



***The Loyalhanna Review***

**2019**



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**Ligonier Valley Writers presents  
the 2019 edition of its literary magazine,  
*The Loyalhanna Review.***

## From the Editor

2019 is LVW's thirty-third year. Since our last publication party, we sponsored a successful Flash Fiction contest, awarded prizes, and held readings in two locations for the winning entries. Authors shared their work with guests at both our fall picnic and holiday gatherings at St. Michael's of the Valley.

In February, we partnered with Ligonier Valley Library on a workshop Jim Busch presented for families about the importance of parents and kids sharing their stories. In a spring workshop at Westmoreland Museum of American Art, authors used the quilt exhibit and the permanent collection to inspire their writing in multiple genres. The Student Poetry Contest readings and awards at Barnes & Noble produced our largest turnout ever. Guest playwright F.J. Hartland presented character-creation methods applicable for any type of writing.

We have a new and improved website, which displays archives of past *Reviews*: LVWonline.org.

The 2019 *Loyalhanna Review* is the twenty-eighth annual issue showcasing many talented local authors and artists. It is through the generosity and dedication of our active members and loyal contributors that this year's LR can be distributed to the broader southwestern PA community.

We were touched to see how much the *Loyalhanna Review* means to so many people throughout our region. We sent out a call for help printing this year's edition, and many LVW members and friends stepped up to help us afford to print 1,500 copies in color.

**Thank you so much!**

*Ruth McDonald, Editor-in-Chief*

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## Special Thanks to LVW Contributors and Friends

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These donations were received as of June 26, 2019. Thank you for your generosity.

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Back Cover: **Leaving Yellow Creek** © by Colleen Wakefield (See Colleen's bio on p. 27.)

# The Chicken Tractor Factor

© by Joe Potts

At a recent family shindig, I was dumbfounded when someone said they had a chicken tractor. Being in such a mental state wasn't unusual for me. I average about three dumbfoundings a day. In this case, though, I was sure my dreaded earwax problem had resurfaced. If there are two words that were never meant to be used together, they are certainly chicken and tractor.

First, let me admit up front that I don't know much about farms and farm birds. I'm a city boy (in the sense you can call someone a "boy" whose lifespan exceeds those of Clark Gable, George Washington, and Ulysses S. Grant).

As the saying goes, though, knock me over with a chicken feather: I had heard correctly. Evidently some of my relatives have joined the growing herd of casual chicken farmers.

Yes, chickens are everywhere. Nowadays there's a flock on every block. Actually, I think a "squawk" of chickens would be a more descriptive term than flock. On the other hand, it's a "gaggle" of geese, so maybe it should be a chunk of chickens. Or a cheeseball of chickens. At least that sounds like the start of a pretty good recipe.

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## *I average about three dumbfoundings a day.*

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Naturally, I wondered what such a vehicle might look like. A chicken tractor would have to be smaller than a normal farming tractor. Also, the seat would have to be completely redesigned, or the chicken could never sit on it.

Before I fell too far down that hypothetical rabbit hole, though, I was given the scoop on the chicken tractor. It's a clever contraption to corral your chunk of chickens and move them in unison around the chicken yard or lawn or pasture or prairie, or whatever it is. It's sort of a movable chicken coop, without a floor.

You're probably thinking, as I did, that the reason farmers would use a chicken tractor is to make sure the chickens get enough exercise. No. Incredibly, in a classic case of flawed design, the chicken tractor engineers did not make it chicken-powered. (And, yes, Chicken Tractor Engineers would be a great name for a country band.)

The poor cluck of a farmer has to hitch up to the cluck-mobile and drag it. As you can readily imagine, this leads to lazy chickens. They sit back and smoke cigarettes while being pulled around, occasionally mocking and heckling the farmer, and blowing smoke in his face. In rare cases, they egg him.

One of the benefits of this device, evidently, is

that the chicken farmer can move the little ingrates to a fresh patch of ground. That way, over time, they can completely destroy every square inch of the yard or pasture or prairie or farm.

Another benefit is the protection it provides from predator hawks. Hawks are not afflicted with pangs of guilt over avian cannibalism, so they crave chicken tenders as much as a six-year-old at Chick-fil-A. It's a bird-eat-bird world out there.

There's much room for improvement in chicken tractor design. I imagine at this very moment, while the rest of us are blithely chomping chicken wings, Elon Musk is imagining the chicken tractor of the future. He's ready to pounce on this wide-open market, with wi-fi equipped, fusion-powered chicken tractors, complete with bucket seats.

That way, the chickens can be delivered directly to KFC, already in the bucket. And once Elon is involved, can chicken tractors on Mars be far behind?

Of course, some will assert that it makes no sense to send chickens to Mars without first having a firm chicken-foothold on the Moon. After all, it's just a hop, skip and bawk to the Moon, as the chicken flies. But at best, it's a 35-million mile trip to Mars—quite a haul for a bird that normally flies about ten feet. This would inevitably lead to the question, "Why did the chicken cross the solar system?"

The logical choice is to first colonize the Moon with chickens. Just as bison once roamed North America, thundering herds of chickens could head-bob their way across lunar craters, scratching and pecking in the moon dust. The Sea of Tranquility could be terraformed into a clucking, cock-a-doodle-doing cacophony. Once chicken tractor factories are built on the Moon, the tractors could be loaded with chickens and launched to Mars, simplifying the process.

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## *It's a bird-eat-bird world out there.*

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There's also precedent for moonfowl. Apollo 15 astronaut David Scott famously dropped a feather to the lunar surface, in a dead-heat race with a hammer. This proved Galileo's theory that one day a feather and a hammer would be dropped on the moon. It may or may not have been a chicken feather, but that's ducking the issue.

The point is he proved feathers won't fly away in the lunar breeze, because there isn't one. Astronaut Scott also proved that, even on the Moon, if you drop a feather and a hammer, it's the hammer that will land on your foot.

All of these future fowl goings-on make me wish I were young again. Ah, to be in on the ground floor

of the burgeoning chickens-in-space industry. The fortunes to be made are, ironically, not chicken feed.

The astute reader will notice that I have come to the end of my little tome (technically, my “tomette”

without once mentioning birdbrains. That is left as an exercise for the reader. Just make sure you’re talking about the chickens. ♦

**Joe Potts** has had articles published in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and the *Tribune Review*. His SF/fantasy fiction, including the Electron Jones series, can be heard on the WAOB Audio Theater website and YouTube channel. Joe’s humor writings are at [www.joepottszone.com](http://www.joepottszone.com). He lives in Unity Township with his wife, Susan.

## River Dance

© by Janice McLaughlin

The day is oppressively hot and humid, so the rushing stream looks cold, clean, and tempting. I’m old enough to know better, but I can’t resist removing my shoes and socks and stepping in.

My body seizes up in an all-encompassing cramp; I wonder if my heart will stop. I’m wheezing with every breath.

Why do I do this every year? Why can’t I remember that I am no longer young? Why can’t I resist?

I know what’s going to happen. I know the rocks are covered with spring green moss that is as slippery as a defendant in court.

The river is only about fifteen feet wide and knee deep at this spot, but it has many drop-offs that are waist deep or more.

In my youth I could skip from stone to stone, making my way across too fast to fall, showing off to

anyone in sight.

Now I look first to make sure no one is watching. Then I slowly and very cautiously step to the first stone, then the second. Although they started out flat and slippery, they’ve now become rough, jagged, very slippery boulders.

I slip, slide, expose my backside, slither, glide, then like last year—KER-SPLASH, KER-PLUNK, I land on my junk. KER-PLUNK, KER-SPLASH, I fall with a crash.

Looking up, I see that I now have a small audience of twenty-somethings who start apprehensively toward me, hoping that none of them will have to fish me out.

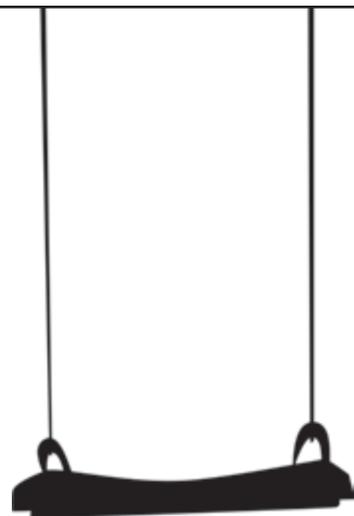
Slowly I stand and wiggle my fingers and toes. Nothing feels broken. I take a bow and shout, “I’m practicing for *Dancing with the Stars*. How do you like me so far?” ♦

**Jan McLaughlin** does layout, design, and book covers. She is working on her sixth children’s book with companion coloring/activity book. She recently published a poetry book titled *Darkness Falls* and is working on one titled *Reflections*. She believes that as long as you are learning, you are alive.

## What If?

© by Patricia Orendorff Smith

What if you lived in a family of twelve children and you had to find your shoes in a pile at the door? Your brother beat you home. He ate the meat and left you the bone. Your brother spat in your sister’s bubbling fudge so he could lick the pan. What if you found your chores listed on the pantry door to sweep with a broom or scrub the floor? Or you went to school and while you were gone, Momma cut your clothes to fit a younger one? Would you know how to find room in a bed and not bump each other’s head? Or find your brother drawing a line across the floor. “Step over this and you’ll be sorry!” “Maaa!” Did you ever fight for a window seat or have to come up with a new baby’s name? One thing for sure, you’d have someone to play a game, bounce a ball, jump a rope, or push a swing. But best of all are twenty-two arms hugging you!



**Patricia Orendorff Smith** is published in national, regional, and local publications. Seventy poems appeared in *The Indiana Gazette* from 2016 to 2019, including two half-page spreads. “Identity” appeared in Penn State’s *Wild Onions*.

# The Sox Box

© by Nancy A. Clark

The richest family traditions often rise from the ashes of our less prosperous periods. In our family such a period gave birth to what is known as The Legend of the Sox Box.

Sis and I were youngins in braids and brown oxfords when we drooled over the pages of the Sears Christmas wish book. Though we salivated over high-end toys and fancy dresses, we were gently encouraged to request “reasonable gifts” in our letters to the North Pole.

We also fantasized that whatever Santa might leave underneath our tree would be wrapped in colorful paper, satin ribbons, and velvet bows—like those featured in the toy catalogue.

But, alas! Year after year, the jolly old elf, a close kin to our practical coalminer father, wrapped our unmentionables—sans ribbons and bows—in the Sunday newspaper comics pages. No problem: we weren’t picky.

Christmas morning of my eleventh year dawned with the startling realization that, except for a plaster of Paris trinket we fabricated in grade school, Mom and Dad would have no *Blondie* or *Beetle Bailey*-wrapped gift to open. I resolved to one day remedy that grievous slight.

When I was sixteen, I nabbed a part-time job at Murphy’s five & dime store at 50 cents an hour for 10 hours a week. Visions of sparkly Christmas packages danced in my head as I plotted playing Santa to my parents and three younger siblings.

However, my first paycheck came with a new reality: employment-related costs would be nibbling on the beans in my bean jar.

Simple toys for my siblings. An itsy-bitsy bottle of Evening in Paris toilet water for Mom. As for Dad? I was stumped.

Every consideration required a larger chunk of change than I could make in a month of Sundays, and spending hard-earned cash on junk would only spawn a stern lecture about fiscal responsibility.

Meandering through Murphy’s men’s department during one ten-minute break, I spied a pair of silky black knee-high stockings. Price: \$1.99 with my employee discount. Dad would deem the expenditure frivolous, but wouldn’t he want such stockings to walk me down the aisle at my wedding someday?

Two stockings did not an impressive package make. I needed a cover: something sturdy and practical but with a hint of mystery. A size 10 shoebox filled the bill.

Rolling and wrapping each stocking in a cartoon page, I nestled the two lumps in the crumpled-newspaper-stuffed box, tied a length of Mom’s white crochet thread around the box, and repeated the process until the shoebox lost its identity.

When no creature was stirring (not even a mouse), I crept down the stairs on Christmas morning and snuggled the box, *Snuffy Smith* and *Li'l Abner* face-up, in among the sketched antics of *Dick Tracy* and *Pogo*.

Our typical Christmas morning hoopla was all but over when Dad spied one heavily padded package under the tree. He picked it up and read the handmade tag: “To DAD. From SANTA.”

Bewildered, he examined the puffy parcel and glanced at Mom, who appeared equally puzzled.

We egged Dad on as he tugged at knotted strings and slowly tore away *mucho* layers of newsprint. “I wonder what it could be,” he teased. A smile supplanted his confusion as he pulled and peeled, stopping now and then to read a story frame to us.

To his amusement, we responded with guesses ranging from a shoehorn to a baby elephant.

More string. Paper. String. Paper. String. He laughed. “I think Santa brought me a box of paper.”

Finally: “It’s a shoebox!” he crowed, elevating the unopened container for all to see. I held my breath as he slowly, deliberately, removed the lid and burrowed through the crumpled newspapers. He unwrapped the two lumps and lifted each silky stocking until it unfurled to its full length.

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“SOCKS!” he shouted.

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“SOCKS!” he shouted. His not-so-little round belly shook like a bowlful of jelly as giggle-tears trickled through the stubble on his unshaven cheeks.

Then we coaxed him into modeling the stockings. First one foot and then the other. He closed his eyes, wiggled his toes, and sighed. It was as if he’d never felt anything so luxurious—and he probably never had.

The game became legend, and we repeated it year after year with larger boxes and more socks. Through the years, he delighted his wide-eyed grandchildren by tugging and tearing away the distinctive wrappings while uttering, “I wonder what it can be” as if for the very first time.

Dad celebrates the Holy Day with the angels now. But at our family gatherings, someone will resurrect a memory of the Sox Box and the immense joy of giving so small a gift to one who had so great a capacity to love and appreciate.

EPILOGUE: After he adjusted my wedding veil, Dad lifted his right pantleg to reveal one half of the first pair of stockings from the original sox box. I smiled and wrapped my arm through his, and we began the long walk down the aisle. ♦

(See Nancy’s bio on p. 27.)

## Breakfast

© by Christian Reifsteck

She can't eat much—  
just some hashbrowns and cheese  
that she tastes with trepidation  
while I gulp down whole waffles.

She said the other day  
that her hair is falling out again,  
and though I couldn't tell then,  
I can see now that the right shoulder  
of her pink sweatshirt  
is covered with errant hairs.

This may be our last meal together,  
though I know it isn't true,  
just like it wasn't the last time  
we sat in a booth and ate off of plates  
on thin paper placemats.

It has been a long winter  
with lots of snow and always some sadness.  
This will pass, too, though—  
like the steam rising from my mug of coffee  
that she can no longer tolerate  
because now it all tastes like iron,  
so she drinks a small milk instead.



(See Christian's  
bio on p. 23.)

## Spring Peepers

© by Christian Reifsteck

The spring peepers have returned,  
whistling out their desires in the cool evening.  
They do this in the marsh beside the mountain:  
the mournful side of the mountain  
that slants away from the sun  
and slouches toward the quick chirping  
of their loneliness.

Long into the night they call for love,  
breathing out their hope, longing for a reply.  
Perhaps their love, all love  
is only a deep wanting, a continual longing  
to come closer and closer to something,  
to know it and understand it and meld with it,  
like the mountain and sky, river and shore,  
so much singing of frogs.

You would have loved this night.  
Rocking chairs on the back porch,  
we would have blended together  
into the wild chorus of wanting.  
Tonight I hear the swell and buzz,  
whistle and hum call of want and waiting.  
I breathe out my broken heart.

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## Gardens Are Built by Friends

© by Louisa Fordyce

My garden has been built by my friends. I don't mean they came over with shovels and dug in the dirt with me. But when I look around my garden, I can see the contributions from my friends that have made it colorful, eclectic, curious, and maybe a little uncoordinated.

Sue donated lady's mantle, a plant I had never heard of until I met her. Joyce contributed Monarch's Velvet potentilla and Sheffield Pink chrysanthemum, also new to me.

Gretchen gave me a large clump of Japanese painted fern. Cathy and R. Jaye gave me September charm anemone, a lovely lavender flower that the bees and I both adore.

Cathy and R. Jaye also dropped off several hardy Fantasia hibiscus, which originally annoyed me because I had to find a place to plant them. But now the large, deep-pink flowers are showstoppers; passersby walk up the drive to ask about them. I now have the start of a much-desired heavy shade garden

with bloodroot and Jack-in-the-pulpit, thanks to my friend Carol.

From another Sue, my garden has orange mint and Walker's Low catmint. Even the friends who have drifted away are still in my thoughts when I walk through my gardens.

Just as I have benefited from donations, plants from my own gardens have expanded other gardens. It always pleases me when I see my former plants appreciated and cared for in another garden.

I've divided and passed on perennial sunflower (helianthus Lemon Queen), various coneflowers, heirloom daylilies, hardy prickly pear cactus, double Japanese aster, sweet woodruff, pulmonaria, and many more.

Although none of my gardening friends has dug in the dirt with me, feel free to volunteer sometime. You will likely take home plants that are new to you and may even be rare. Then you, too, can say that your garden has been built by friends. ♦

**Louisa Fordyce** is a blissfully retired professor of English. She spends her time cleaning out closets, taking photos, walking two ill-behaved (but wonderful) puppies, and reading everything she can get her hands on. She and her husband, Ron, are also Penn State Master Gardeners.

# Perseverance

© by Joanne D. Kiggins

Just when my life had settled some, and I'd published the last issue of my newspaper and told my readers I was going to work on my book, I found myself lying on the kitchen floor, numb, unable to move or speak.

I know I was crying, but I couldn't feel the tears run down my cheeks as I watched paramedics attach medical equipment. I closed my eyes and tried to get a perspective on the scene taking place, but nothing registered. Fear washed into my throat as I faded into unconsciousness.

When I woke in the emergency room, doctors told me I'd had a stroke. I looked at them through wide, glassy eyes and shook my head no.

"You're young. After physical and speech therapy, you'll be almost as good as new," they said. It was the "almost" that made me cringe. I couldn't feel my limbs but I could feel the chilling, unadulterated fear that flashed through my body. What was the "almost" that I would be left without?

Those who didn't know me wouldn't notice the slight droop on the left side of my face. The slow, slurred speech and long spans of time between sentences, while I searched for words that wouldn't come, made me sound like a second grader trying to talk with a mouth full of cereal.

By the fourth day I was walking with a limp and a cane, my left arm twitched and went wherever it wanted to go, and my smile faded. I was scheduled to see physical and speech therapists three times a week for rehabilitation.

After one week, I knew there wasn't anything I was being shown that I couldn't do every day at home. I insisted on going home, where I could rehabilitate myself to gain those things I desperately needed most. And what I needed most was to write.

In front of my computer, in my home office, I sat staring at the blank screen. No words would come. I glanced up and scanned the diplomas, awards, and pictures of me and Senator John Glenn, Charlie Daniels, and Kenny Rogers.

Then I cried. Long and hard.

I began my writing career in 1981 as a stringer for two major newspapers and two weeklies in Ohio. Since then, I have crafted and published more than 2,500 articles and two nonfiction regional books. I owned, operated, and published my own newspaper.

I wrote, copyrighted, and taught my Sell What You Write course, sponsored writing seminars, spoke at many conferences and writing groups, and won the 1990 Beaver County Times Woman of the Year Award for contributions to the community and excellence in journalism.

Twenty-nine years ago, the reporter who wrote about my winning that award began her story with

the sentence, "When there's time she sleeps."

She then listed part of my daily routine in one long paragraph, asked the readers if they needed to take a breath yet, then continued, "... she returns to her personal computer where she seized the late night and early morning hours to do what she enjoys immensely—write. She is as relentless as the pink Energizer-battery rabbit—steady, persistent and determined to succeed."

I received the award in October 1990. In December, at age 38, I had the stroke. My writing career died, along with a part of me. My ability to remember what had taken years to learn was destroyed. That award-winning writer no longer existed. I was once again a beginner.

## PERSEVERANCE: TO PERSIST IN SPITE OF DIFFICULTIES

Those words were posted in large, bold print on my bulletin board. When my feet hit the floor in the morning, I walked into my home office, read those words, turned on my computer, and hobbled to the kitchen to pour a cup of coffee.

I grabbed my writing course notes and my tape recorder and began pacing and reading my notes out loud. None of it sounded the least bit familiar. When I played the tape back, it didn't take long to realize I never would be the same person I once was.

All that I had learned to earn those diplomas and awards had vanished. As an avid Stephen King fan, I often referred to it as the "dead zone."

I read magazines, newspapers, and books out loud into the tape recorder. All day, every day for the next month, I followed the same routine. I would turn on the tape recorder, read, and listen.

By the end of January, I began to sound somewhat like myself. But that wasn't good enough. I would pace, cane in hand, in front of the mirror, recite parts of what I'd memorized, and read parts I'd forgotten. By the end of February, I had gained some coordination, some inflection, some pride.

When the envelope from Slippery Rock came with my spring semester course agreement, my hands shook when I opened it. It was my creative writing course. Every student who had taken the Sell What You Write course was on the roster, along with ten new students.

Standing in front of a mirror practicing my teaching skills was one thing, but I wasn't ready to face or speak to a classroom full of people. I set the envelope aside.

It took me six trips from the car on the first evening of the course to get all my materials into the classroom. I wanted to bolt, but instead I smiled, walked behind the desk, and said, "Welcome to my

creative writing class.”

One former student glanced at my cane and said, “It’s great to be here. What happened?”

I took a deep breath with eyes closed for a second, and said, “I’m here tonight to learn along with you.”

Those who had taken my other course looked at me questioningly.

“Before I begin, I’d like to tell you that if, after you’ve finished this course, you’re not satisfied with what you’ve learned, I will personally refund your money.”

The student who had asked what happened said, “Yeah, right, as if we wouldn’t be satisfied. You’re an excellent teacher and speaker. And what do you mean you’re here to learn?”

I thanked him, smiled, and told them what had happened since we had last met in this classroom. I said I had almost canceled the course because I didn’t feel I had a right to teach it since I had just begun to learn what I would be teaching.

After I told my story, I assured them that it wouldn’t offend me if they chose to leave.

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## *I was once again a beginner.*

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Not one of the students left the classroom. I paced in front of them, leaning on the cane, repeating everything I’d memorized over the past three months. I used the gestures and inflections I had practiced. I tripped over the cane a few times.

When they all jerked in their seats anticipating my fall, I smiled and said, “Just wanted to make sure you are paying attention.” I was thankful that my sense of humor hadn’t slipped into the dead zone.

After four hours of speaking, joking, and tripping, I passed out handouts, gave the assignment for the next class, and closed my briefcase.

As I packed my boxes to go home, I heard chairs sliding, papers jostling, and loud thundering noises. When I looked up, each and every student was standing beside his or her desk, clapping and smiling at me.

It wasn’t until that moment that I felt successful. My vision blurred from tears that I wouldn’t let drop, but I didn’t need clear vision to see that the months of pacing, reciting, and learning had paid off.

Unfortunately, the story doesn’t end there, and neither did my diversions from writing. Between 1991 and 1992 I had four TIAs (mini-strokes) and went through a divorce.

Minor aches, pains, swelling, and other physical problems I’d ignored for years were now becoming more noticeable. I was tested for everything from

Lyme disease to lupus. In 1994 I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia and in 1997 with multiple sclerosis.

After my stroke and diagnoses, I continued ignoring the pain and loss of memory and kept trying to convince myself I was fine. The more I tried, the more disillusioned and weaker I became.

My seventy-four-year-old mother drove me to a hearing before a judge, who would determine if I would receive Social Security. My attorney told me to be myself. I wondered what and who “myself” was.

My attorney told the judge I was unable to remember and accomplish simple chores around the house, and medication limited my ability to drive. She said the many ailments and side effects of medications had forced me to quit my job. If I hadn’t quit, I would have been let go.

I listened to her expose all the personal aspects of my life. I had endured much, but the humiliation I felt at that moment was more crippling than any disease could be.

The judge said he had read my forty-page report but he wanted to hear me tell him my story. I stood a few seconds, looked straight at the judge, and then fell apart.

With tears running down my face, I said, “I’ve worked since I was fifteen years old. I don’t know what it’s like not to work, and work hard. Since I had my stroke in 1990, I’ve continually told myself I’ll be okay. I have convinced myself all these years that I am okay. But I was forced to quit a job I truly loved, and my seventy-four-year-old mother drove me here today.”

Humiliation struck again. Between sobs I gained enough control to add, “Sir, how can I convince you that I can’t work, when I’ve been trying to convince myself for years that I can?”

Several months later I received a letter informing me I’d been approved for SSD.

I use a walker now and keep telling myself I’m okay. The pictures, awards, degrees, and published articles still carry a lot of meaning to me but hold no validity now. I shake my head in awe of that person’s ability to write and remind myself every day that I am a beginner.

Learning to write had never been easy. Even established writers need to be open to new ideas and learn by practicing. My experience taught me that regardless of detours in my life, I need to continue to set goals and diligently work toward them.

I follow the road to the goal I’ve always had. That goal is—and always will be—to be the best writer I can be.

I love to write. Writing is all I ever wanted to do. I’m still here. I’m still writing. I’m still learning. And I will persevere. ♦

**Joanne D. Kiggins** is a writer and photographer. She has published more than 2,5000 articles, essays, and short stories for newspapers, magazines, and anthologies. Her passion lies in writing thrillers and suspense. When not writing, Joanne spends time with her husband and two dogs in Economy, PA.

# Words to Some Sudden Rays of Sun

© by Sally Witt

Really, Friends,  
how did you get into  
my summer evening kitchen?

You had to squeeze  
between the clouds that border you,  
stoop underneath  
our backporch awning,  
slide down the screen door's frame  
to fall right there,  
where I would see you  
as I turned  
from baking preparations.

How, really, did you find your way—  
more than ninety-two million miles  
to this kitchen floor—  
let alone the distance  
from there into my heart,  
to say you knew,  
more surely than I did,  
that something deep within me  
longs for light?

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



## Autumn Glory

© by Alicia Stankay

The sun sinks in the west beyond my windows.  
Newly barren trees outline its glorious glow,  
painting the clouds in brilliant orange and red.

Winter's somber sepia tones overtake the earth  
until a cushion of white blankets the bleak terrain  
and softens the tree branches stripped of leaves.

Beautiful, but still I hunger for the sight  
of that golden sphere setting fire to the world.

**Alicia Stankay**, writer and photographer, cultivates a sunroom full of African violets, trailing ivy, peace lilies, orchids, and more. Their oxygenated air boosts her creativity to give her stories that little twist at the end. Her latest book, *October's Dilemma*, will be available this fall.

# Passing a Window Late One Night: A Rubaiyat

© by Candace Kubinec

Our eyes met through the windowpane  
A chance that may not come again  
For just one second, we were one  
A feeling I cannot explain

Then, just as quickly, she was gone  
A graceful, caramel-colored fawn  
I look for her on clear, dark nights  
To pass, once more, across my lawn

And wonder if she looks for me  
When eating apples from my tree  
I won't forget that look we shared  
One night that ended magically



## And I Smiled: A Strambotto

© by Candace Kubinec

I found a yellow crocus blooming today  
amid the detritus of a season gone.  
Its slender green and white leaves finding a way  
through fallen leaves and bits of bark. It was drawn  
by Spring's silent signals and the Sun's warm rays.  
Tightly curled buds, the color of a new fawn,  
unfurl to show off in golden, flouncy play  
as a milder wind makes them dance in my lawn.

**Candace Kubinec** lives in Greensburg. She has been published in *The Loyalhanna Review*, *The Official Poet's Guide to Peace*, Chicago Poetry Press anthology, *Chiaroscuro - d'Veres Poets* anthology, *Highland Park Poetry Challenge Chapbook 2019*, and *Ink in Thirds*.

# Can We Talk?

© by Keith Neill

Has technology taken over the lives of my granddaughters? Maybe. We were preparing to celebrate Olivia's fourteenth birthday at Pamela's, home of the famous crepe pancakes in Pittsburgh.

She had requested this place when I offered to take her to breakfast to celebrate. Pamela's seems to be her favorite place; we've been to four different locations.

The texts started coming a week before her birthday. I guess the phone part of that smartphone doesn't work.

Olivia: *Can we go on Sun?*

Pappap: *What time do you want to go?*

O: *Can we leave at 11?*

P: *It will be too late. Pamela's is very busy on weekends and they close at 2:00.*

O: *K*

Twenty minutes later:

O: *If my friends leave earlier, can we still go on Sun?*

She had a sleepover planned for the night before.

P: *No.*

Midweek Text:

O: *Do u think there's any way we can go on my B.D?*

P: *No, we'll go on Saturday.*

Friday night:

P: *What time would you like to go tomorrow?*

O: *11.*

P: *We should leave at 9:30? The wait line won't be long.*

O: *K.*

I was out late on Friday night and decided that the 11 o'clock hour would be better.

P: *We will leave at 11 as you suggested.*

O: *Carrie wants to know if she can go ??*

P: *She's welcome.*

Saturday morning I called at 10:50 to tell her I was on my way. No answer. Maybe that part of her cellphone still wasn't working! I stopped to pick them up. Olivia wasn't done dressing and couldn't find her shoes. What's new!

We were no sooner on our way than Olivia started to insert earbuds.

"Don't you think we could talk?" I asked.

"We can talk at the restaurant," she said.

Carrie was in the backseat playing games on her phone.

So tech-challenged Pappap and two granddaughters drove 35 miles with no talking. I did dare to interrupt the silence a few times to make a remark or ask a question.

We arrived at Pamela's just after noon. Twenty or more people were lined outside and inside along nippy Forbes Avenue.

"Is this where the line starts?" I asked one of the college kids.

"You have to give your name inside."

"How many?" the host asked.

"Three."

"What's your cell number and your name?" he asked me.

"724-123-4567, Pappap."

I saw the guy adding us to a list on his iPad. My phone beeped immediately. I hadn't realized we were connected.

Pamela's: *12:12 p.m. Pappap, wait time 25 to 35 minutes. Make sure your entire party is present when called.*

We walked down chilly Forbes Avenue to look in the William Pitt Student Union. It was originally the Schenley Hotel. I thought the wait time might as well be useful. We had a short history lesson. I also answered questions about the Cathedral of Learning.

We hadn't been back very long when the phone beep alerted me.

Pamela's: *12:40 p.m. Pappap. Your table is ready. Make sure all members of your party are present.*

We ambled into the restaurant and showed the host our text. "Follow me."

The girls noticed foods that some diners were eating. "I want those pancakes," Carrie said.

"Me too," Olivia echoed.

When the waiter arrived, I said, "We all want pancakes."

Now was time for conversation. We talked about birthdays, school friends, and what they were learning in various subjects. The time passed quickly.

We talked at length about the many board games that are plastered to the walls. Pamela's is a game lover's destination.

After we finished our meal I asked, "Where else would you like to go?"

"Can we go to Schenley Park?" Olivia asked.

"Remember you took us there before."

At Schenley Park Olivia took selfies with Carrie and Carrie took numerous pictures looking toward downtown Pittsburgh. She had already taken more than a few pictures at the restaurant and along Forbes Avenue.

We all tried the swings as Arctic winds blustered across Schenley Park. As we headed home, there was no shortage of talk. I felt much better.

The conversation ranged from school to cheer leading to best friends to family and what it's going to be like at the high school next year.

"If you could have dinner with any person, living or dead, who would it be?" I asked.

"Let me think," Olivia said.

After a time, she said, "Anne Frank."

"Why Anne Frank?"

She listed a lot of facts about Anne and the Frank family. We all talked about the Holocaust, the escape, the hiding, who survived, and the concentration

camps. The exchange continued until we arrived at their house.

I was relieved to learn that there can be meaningful conversation with a teenager without any technological device. A grandparent just has to be patient. ♦

**Keith Neill** is a retired high school teacher. He continues to write and spends time bicycling and teaching English as a Second Language (ESL).

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## White Couch

© by Carolyn Cecil

Dear Daughter,

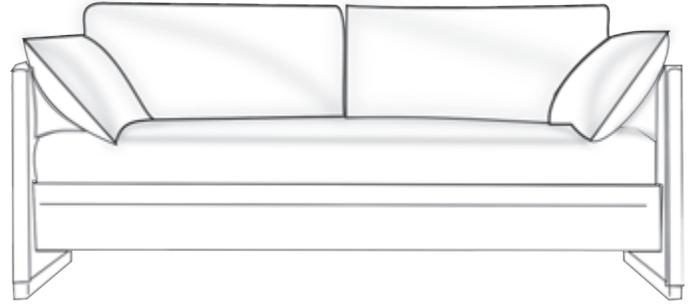
Forget the white couch hauled away in Simon's truck, your stepfather's couch you weren't to sit on.

He fooled us with his jokes: no-sitting-on-the-couch rule. Took his futon, noodle dishes, all that hippie stuff.

The crystals he carried to fight bad karma. His white wine with asparagus. His seasonings.

Champagne, croquet, bocce ball. His ironing board, starched white shirts.

His Honda we wished we'd spilled ice cream on.



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

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## After College Graduation

© by Carolyn Cecil

I bought grapefruit juice especially for you, only to be reminded that is what your sister likes. I bought cranberry juice and it was never opened. I picked out Banana Nut Crunch for you and you didn't eat breakfast. If you did, it was half a banana and out the door.



I thought we would have cooking lessons, you and me, but you ended up liking Dave's tuna salad with dill better than anything I concocted.

I thought we would go out to lunch, a semi-family outing, but later remembered that stepfamilies grow out of loss. We were all at a loss for words.

Finally on the way home Dave said to you, "You can always talk to us." It took all of lunch to blurt out those few words in the car on the way home, with me hollering over your music from the back seat as you were driving.

Then you got a job and everything seemed better. You had confidence and a smile. And all of a sudden it is your last night with us. You have a new job in Pittsburgh, four hours away, and I hear your stilettos hurrying down our wood steps. I see you carrying your green Laura Ashley bag full of clothes, some of your high heels dangling.

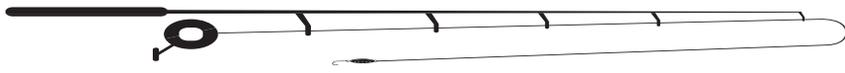
# Opening Day, Age 12

© by Sarah Russell

The ritual started days before—  
finding Grandpa's fly rod in its frayed canvas case  
and the reel, handled so the sheen, once green  
as summer oaks, was worn away. Dad gave them to me  
after Grandpa died, and I cried all over again.  
I got out the old book that showed how to tie  
the knot between line and leader, leader and hook,  
remembered Grandpa's tobacco breath, close  
as he showed me that first time. The night before,  
I dug for worms, stored them in a soup can  
by the wicker creel that smelled of grass and brook trout  
Grandpa'd caught for supper. "Don't let them suffer," he said.  
"They're too pretty to suffer," and he'd snap their necks  
and gut them there on the bank with the knife he got as a boy.  
My knife now.

At first light, I left the house, careful the screen door  
didn't bang, and headed across the field where horses  
silhouette dark in the mist. The creel on its worn strap  
banged my hip, my arms gooseflesh in the dawn. The stream  
spoke as I neared, and I tiptoed on the grassy bank.  
"Fish scatter if they feel a tremble," Grandpa said.  
"They can hear you too," he whispered.

There's a place he showed me  
where the "big one" lived—the one Grandpa  
never caught, though he got close a time or two.  
I set the creel down in the willows, fuzzy  
with pollen, and looked into the shadows where the bank cut deep.  
This wasn't the sport of men in waders, the swish and snap  
of lines cast to a river's flow. Instead I baited the hook  
and let the leader plop upstream to drift. I heard my breath,  
the hum of a dragonfly, and Grandpa whispering, "Good."



## I lost summer somewhere

© by Sarah Russell

in the wildflowers, woke  
to trees blushing at my disregard,  
wind hurrying the clouds along.  
I should have seen the signs.  
I watched geese abandon their twigged  
April nests, pin-feathered goslings  
ripple ponds listless with July. Now they rise  
gray against the gray sky, skeining south  
before first snows.

I'll stay here, I tell them. I'll air out  
cedared cardigans, chop carrots  
for the soup tonight, cross  
the threshold of the equinox,  
try not to stumble.



### Bird Footprints in the Sand

© by Carolyn Holland (bio on p. 27)

## A Gospel of Birds

© by Sarah Russell

She wasn't sure about heaven,  
but she believed in birds.  
On walks she stopped to watch  
a skein of geese, wondered  
where they were heading.  
They mate for life, she'd say.  
Crows do too. And swans  
and storks. She must have said that  
a hundred times, with a kind of wonder  
at the impossibility.

She kept five feeders on the deck,  
had a book of backyard birds  
to identify newcomers at the feast.  
She cried when a neighbor's cat  
killed a mourning dove. They mate  
for life too, she said. Listen,  
her mate is sad. That's just their call,  
I told her. No, it's different, she said.  
You can tell when birds are sad.

She died a month ago.  
I keep the feeders filled.

Sarah Russell's poetry has been published in *Kentucky Review*, *Red River Review*, *Misfit Magazine*, *Rusty Truck*, *Psalter and Lyre*, and many other journals and anthologies. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee and blogs at <https://SarahRussellPoetry.net>. Her first collection, *I lost summer somewhere*, was published in May 2019 by Kelsay Press.



**Patient Fisherman** © by Colleen Wakefield (bio on p. 27)



**Natural Sculptures at Yellow Creek** © by Colleen Wakefield (bio on p. 27)



**Bearded Snow Lady** © by *Bethany Hutira*  
(bio on p. 27)



**Portrait of Woody** © by *Tamara DiBartola*  
(bio on p. 27)



**After Nap** © by *Carolyn Holland*  
(bio on p. 27)



**Dragonfly on Bobber** © by *John Negich*  
(bio on p. 27)



**Glorious Glow of Sunset** © by *Alicia Stankay* (bio on p. 9)



**Laurel Ridge Fall** © by *John Negich* (bio on p. 27)

# The Zoo

© by Cheryl Shively

It is lovely out here  
In the screened-in gazebo.  
No bugs can get in  
To annoy us.  
The spiders and mosquitoes  
Hang on the screen in frustration.  
The squirrels and chipmunks  
Scamper about near us,  
Pausing now and then  
To check on these strange creatures  
Sitting so near them.

We could have gone  
To the zoo.  
But no,  
Instead  
We have caged ourselves  
For the animals to view.

**Cheryl Shively** has been writing poems and stories since she learned how to write. She sees poetry everywhere and in everything. She has been writing seriously since she retired.

# Humble Wonder

© by Candace Kubinec

I tried to sketch a dandelion  
An early sign of warmer days  
A memory of childhood games  
A feast for waking bumblebees

I tried to sketch a dandelion  
The bane of lawn enthusiasts  
The nemesis of gardeners  
The most persistent of the weeds

I tried to sketch a dandelion  
Its yellow rays  
Its hollow stem  
Its spiky leaves

My pencil traced across the page  
But could not capture the true wonder  
Of this small flower—so reviled,  
So revered, yet so humble

(See Candace's bio on p. 9.)



**Final Days of Indian Summer**  
© by Colleen Wakefield (bio on p. 27)



**Dandelion Feathers** © by Candace Kubinec  
(bio on p. 9)



**The Stoop** © by Michael Staresinic

## The Stoop

© by Michael Staresinic

What happened on this spot  
Stone steps wonder how when why  
Time on the threshold

**Mike Staresinic** is a Pittsburgh-born Penn State electrical engineer who leads large projects in international affairs. He has published four books and writes in his spare time.

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## Making Change(s)

© by Rod Cross

Sometimes I think I would like to wake up on a Saturday morning that can never happen again.

It would be a lovely sunny morning. While eating a breakfast of those big hay-bale hunks of shredded wheat, I would wonder what my hoodlum buddies would be doing for the day without me.

I had my day ahead of me with an optimism that came naturally to a working kid in 1965. I was working at a Boron gas station in White Oak and had to get ready.

After showering and preening my hair for fifteen minutes, I would go out to the carport and fire up my pride and joy, a Sport 90 Bridgestone motorbike. Of course the bike had to be prodded to life with a couple of stabs at the kickstarter.

From the kitchen Mom would yell, “Don’t forget your helmet.” So much for carefully combed hair with a slathering of Avon Hair Trainer.

Although I would ditch the dorky Davida pudding-bowl helmet in a culvert pipe down the road. I’d have to remember to pick it up on the way home. I hoped it didn’t rain.

The freedom of a morning on a motorbike, hoping to do it forever, was almost too much fun to be true. Down the old Lincoln Highway past Johnson’s Greenhouse, past the Rainbow Gardens Drive-In to the Boron station at the intersection of Long Run Road. I would run over the driveway hose that rang the bell a few times just to aggravate my working buddy Ernie.

Into the backroom to change into the official Boron uniform: ill-fitting unbreathable pants, a blue shirt with “Rod” over the pocket (which held a tire gauge and a pen). A steel coin changer clipped on a thick black leather belt. We knew how to make change on the fly.

Last I reluctantly put on the black bowtie and Boron hat, ready for a day of answering the bell with a courteous “Fill ‘er up?”

Then to give the customer \$1.50 worth of 31.9-cent regular leaded gasoline. Check the battery and the oil. Cars burned oil then. We kept bulk oil in glass containers at the pump.

After that I would wash the windows, front and back, while the guy’s wife would point at bug splats I had missed. Given a five spot, I would plop two quarters from the change management system on my belt and take three ones from a roll of bills that would surely get us shot today.

So the day would go. We were proud of the fact that even though we were barely old enough to drive, we could fix flats (there were many then), change tires, and change oil.

We promoted products that would make the engines of the day less prone to burning oil, wearing out valves and transmissions. In the end, though, they all did that with a regularity that would not be tolerated today.

---

*I’d go out to the  
carport and fire up my  
pride and joy, a Sport  
90 Bridgestone  
motorbike.*

---

Of course we swept the lot and washed the bay windows, and at night we washed down the garage bays with a mysterious cleaning agent that went

down the drain and into the open sewer of a stream that flowed behind the station. Out of sight, out of mind, apparently.

We always managed to have some fun, and we had favorite regular customers who were nice to us. We looked forward to servicing them again.

Occasionally the great event would happen: Cute girls or even beautiful women would come in for gas, and we would make sure their windows got really clean. Naturally we were convinced that they were flirting with us.

Eventually my shift would be over, and I would push the bike out to the pump and pre-mix oil and gas for the two-stroke engine. I wanted to make sure I had gas for the next day. Nothing was open on Sunday.

That night I would put on very fashionable khaki pants, a wide brown belt, and a light-blue Gant shirt with the collar starched very stiff. I'd place a tie tack between the top two buttons. I'd hand polish my Florsheim dark cordovan shells to a shine.

The finishing touch was the English Harrington Baracuta poplin jacket, like the one Steve McQueen would wear in *The Thomas Crown Affair* a few years later. The McKeesport uniform.

One of us would have begged for the family car, and we would spend Saturday night at the White Elephant Dance Club in White Oak. I loved the Elephant, but I wasn't proud of the fact that the membership card I had to show to get in was never issued to a black person (although Little Richard was allowed to sign there).

The music was great! We didn't drink and there were no drugs, at least as far as I knew. We danced and chatted up girls, hoping that in this innocent, safe world we would lose our innocence, safely or not.

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## *I'm pretty sure she's flirting with me.*

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And it was a wonderful world. I wasn't all that concerned with the future. I knew that we all would always have jobs. Somewhere in the future there would be a girl who would actually like me, a lot, I hoped.

Most of what happened that day is gone; I'm glad some of it is. The polluted stream that ran through White Oak, the dirty skies over McKeesport that glowed orange at night.

I do miss the ironclad stomach and perfect health that let me consume Winky's burgers and fries by the pound after work, then go over to Rainbow Gardens and ride the Wild Mouse. It was fast and scary, but I was immortal.

Now a push of the button starts any of my motorcycles, and I mix gas and oil only for a weed whacker. Cars don't leak or burn oil and last five times longer now. I can buy anything I may need on a Sunday.

It is clearly a better world in many regards, but I still shake my head in disbelief when I watch

a cashier struggle to make change, even after the computer tells them how much to give back.

I still have to pump my own gas, check my own oil, and clean my own windshields as I look down at the lovely legs of the girl who made one of my wishes come true. I'm pretty sure she is flirting with me. For forty years now she has told me she likes me a lot! ♦

**Rod Cross** loves fly fishing, riding old motorcycles, and life. Experiences and characters that he has met through these activities have gone into over forty years of journals. He hopes to excavate some stories from them that are worth your reading.

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## The Back Seat

© by Cheryl Shively

I look out the window  
Watching the houses  
And streets go by  
Wondering . . .  
This can't be me  
In the back seat,  
Playing finger bugs  
With my grandson,  
A game his grandfather invented  
To play with our son.  
I promised never to be one

I used to see them  
When I was younger,  
Small white-haired women  
Relegated to the back seat  
With the babies and the toddlers,  
The front seat no longer theirs,  
It's like sitting at the children's table  
At Thanksgiving,  
The big table denied,  
Now husband-less  
Now somehow less.  
The time has gone quickly.  
Once I would have argued  
This loss of position,  
Fought against the changes,  
Resisted the thought of aging,  
Wanting to stay where I was.  
The cycle moves on.  
I had done it to my mother,  
And she to hers.

I can be the grandma  
In the back seat,  
Relinquishing control sometimes.  
There is a comfort here.  
I give them the steering wheel.  
Someone else can drive  
For a while.

(See Cheryl's bio on p. 16.)

# Only Writers Need Worry Losing the Voices in Their Heads

© by Stacy DiPasquale

They say he's crazy  
Unfiltered  
Unpredictable.  
He talks to himself.  
Two-way dialogue  
Spits out random thoughts,  
Interrupting conversations.  
But to him it's just a fact of life,  
A means to an end  
Or to a new beginning.  
What others deem erratic  
Is an everyday norm,  
One that keeps the pencil moving,  
The ink flowing, or his fingers on the keyboard typing.  
They are the thoughts in his head,  
The good and bad ramblings  
Of a writer,  
His comfort.  
For if the voices go away,  
He fears he'll fade with them.

(See Stacy's bio on p. 20.)

## Appalachian Suite

© by Walt Peterson

Music,  
Sweetest Sister, in this poem  
is winter rain hissing from eighteen wheels  
on the interstate.  
The green glow of the instrument cluster  
ghosts a face high in the cab.  
White lines are tracer bullets  
fired into the fierce lyric of this engine.

Off on a Pennsylvania hill,  
a house sings through a single golden window:  
loneliness is stern and unforgiving  
as the anthracite darkness  
of one winter night.

The liner blinks its amber lights and is gone,

but when you awaken, Muse,  
there will be music still  
as stainless saddle tanks  
fill with diesel fuel and chrome exhaust stacks  
blue with the heat of the night passage and  
crackle as they cool. Then Apollo plays  
his light on the Kenworth logo in Georgia dawn.

**Walt Peterson** is a writer and teacher who lives in Pittsburgh.

## Your Birthday Would Be This Week

© by Steven Deutsch

Just past the tunnel  
the road rises,  
and from its crest  
I see the lights  
of an entire city  
shine like memories  
of a life left.

When did we last  
really talk,  
my brother and I?  
Even here,  
we settle into roles  
enshrined by childhood.  
You play the tough guy  
in a bad B movie,  
and I become  
the simpering sidekick.  
Our patter is so to script  
we manage not to mention  
the hospice team,  
the feeding tube,  
and morphine drip  
that keep your heart  
barely beating.

It is nearly morning  
when I reach the turnpike,  
and the road  
seems suddenly unfamiliar.  
It is only then I realize  
the lights of the city  
have gone out.

**Steve Deutsch** lives in State College, PA. He has published in *Algebra of Owls*, *The Blue Nib*, *The Muddy River Poetry Review*, *Streetlight Press*, *Nixes Mate Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Misfit Magazine* and many other print and online journals. He was nominated for Pushcart Prizes in 2017 and 2018. His chapbook *Perhaps You Can* will be published in 2019 by Kelsay Press.

# Steel Town Kid

© by *Jim Busch*

I grew up in a town where you could see the air,  
A town where you could smell the air,  
A town where you could taste the air.  
A town where tired men washed their Fords and Buicks every day  
after work

So the acid air would not peel the paint from their big fenders.  
A town where the rotten-egg sulfur smell burned the eyes.  
A town where men bragged that any doctor, anywhere in the world  
Would know where they came from  
Just from the blackness of their lungs.

Men in my town were proud of the grey skies and the smoke.  
Smoke meant jobs.  
Smoke meant a small brick home on the hill with a barbecue in the  
backyard.

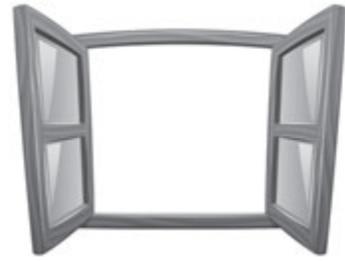
Smoke meant a new Chevy every few years.  
Smoke meant life.

Men in my town were proud of what they made.  
In shot-and-a-beer bars they talked about  
How their steel had smashed the Japs.  
How the bombs they made had crushed the Nazis.  
How their steel had built America.  
How *they* had built America!

My dad told me the first bombs of the next war would fall on our town.  
He said the end would come in a quick flash brighter than the sun.  
But my dad was wrong.  
The end did not come in a nuclear cloud.  
The end did not come in a flash.  
The end was not quick.  
The end came slowly as the money and the jobs trickled away.  
The end came when the black skies turned blue.  
The end came when the white-hot steel turned to rust.  
In a town without steel or hope,  
We can no longer see the air ... we can no longer see a future.



**Jim Busch**, retired from the newspaper industry, is a freelance writer, journalist, and public speaker who writes several monthly columns. He has published a number of nonfiction articles on western Pennsylvania people and events. Jim lives in White Oak with his wife and proofreader, Glenda.



## The Window

© by *Stacy DiPasquale*

I look outside.  
Trees sway,  
Dancing with the wind.  
Cars travel by.  
There is life.

Inside  
Words are spoken,  
But nothing is said.  
Opinions expressed,  
But nothing accomplished.

Outside  
People are laughing, crying.  
walking, running  
Escaping rain sprinkling down  
Or spinning, arms outstretched,  
Praising the droplets from the sky.

Inside  
Lights blink on and off inconsistently.  
The room is either too hot or too cold,  
Never comfortable.  
There is a longing,  
Belief there is something more.

Outside  
Birds fly free, people can go,  
Life is lived.

Inside  
Birds sit in cages.  
We sit in the cells of our work,  
Trapped.  
Our only escape  
Is the window.

**Stacy DiPasquale** of Mt. Pleasant is a member of the Greensburg Writer's Group writing fiction, poetry, and plays. She wrote as part of the Beautiful Cadaver Project to create a play performed during the 2016 Pittsburgh Fringe Festival. She is working on her first full-length play.

# I'm from Down on the Farm ...

© by Janet R. Sady

Where waving wheat ripens in the hot August sun;  
and hay is wind-rowed and rolled into bales.

I'm from lush green pastures where snowy sheep  
graze and Holstein cows chew their cud, watching  
with sad brown eyes, waiting to be milked.

I'm from gathering eggs from clucking hens and  
using the rooster's crowing as your alarm clock.

I'm from papery cornstalks whispering secrets to  
purple asters, which nod their heads at pickup trucks  
on country roads.

I'm from where rabbits and groundhogs run  
rampant and barely escape with their lives from tractors  
and mower blades.

I'm from truck patches planted with tomatoes, corn, beans and  
peas, which will be put up for winter in glass jars and freezers.

I'm from barns, silos, corncrubs, tractor and wagon sheds, which  
become hiding places for feral cats and mice.

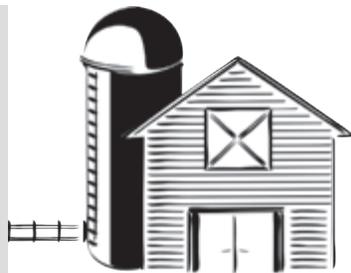
I'm from hillsides where red maple and golden oak catch fire  
in autumn and cause a farmer to stop, notice and give thanks.

I'm from where bibbed overalls and baseball hats are formal dress  
at the feed store, and rocking chairs are essentials on front porches.

I'm from helping hands and loving-kindness and friendly  
neighbors who pitch in when you need a hand, who know and  
care about each other.

I'm from down on the farm!

**Janet R. Sady** has authored ten novels and been published in twelve anthologies, and several national magazines. Her latest book, *Jan Sady's Poems for All Seasons*, can be purchased at Amazon.com along with her publications *Consider the Sparrows*, *The Journey*, and *Miracle on Green Mountain*. Contact her at janfran5033@att.net



*Life is really simple,  
but we insist on  
making it complicated.*  
—Confucius

# Nature's Spice

© by Faith J. Cataffa

Sparkling dew  
drips  
from silken petals  
stretching to feel  
the caress of the sun.  
Good morning!  
I shall scent the breeze  
sweetly  
with my intimate nectar  
that cannot be  
resisted.  
No shame!  
Lilac, Honeysuckle,  
Dianthus and Rose  
Temptresses all!



# Liquid Marble

© by Faith J. Cataffa

I do not chisel  
in hardened possibilities,  
I dance  
in fluid anonymities,  
where arc meets angle  
and they become one  
over and over  
populating the scroll.  
A calligraphy  
of single words  
intertwined  
into married thoughts  
of everything  
held in my heart.

**Faith J. Cataffa** has been writing poems and short stories since 1994. She joined Taproot Writers' Workshop in 2002 and met some talented, encouraging writers of all genres. She is currently working on her first book. She lives in Monaca, PA, with her little Yorkie mix, Penny.

# The Customer Out Back

© by Teresa Holzapfel

It had been raining like end times all day, and it didn't have the decency to pause while I ran to my car, parked across the street. I don't know who or what "it" exactly stands for in this context, but at 5:00 on Saturday night I felt like punching it squarely in the face.

There were no spaces open near the building, per usual. And my roommate had borrowed my rain jacket "just for today" ten days ago, which I remembered when I reached into my backseat and found no rain jacket.

By the time I slogged across the parking lot I was ten pounds heavier and my hair was a rat's nest.

Inside the little burger joint it wasn't much brighter. Silence reigned over the three people eating, as if the iron pall outside had slithered in and settled down to stay among the splitting vinyl booths and wobbling tables.

After I elbowed open the door marked Employees Only, I came around behind the front counter, where Annie, the manager for the evening, was waiting.

Her gaze flicked to the snarled bun dangling against my left shoulder and the saturated Camels clenched in the opposite hand. She smirked.

"Pleasant day." She eyed the grimy shoeprints chasing me as I stomped for the back. "Since you're already wet ..."

She jerked a thumb at the garbage cans behind her, overflowing from the previous shift. I felt my shoulders droop.

My eyes rolled instinctively to the drive-thru window across the way. The rain slashed at the glass, eager for some poor slob to trudge out into its hard embrace. I narrowed my eyes at the very slob reflected in the windowpane. She glared back at me, rain water tracing down her face like scars.

"You wanna give me a raise?" I scoffed.

"You wanna clock in on time for once?"

Three minutes later my wet hair was in my eyes. The trash bags were swollen to bursting and reeked like a dead animal.

Today's challenge called for speed and agility, neither of which the rolling garbage cans had. Their wheels caught in every crevice and pothole, splashing my already doused shins with cold, clammy water at each bump.

I bullied them over the parking lot to the Dumpsters amid a string of swearwords. I was so busy combining as many curses as I could think of that I didn't see the man until we were less than twenty feet apart.

Sometime in the future I would wonder how

old he really was, but it didn't occur to me then. He looked about a thousand-and-one, a scarecrow with cracked leather skin and a pair of dusty blue marbles for eyes.

Gray hair escaped from his Pirates cap and tangled with the frayed scarf around his shoulders. His thin clothes clung to him, riveted to his flesh by the rain. Scars mingled with the deep lines on his gaunt face.

He made eye contact for about five seconds. Then he bent down in the trash heaped alongside the Dumpster and fished around. A few seconds later, his trembling hands reappeared clutching a couple of plastic bottles and one aluminum can.

As I stood staring like an idiot, he waded out of the garbage to the shopping cart he had parked nearby. Putting his finds in the cart, he covered it with a tarp and pushed onward.

One wheel squeaked, but he didn't seem to notice. The man never made a sound. Without looking back, he blazed a trail across the parking lot and vanished into the rain.

Inside, I dumped the empty trash cans by the back door and raked some of the water from my hair with a quivering hand. One of the new girls frowned in sympathy as she steered a mop and bucket toward the front. I propped one foot up on the rim of the slop sink and started crushing the water from the cuffs of my pants. Annie strode past with her face in her clipboard.

"Hey, there was a homeless guy rooting through the trash out there," I said.

"Yeah, I saw him and thought of you." She didn't look up from her paperwork.

The rest of the night was dead, as most rainy evenings were. Around 10:00 I stepped out back and lit a cigarette, huddled under the little awning above the rear exit, just inside the cold curtain of rain.

The Dumpsters hunched at the dark edge of the lot like rusty trolls. They bulged with the food we had pitched throughout the night.

Burgers still in their wrappers, fries that had sat a few seconds past "freshness," entire cases of cookies discontinued because they were not as popular as the owner had hoped. Juice boxes and applesauces from kids' meals that kids had not touched.

The homeless man had been up to his knees in it, his cracked, bloody hands scraping up some bottles and a can.

My cigarette suddenly tasted bad. I ground it out and went back inside. ♦

**Teresa Holzapfel** is a spring 2017 graduate of Clarion University of Pennsylvania, with a BA in English. She is currently an editorial assistant for the publishing office of the American Economic Association.

# Rainstorm at Trillium

© by Christine Aikens Wolfe

Clouds lower outside our skylight windows  
Third floor, a Madwoman's loft, writing spot for me,  
and—for the two of us—a space to read, make love or sleep.

Rain runs in my mind this afternoon  
I'm in a silvery mood ...  
wind begins it,  
trees quake our giant backyard cherry for one  
sparrows chitter  
and desert apple tree in our driveway  
for the safety of spruce in our neighbor's yard.

My favorite squirrel  
chubby opinionated "baby"  
shakes his tiny fist  
cries like an infant  
whirls his tail, frayed and bitten  
as if he's argued with one too many large birds—

he scampers up our cherry to his sloppy nest  
about 30 feet above the grass  
below him, robins hunker down among the leaves.  
he waves up at God as if he could stop the dripping ...

Not at all. A downpour envelopes his tree, his nest,  
drums on our skylights like snare drumrolls  
steady patter now a rhythmic bass.

My fingers desert laptop keys  
I snap, snap click nails on the glass coffee table  
overhead drumbeat on skylight crescendos

I laugh  
and rise to dance.



# Francis

© by Christian Reifsteck

Francis tilted his head back to view  
the wide Nebraska sky. The morning  
stars were bright as his breath hung  
above his furrowed brow. This was a  
quiet time, his favorite time, when  
feeding the pigs came before his first cup  
of coffee.

Francis knew a thing or two of pigs,  
of earth, of the rust that gathers on old  
tools left in the shed. To how many sows  
had his callused hands been a midwife?  
How many hogs had he butchered and  
cleaned?

In January in Nebraska, cold is  
a noun that flattens itself against the  
empty plains and stretches far into the  
corners of mowed and vacant fields. If a  
man can dig deep enough into the frozen  
sod, he may find some relief from the  
loneliness.

This was all Francis knew. This was  
all he cared to know because the stars  
and pigs and fields were everything in  
his gaze. And when Francis looked into  
the eyes of his pigs, it wasn't money or  
food or property he saw, though the pigs  
were all of these things. It was the stars  
and fields and himself he saw.

This morning, like every morning,  
Francis paused beneath the sky before  
entering the barn, where he breathed in  
their squalid bodies and looked down at  
the squealing, clambering mass.

Bowing his head and spreading out  
his hands, he prayed in wide arcs as  
a baptism of grain rained down upon  
them.

**Christian Reifsteck's** work appeared  
in *The Loyalhanna Review* in 2013. His  
book *Turning Turf* features poems and  
photographs from Ireland. It is available  
from Shanti Arts Press. He lives in  
Selinsgrove. View his work at  
[www.illuminatedmanuscript.wordpress.com](http://www.illuminatedmanuscript.wordpress.com).

**Christine Aikens Wolfe** released a full-length book of  
poetry, *Garlanding Green* (Dos Madres Press) in August  
2018. Her poetry appears in *Chapter & Verse* (*Pittsburgh  
City Paper*), *Loyalhanna Review*, *Poetry* magazine, and  
*Sonnetto Poesia*. She's anthologized in *Phoenix Rising from  
the Ashes*, *Fission of Form*, and *Love & Ensuing Madness*.

*Art lets us find ourselves  
and lose ourselves at the  
same time.*  
—*Thomas Merton*

# Mildred McAfoose

© by Sara Rhodes

Mildred McAfoose died because of a broken foot.

Well, that isn't quite right. It wasn't actually her foot. It was Stanley Westman's foot, and it was fifteen years before Mildred died.

Stanley was eleven at the time, and he was being chased by the Ammermans' dog, Peaches, the meanest Pomeranian that anyone would ever meet. He had been delivering newspapers on his normal route: up Sutter Street, across Welker Avenue and then down Mechanic Street.

The Ammermans lived at the corner of Sutter and Welker, and their Pomeranian had developed a taste for paperboy. Stanley had gotten the job only because Peaches had bitten the last paperboy, Jimmy Robbins, and his mother made him quit.

Stanley had just crossed to Welker when he heard the yip. Turning, he saw Peaches rounding the corner of the Ammermans' ugly pink house and charging the path to him. Taking off running, Stanley had his eye on the prize: Mrs. Bevington's house.

She was the pastor's wife and hated Peaches even more than Stanley did. Peaches had a tendency to urinate in her petunias. He knew he would find refuge there. Mrs. Bevington had made Reverend Bevington put up a fence and gate.

Stanley ran. Four houses. His feet moved as fast as they were able. He looked behind him to see Peaches gaining ground, teeth bared, growling viciously for such a small dog.

Three houses. He was so close. Two houses. He would have made it if Mrs. Coleman hadn't let her son Billy out to ride his bike.

The boys, bicycle, and beast collided. Mrs. Coleman came out shrieking when she saw the blood pouring from Billy's nose. Mrs. Ammerman appeared to rescue her darling Peachy. And Mrs. Bevington ran out of her house, yelling at Mrs. Ammerman about her demon dog.

---

## *Their Pomeranian had developed a taste for paperboy.*

---

It was only when Stanley looked down that he realized his right foot was at an unnatural angle, and a bone was poking out of his skin.

Stanley didn't remember much after that because he fainted. Waking up at the hospital, he saw his foot in a cast and his mother sitting at his bedside. She informed him that he was no longer a paperboy.

All he had wanted to do was make enough money to buy a bicycle. In fact, he'd wanted the bicycle so he could maneuver around the Ammermans'

Pomeranian.

It was two weeks until summer vacation, and now summer was ruined. No longer could he dream of riding a bike to the store. No games of baseball at the field. No swimming at the pool. A cast and crutches were his summer. A wave of grief crushed the eleven-year-old boy.

It was his mother who tried to find a solution. The library was looking for volunteers. They had received a donation of old books and needed help sorting them. So started Stanley's summer as a book sorter.

Oddly enough, he enjoyed it! He found the smells of old books alluring and the mementoes tucked away intriguing.

He especially loved the letters. He always found letters; people tucked them in as bookmarks and forgot them.

One letter was from a man named J to a woman named M. J loved M and M loved J, but M was to be married to someone named R and J to someone named A, and everything was confusing. Stanley didn't understand why J and M couldn't just get married if that was what they wanted so much.

He was supposed to label everything that wasn't a book so the historical society could take it to the town museum. But for some reason, he didn't want to put the letter between J and M with the stack. He slid it into his pocket and returned home.

Six years would go by before that letter would pop up again. Stanley had stuck it on a shelf in his room. But now Stanley was in high school and had a girlfriend.

Karen Goldberg had never met a piece of gossip that she didn't want to share, and she had learned the craft of gossip from her mother. Mrs. Goldberg was known to prowl the funeral parlors, the deli, and the grocery aisles in search of secrets to share.

So when Karen found the letter among papers on her boyfriend's shelves, she asked him about it. He told her the tale of Peaches and his broken ankle. Karen laughed. Stanley forgot about it.

But Karen did not forget gossip.

Next time Stanley brought Karen back to his house, he went downstairs to get them some soda. Karen pocketed the letter.

She showed it to her mother, who started making a list and asking questions.

"Stanley found this six years ago? It must have been from a book donated after the rummage sale. Hmm ... Why were they so secretive, I wonder? Initials? It's like they were expecting someone to read their secrets!"

"Mom, we are reading their secrets."

"Well, yes dear, but how would they know that!"

Hours went by as they hunched over the kitchen table, trying to uncover the identities of J and M. Her father walked by, glanced over their shoulders, and shook his head. Finally they determined when the letter was written and created a list of names.

“James Carter, James Frederick, James Zooke, John Edwards, Joseph Kapitsky. Those are our men, Karen!” Mrs. Goldberg threw her pen down in unconcealed delight.

But Karen knew her mother had forgotten one: her father, Joseph Goldberg.

The women were easier to list, because there were only three options: Millie Zelner, Margaret Shaker, and Mildred McAfoose.

Now what should they do? Mrs. Goldberg shrugged. “The satisfaction is in knowing, Karen.”

Much like Stanley, Karen forgot about the letter. It wasn’t until nine years later, when her father became sick, that it came up again.

He looked so weak, lying in the hospital bed, wires and IVs strapped to him, that she didn’t know if he was awake when she sat next to him. But he moved his hand to hers and squeezed, and she knew he was there.

And then he brought it up.

“Do you remember that letter?” he asked, his voice raspy.

“What letter?”

“From J to M.”

The memory jolted her. She hadn’t realized that he had been listening to her and her mother gossip. “Yes, I remember.”

Joseph Goldberg sighed. “I thought you might. Can I tell you a story?”

Karen stiffened but managed a nod.

He swallowed and told her about his love for Mildred McAfoose. It was a hard, strange thing for her to hear her father declare his love for someone who wasn’t her mother, but she listened as well as she could.

He had fallen in love with Mildred, but his Jewish parents and her Catholic parents had forbidden them to see one another, setting them up with Annabelle Levenpitz and Roger McAfoose.

He told her how he had written the letter but never mailed it. “What good would it have done?” he asked. But it was not a question.

A long silence fell.

“I did love your mother. I promise.” Tears welled in her father’s eyes.

“I know.”

With those words, Joseph Goldberg breathed his last breath.

Karen felt a weight. She could not share her mother’s grief in the same way. She knew a secret she could not divulge, a burden she would have to bear on her own.

She was readying herself for the funeral when she found the letter tucked in her dresser. Suddenly

she knew where to put the letter that had for so long been homeless.

She stood by her mother’s side at the funeral. So many people had come to bring comfort that she barely registered their faces anymore. But she recognized Mildred McAfoose instantly when she walked into the room.

---

## *She knew a secret she could not divulge.*

---

An irrational rage boiled inside of Karen. She wanted to lash out at this woman. How dare she come here! How dare she encroach on this magic moment in their lives.

Karen remembered her father dancing with her mother in the living room: was that a lie? Her father’s laugh at her mother’s gossipy ways: was that a lie? Was everything a lie?

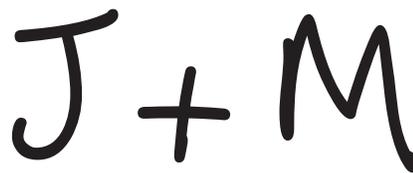
But when Karen looked into the woman’s eyes, her anger dissipated.

Mildred McAfoose did not know of the letter; she did not know Joseph Goldberg had proclaimed his love for her. She did not know the weight that Karen was bearing. She knew only of a man she had once loved and lost, and she wanted to say goodbye.

Karen had been going to place the letter with her father, to bury the secret with the man who wrote it. Instead, she asked Mildred to walk with her.

Outside, the sunlight basked everything in a soft glow. Without a word, Karen gave the letter to Mildred, the person who should have received it in the first place, years ago. Then she returned to her mother’s side.

The next week Karen opened the paper to see an obituary for Mildred McAfoose. She had been found dead, near a grave in the cemetery, with a rumpled, tear-stained letter in her hand. ♦

The image shows the letters 'J + M' written in a simple, hand-drawn style. The 'J' is on the left, followed by a plus sign, and the 'M' is on the right. The lines are thick and slightly irregular, giving it a personal, handwritten feel.

**Sara Rhodes** graduated from Indiana University of Pennsylvania with a degree in English education in 2011. She lives with her husband John, son Seth, and dog Obi in DuBois and enjoys reading and writing.

# The Last Laugh

© by Alicia Stankay

I smiled when I saw my friend's photo on the front page of the local newspaper. A minute later, the newspaper fell to the floor from my nerveless fingers. Tears slid down my cheeks as I stared blindly out the window.

Lainie Burrows, my dear friend who had offered to edit my book for free, had just published my book to rave reviews. The only problem was that she had used her name as the author on *my* book!

After the first shock, I called her, only to be told by a tinny voice that the number was no longer in service. No problem, I thought, because I knew where she lived. But in front of her house, a For Sale sign greeted me. Marching up the sidewalk to the door, I stabbed the doorbell repeatedly. When that didn't work, I started pounding on the door.

---

*I think what I need now,  
besides my car keys,  
is a good lawyer.*

---

"Miss, miss," shouted a man. I turned in aggravation to see whoever was trying to get my attention.

"What is it?" I demanded since my polite gene had deserted me.

"Lainie is gone. Moved away. Flew the coop."

I recognized the man as the next-door neighbor I had waved to a few times over the years when I visited my friend. Fortyish, not great looking but decent, and normally with a smile on his face as he waved back to me.

"Where did she go?" I heard the shrillness in my voice, but I couldn't help it.

He shrugged. "Sorry, but I wasn't one of her bosom buddies. I thought you were."

I snarled a wordless reply and stalked back to my compact car.

He followed me and said, "Perhaps you could tell me why you're so upset. It seems more than the fact that your friend has left without a forwarding address."

"You'd be fighting mad too, if one of your best friends claimed to be the author of the book you wrote!"

I tried to get away quickly before I disintegrated again, but I couldn't find the key fob in my purse. I sighed and leaned back against the car. "I think what I need now, besides my car keys, is a good lawyer."

"Maybe I can help," he said.

I laughed. "How? Do you have my keys?"

He placed a hand on my arm. "No, but I am a good lawyer."

And so began my very interesting relationship with Matthew Newman.

Although Lainie had the most recent printout of my manuscript, I had an earlier edited version with corrections. I also had everything on a flash drive.

Unfortunately, she had a duplicate flash drive I'd given her in good faith. Still, I was determined that Elaine B. Christie (really, Christie?) would not get away with this fraud.

Matt had me dig out every single note I had ever made about my book, *The Champagne Caper*, and asked who else had read the book or parts thereof. I gave him the names of three people in my writers' group who had read the first several chapters.

When Lainie offered to read my book, though, she suggested she should be the exclusive reader so I wouldn't get confused by too many opinions. Ha! A sure sign she'd planned to steal it all along.

Armed with everything I had to prove I was the author, Matt filed the information and made a claim of stolen property to the court.

That was when I got a call from Lainie, and butter wouldn't have melted in her mouth. She proposed a meeting at her attorney's office, but I nixed that idea. I insisted she come to my house—alone. She didn't like it, and she made me agree that my lawyer wouldn't be present either.

I really wanted a private showdown, just the two of us, but I'm not a total idiot.

I rolled my eyes when the Mercedes-Benz pulled into my driveway. I'd forgotten how superficial she was. It was something we always laughed about before, but I wasn't laughing now.

---

*I really wanted  
a private showdown,  
just the two of us,  
but I'm not a total idiot.*

---

I was ready to chew Lainie up and spit her out (to finally get rid of that nasty taste in my mouth). Nonetheless, I pasted on a dazzling smile when I opened the door.

Lainie stood on the top step, her bright attitude from the phone now rather subdued. She glanced around uncertainly as if looking for safety. I grabbed her arm and yanked her inside, slamming the door behind her.

"I'm so glad you came so that we can settle this problem, one way or the other."

Straightening up to her full 5 feet 2 inches, she said haughtily, "I don't know what you're talking

about. I came to make you an offer that's much to your advantage."

"Do tell!" I exclaimed. "Let's go sit in my den. I'll call the newspaper so you can explain how you stole my manuscript."

"Don't be silly." Lainie allowed me to lead her into the den and sat in the chair I indicated.

"However," she continued, "I'm willing to give you a 25% cut of all the royalties from the book."

I laughed, of course. "That's so generous of you, considering the book is mine and I should be getting 100% of the royalties."

"You would never have gotten published without the enormous amount of editing I did. I saw the glimmer of a great book in your writing, but I'm the one who took that tiny nugget and polished it into gold." She sighed. "Okay, 40%. But that's my final offer."

"I might accept, but I want you to admit it's my book," I said. I leaned back on my desk as she shifted her eyes away from me. "Otherwise, I'll make a stink for years to come and your success will be tainted."

She huffed and looked around the room before saying, "First I'll need everything that proves the book is yours."

I smiled and picked up a pile of folders topped by a flash drive. "It's right here."

She reached for them. "Yes, I stole your book. I knew that if you were lucky enough to publish it, you'd never give me what I deserved."

She grabbed the files from my hand and laughed. "And I lied about sharing the royalties," she said as she ran down the hall.

"Guess what?" I shouted as a man stepped in front of her before she reached the door. "I sort of lied, too. Meet my lawyer's friend, Detective Henderson."

◆



(See Alicia's bio on p. 9.)

*... if you wait  
till the end of the story,  
you get to see good people  
live happily ever after.*

—*Cat Stevens*  
*British Musician*

## Ligonier Valley Writers Calendar of Events

*Please check [www.LVWonline.org](http://www.LVWonline.org) for  
the latest info and date confirmations.*

— 2019 —

- **August 15.** Deadline for Flash Fiction Contest submissions. Cash prizes, readings of winning entries. This year's topic is elves and fairies.
- **September 15, 3:00-5:00 p.m.** Annual Ligonier Valley Writers potluck picnic. St. Michael's Church, Rector. Attendees are invited to read from their work in progress.
- **October.** Readings of the winning Flash Fiction stories at local venues. Details TBA.
- **November 17.** Workshop on reading like a writer, taught by Jim Busch. We'll decipher our favorite authors' techniques by studying their themes, word choice, and sentence structure.
- **December 8, 3:00-5:00 p.m.** Annual LVW Christmas Party. St. Michael's Church, Rector

— 2020 —

- **March 11.** Deadline for Student Poetry Contest entries from students in grades 4-12. Cash prizes in 30 categories, no entry fee, and an awards ceremony and booklet of all the winning poems. Download entry forms from [LVWonline.org](http://LVWonline.org).
- **April 26, 4:00-5:00 pm.** Student Poetry Awards at Barnes & Noble. The winning poets in grades 4-12 will read their work to the audience.
- **May 1.** *Loyalhanna Review* submission deadline. (Reading period is February 1-May 1.)
- Check [LVWonline.org](http://LVWonline.org) for guidelines.
- **July (Date TBA), 7:00-9:00 p.m.** *Loyalhanna Review* publication party. Ligonier Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art (SAMA).
- **August 15.** Deadline for Flash Fiction Contest entries. Three cash prizes plus three Honorable Mentions, no entry fee, readings of the six winning stories, and publication at LVW's website. Contest opens April 15.

## Author and Artist Bios

**Tamara DiBartola** views the arts as a blessing. She believes when you shine light into life's brokenness, you uncover the goodness to uplift and inspire. She hopes her art can be a positive contribution.

**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.

**Carolyn Holland**, a writeographer with journalism and photography experience, is writing a historic novel set in the 1790s and compiling a collection of her cat and dog stories. She's facilitated the Foothills Writers group at the Coffee Bean Café on Route 30 in Latrobe, PA, since 2006.

**Bethany Hutira**, an eighth-grade language arts teacher, enjoys reading fantasy novels and capturing magical moments she discovers daily.

**John Negich** is a member of the PA Outdoor Writers Association. He has published a novel called *Retribution*; a book of short stories called *Why I Hunt and Fish*; and a book of poetry called *My Life in Rhymes*, as well as articles.

**Helen Collins Sitrler**, retired from the English Department at IUP, enjoys traveling, reading, and writing.

**Colleen Wakefield** enjoys taking photos of beautiful landscapes, flowers, and still lifes. She loves the challenge and the continuous learning of photography. The post-production process excites her immensely. She has sold her works in art shows and venues in Indiana County.

## Join Us at LVW

Ligonier Valley Writers is a nonprofit group serving writers and readers throughout southwestern Pennsylvania. Membership provides practical tools and creative inspiration whether you are published, prepublished, or a dedicated reader.

LVW has been bringing workshops, talks, and publication opportunities to writers and readers in the area for more than thirty years. It offers events throughout the year, including the student poetry contest for poets in grades 4-12, the flash fiction contest, and workshops on the craft and business of writing.

Membership is only \$30 a year and provides discounts to most LVW events. Download a membership application at [LVWonline.org](http://LVWonline.org). To be notified of upcoming events, send your email address to [jgallagher@LHTOT.com](mailto:jgallagher@LHTOT.com). One of our biggest projects recently is *Phantom Detectives at Risk*, the fourth anthology of mystery short stories published by Greensburg Writers' Group as a fundraiser for LVW. It's available for \$15 at most LVW events.

## The Phantom Detectives Return

One of LVW's biggest, recent projects is *Phantom Detectives at Risk*, the fourth book in a collection of mystery short stories published by the Greensburg Writers' Group as a fundraiser for LVW.

Detective Brendan Manelli is aided by an eclectic band of authors called Sleuths and Serpents, who meet behind a red door in the library of a fictional town called Falls Bend, a place much like Ligonier, except this library shares a building with the police station.

Each story features characters from this fictional writers' group, the Sleuths and Serpents, who solve unsolvable cases with help from the unlikeliest corners of the paranormal. Each writer is inspired by a different sidekick, who abets their quest for answers (though there is still a lot of legwork involved).

The writers have been told never to put themselves in danger. They are supposed to call Detective Manelli instead, but sometimes they don't listen. The result, of course, is fun for the readers with *Phantom Detectives at Risk*.

The book contains ten short stories by local authors—Thomas Beck, Marge Burke, Linda Ciletti, Stacy DiPasquale, Dan Ekis, Judith Gallagher, Gretchen Landis, Barb Miller, Mary Ann Mogus, and Ronald J. Shafer—plus a poem by Judith Sturgis.

These stories run the gamut from whimsical to noir. A Lovecraftian piece looks at the evil within a local woods. A larger-than-lap cat enmeshes his owner in a drug case.

As one character says, "Weird things do happen in Falls Bend." GWG members are as unique as the members of the Sleuths and Serpents featured in the book. Many of them also belong to Ligonier Valley Writers: thus their generosity of time and talent in creating this collection and donating their work.

The book is available for \$15 at most LVW events and in the Book Nook at Craftique in Greensburg. Other books by LVW and GWG members are also available for purchase there.

Spring Blossoms © by Helen Sittler





Leaving Yellow Creek © by Colleen Wakefield