informal readings by the Carolina Arbors Theater Club.

**Carolyn Cecil** writes from Baltimore, MD. Her chapbook *Taken Away* was published by Broadkill Press. Her poems have been in the *Broadkill Review*, *Backbone Mountain Review*, *Free State Review*, and *Gunpowder Review*, among others. She is a member of Ligonier Valley Writers and attended Johnson Studio Center in Vermont as well as Renaissance Institute, Baltimore.

**Tamara DiBartola** views arts as a blessing and hopes to make a positive contribution through her poetry and photography, which have appeared in the *Loyalhanna Review*, at Westmoreland Arts and Heritage Festival, Latrobe Art Center, Excelsa Latrobe Hospital, and Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art in Ligonier. (See Tamara's art on p.16 and inside back cover.)

**Gerrie Grandpre** is a Sister of St. Joseph of Baden, PA. She has served as a long-term nurse, educator, and chaplain. Her interests include travel, photography, and gardening. (See Gerri's art on p.17 and the back cover.)

**Joe Lesko** from North Huntingdon, passed away at 73 on February 8, 2021. Retired from West Penn Power, he's survived by his wife, two children and three grandchildren. His favorite interests were music and art. (See Joe's art on pg.22.)

**Alicia Stankay**, a writer and nature photographer, finds comfort in walking around her yard and local parks during times of stress. Viewing springtime flowers, bright summer butterflies, colorful autumn leaves, and snowy winter scenes, she also immerses herself in words. In 2020 she created her seventh book, *Sarah's Journey: Adventure in Old Economy Village*. (See Alicia's art on inside front cover and color insert.)



Rose Breasted Grosbeak in Tree © by Tamara DiBartola

