



The Loyalhanna Review

2018



Crooked Tree Trail

© by Alicia Stankay

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Ligonier Valley Writers presents
the 2018 edition of its literary magazine,
The Loyalhanna Review.

From the Editor

Ligonier Valley Writers began in 1986. For thirty-two years, the group has been educating and encouraging writers. For twenty-seven years, *The Loyalhanna Review* has shared individuals' artistic, poetic, and storytelling talents with the southwestern Pennsylvania community. This year we've helped local authors launch their books to the public and offered a workshop on writing your credo at St. Michael's of the Valley. At Fort Ligonier, our guest speakers taught us how to use history to make writing come alive, and we partnered with the Westmoreland Museum of American Art to guide writers to "Step into the Art" in creating their poetry. As always, our Student Poetry Contest Awards ceremony at Barnes & Noble was standing room only. Entries came from far and wide for the Flash Fiction contest. Our *LR* publication party, fall potluck picnic, and holiday party offered good food and camaraderie.

Challenges remain. Without more active members and generous donors to bolster shrinking finances, all the opportunities that Ligonier Valley Writers and *The Loyalhanna Review* provide will disappear. We live in a world where it takes money to make money, even to hold a fundraiser. We need your involvement. We ask for your support. And we thank you for everything you've done to keep LVW a vital part of the community.

Ruth McDonald, Editor-in-Chief

Special Thanks to LVW Contributors and Friends

Editorial Staff of the *Loyalhanna Review*, especially Judith Gallagher

Michele Jones at AIW Communications and Counseling	Westmoreland Museum of American Art and Joan McGarry	Sharon Full	Dominic Potts
Barnes & Noble	Jim and Glenda Busch	Judith Gallagher	Sally Rager
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St. Michael's of the Valley Church	Linda Ciletti	Ed Kelemen	Bruce and Sally Shirey
Smail Auto Group	Tom and Nancy Clark	Ruth McDonald	Cheryl Shively
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Art Credits

Front Cover: **Blue Bicycle** © by Candace Kubinec (See Candace's bio on p. 21.)

Inside Front Cover: **Crooked Tree Trail** © by Alicia Stankay (See Alicia's bio on p. 14.)

Inside Back Cover: **Summer Joy** © by Susan Potts — Back Cover: **Crown of Glory** © by Thomas Beck

Tom Beck is a U.S. Navy veteran, and BSN graduate of Penn State. After 35 years of nursing, he retired and set sail on a second career as a writer, publishing stories and three novels in a series about a retired homicide cop from Pittsburgh.

Tikvah Feinstein, the longtime editor of *Taproot*, has a personal essay forthcoming in *Collateral Damage*, a Pirene's Fountain Anthology. Her short story "The Purpose of Tears" won a 2017 award from the Westmoreland Arts & Heritage Festival.

Louisa Fordyce is a recently retired professor of English who spends her time gardening, reading, walking the dogs, riding bicycles with her husband, Ron, and performing volunteer work. She is also now able to clean her house on a regular basis!

Susan Potts is a retired secretary who is enjoying spending time with her husband, Joe, and her three beautiful grandchildren. Her hobbies include genealogy, photography, and collecting vintage bridal photographs.

Colleen Wakefield is passionate about photography and gardening. Her work reflects the beautiful countryside of western PA and her majestic jungle of flowers in the front yard. She has shown her works at Indiana Regional Medical Center and the Artist Hand gallery.

The Flight of the Emerald Kite

© by Joe Potts

When I was about seven years old, I received a kite as a present. I don't recall who gave it to me, or the occasion. I remember the kite vividly, though, and I especially remember the long-awaited day my kite finally took flight.

The kite came unassembled, of course, and half the fun was putting it together. It was a large kite, at least to a seven-year-old, and made of the finest shiny plastic that was used only for the best toys. You had to bend the wooden slats just right to get the proper shape, and caution was needed to avoid tearing the plastic as you stretched it over the frame.

My dad helped me with the trickier parts; his manual dexterity far exceeded mine. Dad also fashioned a kite tail from old ties and other pieces of clothing.

"That's a nice-looking kite," he said. "We used to fly box kites when I was a kid."

I didn't like box kites. They were—well, boxy. They were square. I didn't want a square kite; I wanted a cool kite.

When completed, my kite was absolutely magnificent. It was deep emerald green, with a black fighter jet emblazoned on its face. I propped it up on top of my tall dresser, so it gave the appearance of flying through my bedroom. My pulse quickened every time I entered the room and saw it. My kite seemed to be patiently waiting to soar skyward into the upper reaches of the atmosphere. Its day would surely come, but for now, it was too wonderful a toy to expose to the perils of flight.

For the next two or three years, the Emerald Beauty was my prized possession, proudly on display for all visitors to gawk at in wonder. There were treeless hills near us that were ideal for kite-flying, but the time wasn't right. To everything in this universe, there is a time and a place, and my kite was biding its time.

When I was about ten, we moved to a rural area north of Pittsburgh, with endless open spaces interspersed with woods and thickets. There were plenty of places to have all the boyhood adventures you could stand. My kite continued its bedroom reign—a different bedroom, but the same vantage point.

Some cousins of mine lived nearby, and I often played with Daniel, who was my age. We were cut from totally different cloth—I was more city, he was all country—but we found many adventures to share. One warm late-spring day, we stood on a hill above his house and the breeze moved over us, he remarked that it was a perfect day for flying a kite. He was right. I knew the time had come.

I ran home, galloped up the steps to my room, and took the Emerald Beauty down from my dresser.

"Mom! Where's my kite string?" I hollered, with the faith that boys have in their moms, who always know where everything is. My parents had bought me a huge spool of string, seven or eight miles at least. The spool had been set aside until the time was right for the flight of the emerald kite.

"It's in your top dresser drawer, where it always is," said Mom. "Is today the day?"

I grabbed the string, ran downstairs, stopping to update my mother. "Today's the day! Me and Daniel are going to fly it!"

"Don't fly it near the wires!" she shouted as I ran out the door. Honestly, sometimes moms think their kids are brainless. I was about to ask if I should put a key on the tail, but I thought better of it. It wasn't even raining.

It didn't take long to get the Emerald Beauty airborne. I slowly gave it more line as it rose into the clear blue sky. This kite was a natural, born to take to the stratosphere. It flew higher and higher, rising over the valley that sprawled before us. Then it crossed the road and sailed past the woods beyond. Heaven knew what lay there; I certainly didn't.

I let out more and more string until I came to the end of the spool. My beautiful kite was so far away I couldn't tell it was my kite anymore. It had become an indistinct dot in the sky.

"Daniel," I said, "it will take forever to reel this thing back in!" It was getting on toward twilight, and I didn't think my mom would approve of nocturnal kite-flying.

After a thoughtful pause, Daniel looked at me with a somber face. "I think we need to set it free," he said. "It's being held back by the string. Let it fly as high and far as it wants to."

*This kite was a natural,
born to soar.*

I knew Daniel was right. My kite didn't have a jet on it for no reason. It was a natural, born to soar. I would miss seeing it looking down at me from the top of the dresser, but I knew it shouldn't be a prisoner any longer.

I took out the penknife I always carried. "Daniel, let's do it," I said, my voice trembling just a bit. "And let's give it a proper sendoff." With all the solemnity I could muster, I unsheathed the knife and held the blade to the line. After hesitating for several seconds, I cut the string. I raised my right hand to my forehead (after sheathing the knife), giving the Emerald Beauty my best salute.

My cherished kite flew off into the wild blue yonder, rising higher and getting smaller with each

passing minute. Finally it disappeared from view, never to be seen again.

At least, never to be seen again by me. My room seemed awfully empty for a while without the Emerald Beauty on its perch of honor. I truly missed it. I was learning at a young age that even inanimate objects can hold a place in our hearts.

I've often wondered about the destiny of my kite. I hope it didn't fall into a tree in the woods. I hope it came in for a soft landing and was found by a kite enthusiast. I hope it was taken to a new home to delight another kid as it looked down from a tall dresser, its sleek black jet looking like it was breaking the sound barrier, even while standing still.

Whatever its fate, my kite had its shining moment in the sun. It thrilled a young boy as only the most terrific toys can, and I have never forgotten the excitement of the flight of the emerald kite. ♦

Joe Potts has had articles published in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, the *Tribune Review*, and the *Laurel Mountain Post*. His fiction can be heard on WAOB Audio Theater. Joe's humor blog is at www.joepottzone.com. He lives in Harrison City with his wife, Susan.

Companion

© by Cheryl Shively

I feel the familiar grayness settle in,
An old companion returning.

I wrap myself in it,
Sinking into its depths
As into a much-worn shawl.

I won't fight it
As I do at other times.
It suits me on this rainy day.

I need what it has to offer,
A place where I do not have to
Pretend that I am all right.

Cheryl Shively says, "I have been writing poems and stories for myself since I learned to write. I see poetry everywhere and in everything. I am now writing seriously since I retired."

Troutmas Morning

© by Laura Lovic-Lindsay

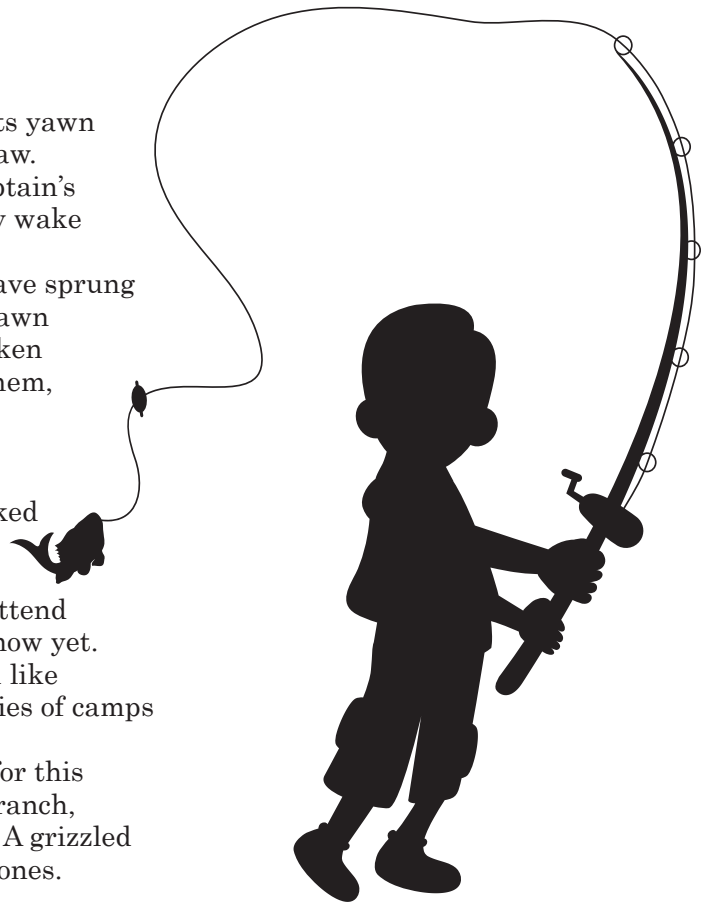
Troutmas morning begins the evening before, canvas tents yawn open, poles wedged in the light mud gifted by winter's thaw. The people light fires to burn all night, sigh into their captain's chairs, and brag to one another of catches long past. They wake

the children just after five a.m. to shop the booths that have sprung up in the past hour: rods and baits, banners to surf the dawn winds, boning knives, fried funnel cakes, have a photo taken with the Salmon of Knowledge—the eldest man among them,

dressed in fins and aqua-and-sage sequins. His wife stirs the coals to fry the first caught, of which all will partake, plates in holy hands. At seven o'clock, the booths are packed away and all have settled creekside and begun the quiet

that marks their morning. Children are solemn as they attend their rods, shushing the littlest among them who don't know yet. The campfire smoke blues the valley in indigo-and-denim like an old cloak. A priest in chest-waders treads the boundaries of camps

and the fishers wheel their ice-heavy chests toward him for this Blessing of Trout. Five crows trade struts on a low tree branch, awaiting the heads, eyes they will inherit late in the day. A grizzled groundhog pokes out, waiting his chance to gnaw those bones.



Laura Lovic-Lindsay lives on a moss-rich, enchanted patch of fairyland where she holds bonfires for friends to sing and dance around. There is almost no truth to the story that if you Google her name, recipes for turning lead to gold will appear.

A Box of Dreams ... A Dose of Reality

© by Nancy Clark

The Sunday edition of *The Pittsburgh Press* had two features in the 1950s that enraptured my sister and me: the comics and the Carlisle's Bridal Shop ads. Nancy and Sluggo were amusing; but it was the black-and-white sketches of bridal dresses in the Carlisle's ad that mesmerized us two pre-teens. We spent hours concocting ethereal visions of our someday-weddings that would outshine that of the young Queen of England, Elizabeth II. We clipped the ads for gowns that caught our collective breath and saved them in a shoebox we kept under our shared double bed.

Sis and I were fiber savvy. Our seamstress mom taught us the tactile differences between our cotton feed-sack garments and satiny blanket binding. We valued wool for snow pants and flannel for pajamas, knew a ruffle from a flounce, recognized the difference between a sweetheart and a scoop neckline, and knew the difference between petticoat lace and our lace-curtain bridal veils.

By our mid-teens, Connie, 20 months my junior, was taller and more developed than I was. She salivated over the long, lean lines of body-hugging satin sheaths, whereas I swooned over every Cinderella-like, bright white, lace-covered bouffant skirt that would swing and sway at *the Ball*. Our favorites were always floor-length and featured neck-to-hip satin-covered buttons in the back. We were beguiled by gauzy tulle cascading from bejeweled crowns, and we gazed into our bedroom mirror to practice the demure, doe-eyed look of the models in the sketches. Stunning in our dream attire, we'd surely be featured in the *Press's* rotogravure.

Carlisle's creations carried price tags of three and (heavens to Murgatroyd!) four figures, oceans away from our five-and-dime bargain-basement world.

"There must be gold in them thar hems," Dad would tease. His assessment did not dash our visions of elegant, candlelit venues far removed from the local union hall or beer gardens where five-piece, polka bands played ethnic waltzes and *chadushes*.

Fast forward to December 10, 1960: I'm 18 years old and about to marry my best friend during his 10-day Christmas military leave. Time is of the essence. What with getting a license and blood test, handwriting a dozen invites, and packing up our worldly goods for the four-day, 2,300-mile drive to our new home in Arizona, there's no time to sigh over a shoebox or lament the lack of funds for a dream dress. My fabled illusions make way for reality as

Dad and I chase a Penn Traffic department store bargain-basement ad, where, as promised, we find "discontinued wedding dresses priced as low as \$50."

Faster forward to December 31, 1960. The sanctuary of the church is dressed for the holidays, the altar covered with red poinsettias that match Sis's maid-of-honor chiffon street-length dress (Montgomery Ward, \$25.99). The family's Brownie box camera is loaded with a roll of Kodak color film, and two dozen guests occupy the pews.

*I'm 18 years old
and about to marry
my best friend.*

Lunch will be served at noon in a church basement, sans amenities such as music, electric lights, running water, or an indoor bathroom. The snowy New Year's Eve day will be tempered by the warmth of family and whatever heat radiates from the monstrous coal furnace located next to a kerosene cookstove in the church's makeshift kitchen.

Mom's oven-fried chicken and homemade potato salad highlight the menu, and we'll feast at tables covered with white paper and sprinkled with blue and gold confetti. A simple three-tiered cake, which at \$30 strains the wedding budget, will be cut for dessert.

As for *THE DRESS*: An obvious orphan on PT's sale rack. The stiff lace, scooped neck, dirty-white little number with semi-bouffant skirt was marked down in \$10 increments from an original \$130 to "now, only \$30." My bridal ensemble also features a veil (with small tear) attached to a faux-satin-covered cardboard crown edged in flaking "pearls" and sequins (\$15) and white pumps with one scuffed toe (\$10).

Yet, as I stand here at the altar next to my dreamy, blue-eyed Army boy (dressed in a black wool suit—and white socks), I feel as regal as any fairytale princess in Carlisle's ads. It's perfect for my dream day. After all, who am I to outshine the Queen of England? ♦

Nancy Clark celebrates 57 years of marriage with her hubby, Tom. They have three children, three grandchildren, and two great-grands, with one on the way. A voracious reader, she knits, crochets, sews, and bakes in between book chapters. Sometimes, she writes.

***"A successful marriage requires falling in love many times,
always with the same person."
— Mignon McLaughlin***

India

© by Barbara Purbaugh

When my friend speaks of love, he speaks of India.
He speaks of food and drinks
and the spicy air.

He speaks of crazy passion
and heat upon your skin.

He speaks of romantic movies
and colorful tapestries.

He speaks of the spark of new love
under the night sky.

When my friend speaks of love, he speaks of India.
And I think, I'd like to love like that.

Evening Lullaby

© by Carolyn Cecil

At Crestfield Camp, a bird sings outside my tent
On Slippery Rock Creek after dusk.

A welcome tune for a stranger from the city, alone,
not used to solitude.

Fears, amplified by giant trees in this forested place,
no cars, no traffic noise.

No shrieking. Just a music maker that whistles in the dark.
And sings me back to daring.

Barbara Purbaugh obtained an MFA in creative writing from Naropa University and a Master of Library and Information Science from Kent State University. She has published short stories and poems and won awards for both her fiction and poetry. She may be contacted at barbarapurbaugh@gmail.com.

Carolyn Cecil, a resident of Baltimore, Maryland, is a member of Ligonier Valley Writers and the Burlington Writers Workshop. Her book *Taken Away* was published by the Broadkill Press, and her poems appear in *Broadkill*, *Backbone Mountain*, *Free State*, *Loyalhanna*, and *Gunpowder Reviews*.

Ronald J. Shafer is a Greensburg resident who writes poetry and short fiction and likes to spend his spare time hiking and fishing.

Yuan Changming edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Qing Yuan and hosts *Happy Yangsheng* in Vancouver; credits include ten Pushcart nominations, *Best of the Best Canadian Poetry*, *BestNewPoemsOnline*, and 1,429 others across 42 countries.

There Is No Synonym for Love

© by Ronald Shafer

There is no synonym for love,
None strong enough that comes to mind.
I've looked and listened, searched and read.
It's hidden someplace I can't find.

The dictionary let me down,
And my thesaurus did the same.
Each syllable is much too weak
To tell you what I need to say.

There must be one verb that will work,
Some term or word that I'll recall
That makes a statement, fresh and bold.
"I love you" won't suffice at all.

I'll find that word to make you see
That you're more than the world to me.

Global Warning

© by Yuan Changming

Slowly but surely
Shaking off blue glaciers
Together with pale sunshine

The Rocky Mountain is getting ready
To roar down from above
Treetops and clouds

Like a monstrous bear
Stalking behind crowds of colorful visitors
Thumping on the Colombia icefields

Forward

© by Yuan Changming

Forward

This message
So that someday

It might reach
Another universe

Though in this valley where messages flood
Rivers overflow

Beyond both banks
The text is changing

Coding or being coded
Is more of a new semiotics

W.H.A.T.: The Master Action

© by Yuan Changming

W: pecking around a lion
 only the little chick
 knows the word's worth
 as it writes the world's story

with its feet printed on the ground
rather than on a papyrus

H: inspired by a fence in hell
 you were invented long ago
 to connect every human
 for a tall ladder of hope
 that we can stand high
 against the blue horizon
 like the Babel Tower growing to reach Him
 where I can find a home in the fame hall
 where I can settle my soul in heaven

A: As the first born to the Semitic family, A was originally a picture of an alef, the
 Agricultural energy that was rotated twice until
 Alpha loomed up in the Greek psychoscape even before
 Adam became the chosen father of all Europeans close to
 Athens, where Apollo had acupuncture wisdom and knowledge into
 Aristotle, the intellectual ancestor of modern man, who inspired
 Alexander to make the first effort of globalization, which did not reach East
 Ah Q's land, the largest hotel for All travelers until centuries later, but it is
 Atomic bombs that will blow up all our pasts and send us through
 America to a higher civilization, where the drop of an
 Apple is to enable us to fly to the other side of the universe
 Along the cosmic string as Africa, the heart of human darkness, awaits Jesus,
 Allah, Buddha or an other unknown author to come and rotate for the third time
 A scarlet letter of A

T: the Egyptian loaf
 far off the Phoenician mark
 is still edible now



(See Yuan's bio on p. 6.)

The Thunder Rolls On

© by Kylie Jasper

It was after the first rumble of thunder that I heard the floorboards creak downstairs under Dad's footsteps. The refrigerator opened and closed and the screen door to the back porch whined. All the while, I was tucked into my bed upstairs, staring out the window at the darkening brew of the stars.

The third roll of thunder caused my eyes to squeeze shut as my body trembled.

At the second crack of thunder, I flipped on my side and pulled the covers up all around me, leaving the smallest breathing hole possible. The third roll of thunder caused my eyes to squeeze shut as my body trembled. *God, I'm sorry I picked on my brother at the dinner table. Just stop all the noise, please. Amen.* God never responded in a timely manner, so my childhood patience vanished moments later. I sprang out of bed.

Tiptoeing downstairs past my parents' bedroom, I often wondered why I didn't just crawl onto the mattress next to Mom, who slept perfectly undisturbed during storms. She would probably slide over sleepily and tuck me into her body. *Just go to sleep, baby*, she'd mumble, and I would feel her warmth seeping into me like honey.

But I knew that she could not settle my pounding heart. Sometimes only a dad can soothe a certain fear. I was drawn to his seemingly brave resilience.

There was an unspoken camaraderie between my father and me about our particular anxiety. During early springtime in our small mining town, thunderstorms came as often as welfare checks. Dad had an odd way of sensing whenever a storm was about to spoil the sky. His mood quieted even more than usual, and his fingers fumbled when he tried to light his cigarettes. He didn't have to say it out loud for me to know the memories of Vietnam were plaguing his rationale.

I would quietly stand at the screen door and watch my father blow filmy cigarette smoke from his mouth. He stared out at the dark road that glistened under the streetlights, with one of his arms draped across the back of the wooden swing that hung from the porch ceiling by two rusty chains. Dad's bare feet pushed off the cement and sent him back and forth. Back and forth.

He raised his glass of wine to his lips. I made a noise that he heard over the thunder. He glanced over, still swallowing, and arched an eyebrow. *Are you sure*

you shouldn't be in bed? We looked at one another as thunder cracked open the sky. Then he said, in that resigned way of his, "You coming out or not?"

I pushed open the screen door and stepped outside, letting the mugginess steam my skin. I padded over to the swing and with a great struggle climbed up onto the seat. Then I sat, not too close because Dad never liked being attacked with affection.

We settled into comfortable silence, me wiggling my toes and Dad blowing smoke rings. As the cool wine slipped down Dad's throat, his movements grew warm and thick. The minutes passed, and he relaxed.

Even as a child, I was never ignorant of the gravity of my father's existence. He was too young a man to seem so tired sometimes. Dad was the type of man carved from stubbornness and loyalty, so emotionally out of tune with his own self that he seemed unaware of the cultural tumult around him. His thoughts were preoccupied with taking care of our family, and there was simply no space for considering the changing times.

As most little girls do, I idolized my father, but I already knew not to expect much attention from him. Yet I was clever enough to know that on infinite stormy nights, under the blanket of his wine, Dad softened a little.

It was excruciating, sitting on that swing, waiting for him to pay attention to me. I sighed as often as I could and twitched my arms and legs. Finally, when the moments had stretched into years, Dad said, "Come here." His coarse hands lifted me at the armpits and teleported me into his lap. He couldn't see my face, but I smiled at the rain.

Mom was so soft and fleshy that I sank right into her when she cuddled me, but Dad was hard and narrow, all edges. He wore only his pajama pants, so his torso and arms were sticky with sweat from the humidity. But I didn't mind one bit.

I leaned back into him, my little legs dangling on either side of his thigh, and I soothed at the slow rise and fall of his chest. No words were spoken after that. We both listened to the sound of nothing, for the threat of the storm had dwindled.

In those days, the smell of my father's cigarette smoke as it curled around my ears meant safety. Even though dawn would eventually break, and Dad would become a distant entity once more, there would always be another thunderstorm waiting for us. I was certain of it.

Eventually, my eyes closed and I drowsed.

The thunder rolled on. ♦

Kylie Jasper will be a senior at Blairsville High School. She says, "From a young age I've had a passion for storytelling. This story is based on a fond memory my mother has about her own father from when she was young."

Rite of Passage

© by Megan Hannah Lindsay

There is no greater curse
Than to wish upon your child
The gift of intelligence

With intelligence comes curiosity
With curiosity comes the knowledge
That there is so much knowledge
You can't have yet

Sooner or later
You climb down the rabbit hole
Following a glimpse of that forbidden rabbit
(You have so many other rabbits,
Black and brown and grey,
But the white rabbit is unknown
And must be)
Not knowing some things should stay buried
Just a little longer

It drives you
Every time you walk into a room
And the grown-ups around the table
Laugh
And stop talking, talk about something else,
Say you'll understand when you're older
But in your heart, you know
You have to understand it NOW

You follow anyone, anything
That promises to tell you what you're missing
What makes you incomplete
What separates you from the grown-ups at the table
Laughing and talking because you're not there

Then you know
Then you're older, and you know
And look sadly
on the children around you because
you know there's no argument
No threat
That can keep them from the aching need
To KNOW
To understand
You say, "I was the same at your age"
See the scoff in their eyes
And they run off, chasing the knowledge
Chasing the rabbit you caught
The one who turned and bit you viciously
And turned you into a grown-up
Who knows

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

Aromatic Asphalt

© by Debra R. Sanchez

Pungent hot asphalt transports me back, freeing
me once again.

As a child I had few limitations, only the distance
my feet could walk or pedal. I could eat lunch if
hungry or wait until my mother hollered for dinner.

Asbestos siding trapped less heat than my
grandmother's bricks, yet most summer days were
unbearable indoors. When weather imprisoned me, I
traveled the world through the words of my endless
supply of books from the library shelves and my own
hefty collection.

Countless hours vanished as I crawled through
the overgrown grass across the lime boundary of the
lot next door, creating hidden passages to my secret
nests, where I would sky gaze and dream. I ate freely
from the bounty provided by neglected apple trees
there. More time escaped in the grove of pines as I
practiced survival skills, building fires in coffee tins,
collecting wax-dipped matches, string and safety pins,
and a few good knives.

Bubbling road tar was my servant. I employed
it to reinforce my soles, popping the road blisters
with steps that none other dared take, alternating
between the gooey black heat and minuscule cinders,
toughening my summer-bared feet to achieve my
ambition of stealth.

Now I live a conditioned life. The air I breathe,
the food I must avoid, the enforced footwear, all
dictated by health.

I still spend hours watching the skies, dreaming
of the days of freedom, reading from ever-expanding
shelves. But when the perfume of fresh asphalt
strikes my nose, my feet tingle, aching for long-lost
glory. ♦

Debra R. Sanchez leads and attends writing groups in the Pittsburgh area and hosts writing retreats. She won the Author Zone award for Best Children's Book in 2017. Her other award-winning work in many genres has been widely published and performed.

Haiku

© by Janice McLaughlin

daylight gently fades—
twilight, swiftly in shadow,
pockets day's treasures

Jan McLaughlin is now doing layout, design, and book covers. She is also working on her fifth children's book with companion coloring/activity book and on two new books of poetry: *Reflections* and *Darkness Falls*. She loves research and learning and believes that as long as you are learning, you are alive.

Chorus for an Illegal Greyhound Bus Traveler

© by Carolyn Cornell Holland

Meredith's large, shabby, overstuffed suitcase held everything she owned, ordinary items: clothes, a few books, financial records, photos, and a metal ashtray in the shape of the Ohio State University football stadium made by a metallurgy student she had dated.

She also clutched another bag—a ragged soft-sided black one—tight to her side as she waited in line at the Greyhound bus station in Columbus, Ohio.

As the line shortened, Meredith grew nervous. Would she succeed? After all, there were *rules*. And she was uncharacteristically breaking one of them.

Meredith's brown eyes grew big with rebelliousness when she handed the bus driver her ticket.

The driver took her ticket, but before he could punch it he heard a muted noise. Recognizing the sound, he looked through his bifocals at Meredith, his eyes soft with sympathy. As he handed back her ticket he said softly, "There's another bus in 30 minutes." Then he reached down and patted her bag gently.

Meredith's head hung low as she returned to the station, struggling with her luggage.

The next bus arrived on time. She was the third person in line. She handed the driver her ticket. After he punched it, she set her large bag aside for the bus's storage area. Then she hugged the smaller bag in her arms and hurried down the aisle to the back of the bus. She placed the black bag on the empty window seat beside her.

As a group of college-age students settled in seats ahead of her, the driver adjusted his mirror. He then skillfully maneuvered the bus out of its parking place and onto the highway.

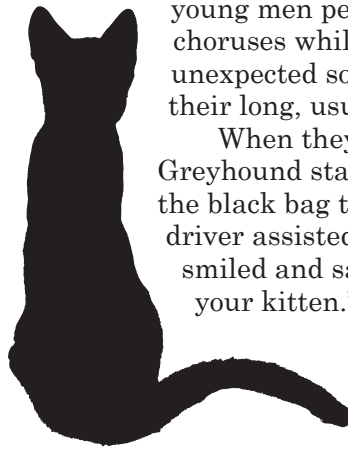
Shortly, Meredith felt motion in the black bag. She reached inside and caressed the illegal passenger, a soft furball curled up on its blanket.

While the bus was stopped for a red light, a noise emanated from her bag. Meredith took the illegal passenger out of the bag in an attempt to hush the sound, but it only escalated. The bus driver turned to investigate. Suddenly there was not just one meow. There was a chorus of them. The college students were hamming it up with a cacophony of feline sounds.

The bus driver smiled, satisfied nothing was amiss. Or perhaps he kindly decided to ignore the situation. Regardless, when the light turned green he continued along the highway, probably thinking *Those darn college students. What will they do next? Or maybe If those students are so supportive of that young woman, who am I to interfere? Besides, how else could she travel with a kitten?*

Throughout the six-hour drive, the young men periodically created meow choruses while enjoying the kitten, an unexpected source of entertainment on their long, usually dull bus ride.

When they arrived at the Buffalo Greyhound station Meredith again held the black bag tight to her. As the bus driver assisted her down the steps, he smiled and said, "Take good care of your kitten." ♦



Carolyn Holland delves into both the written and photographic worlds as a "writeographer." Her active trigger finger takes photos wherever she is situated. She enjoys the research involved in creating her historical novel-under-construction, *She Saw Her Promised Land*.

Three Brief Lessons on Worms

© by Stephanie Malley

I.
A bird is a worm eater;
Ergo, a worm is a bird feeder.

II.
the early worm
how quickly it becomes
the late worm

III.
After
The rain, a worm
Curved like a question mark:
Food for my children, a robin
Answers.

Stephanie Malley is an unabashed word nerd and occasional poet living near Pittsburgh, PA. Her poems have been published in *Glass: Facets of Poetry*, *Guardian Angel Kids* e-zine, and the 2017 *Loyalhanna Review*. More of her poetry can be found at www.serendipity.weebly.com.

Feeling Better Yet?

© by Ekta R. Garg

"Thanks for letting us use your office, Bob."

"No problem, Stuart. Let me know if you need anything else. Ma'am? Are you going to be all right now?"

"Yes, thank you. And, again, I'm sorry for all the commotion."

"Just glad we're sorting it out. Stuart, do you want me to close the door?"

"Sure, thanks."

Click.

"So, Mrs. Campbell, what happened?"

"I don't know what came over me. I've never done anything like that before."

"Why don't you start at the beginning? Sometimes it helps to talk through the situation."

"Right. Well, this morning the showerhead fell off and hit my foot. See, my husband—"

"No, wait, I didn't mean the beginning of your day. I meant what caused you to start screaming in the office supply aisle."

"Look, Officer—"

"I'm technically not an officer. You can call me Stuart."

"Okay, Stuart. Look, I didn't come to Target with any grand plans to start screaming in front of the poster boards. It's just ... I've had a lousy day. Have you ever had one of those? You know, where everything that can go wrong does go wrong from the minute you wake up?"

"We all have, sure."

"Like I said, it started with the showerhead. My husband's been promising me for weeks that he's going to put in a new one. This one's fallen off at least three times, and I've tried really hard not to point out that *he* put in the cheap one in the first place. But would he listen? *Nooo*. Just because the showerhead I picked out cost way more—"

"Mrs. Campbell, I don't think—"

"That's why I decided to go to Home Depot and get a new one myself after I finish shopping here tonight. I just hope they're still open. Is this going to take long?"

"Mrs. Campbell—"

"The beginning, right. I was already running late because my phone alarm didn't go off. Last night I plugged my phone into the charger, but I forgot to plug the charger into the wall. If Emmie hadn't come in to tell me she and Caleb were ready for school, I would have slept until lunch! I was so tired last night with last-minute campaigning. See, tonight the PTA was electing the new president, and I was running against the incumbent. Although I think "incompetent" is a much better word for Rick Peters. That putz thinks being PTA president is going to get him elected governor one day!"

"That's kind of a stretch, don't you think?"

"That's what I said when I heard his wife gossiping about it tonight. Apparently Rick has some grand plan to join all these service organizations in the community to make him look more accessible or whatever. It just makes him look like a putz."

"Mrs. Campbell, I'm sorry you've had a bad day, but we were talking about what happened here in the store tonight."

"Right, I'm getting to that. I barely got the kids to school on time. Everyone claims to love the principal, Mrs. Stephens, but she actually glares at you if you're late. Can I help it if it was the third morning this week? On Monday Emmie got the biggest knot in the history of knots in her tennis shoe. Yesterday Caleb forgot his lunch and didn't tell me until we were almost there. This morning it was my phone. Then I got in the shower, and the showerhead fell off and smashed my foot."

"Maybe this really isn't such a big deal after all, Mrs. Campbell. I think if you just apologize to Bob—"

"He's the store manager, right? Looked a little beat, if you ask me. I wonder if he's ever had days like the one I had. I got the kids to school just under the wire and went to my gym, you know, to work off some of the negative energy. Wouldn't you know it, someone left weights all over the floor, and I hit my foot on one. The *same foot* that got hit by the showerhead. I was so mad! I mean, I know it's the weight-lifting area, but, come on, people! Put your stuff away!"

"I feel your pain, Mrs. Campbell."

"Anyway, I managed to get through my workout without killing myself, and then I went home to take another shower. Of course, I had to use the kids' bathroom, and I nearly screamed—"

*I didn't come here
to scream in front
of the poster boards.*

"Imagine that."

"— when I saw all the wet towels on the floor. It didn't make sense to scream then, because no one was home, but—"

"Mrs. Campbell, my shift ends in about 30 minutes. Do you think—"

"Right, my screaming in the aisle. I'm getting to that. When going to the gym didn't work, I started cleaning. Stress cleaning, Emmie calls it, although I don't know why she has to make it sound so negative. Honestly, Stuart, kids these days think they know everything. And she's only eleven! I get palpitations when I think about what she'll be like as a teenager."

Sigh. "How old's Caleb?"

"He's nine, just as sweet as pie, but I can already see that he's starting to grow out of being my little boy, you know? In fact, it's because of him I'm here tonight."

"When you went to the office supplies aisle and began..."

"Oh, I didn't mean to make it sound like I'm mad at Caleb. I'm not, not really. It's more my husband. And Rick Peters. See, after I cleaned the house, I felt better, so I baked some muffins for the PTA meeting tonight. Everyone would be voting, and I figured it couldn't hurt, right? While they were cooling, I decided to empty the trash and put out the recycling, and the recycling bag snagged on the edge of the cabinet and tore open. Seems like my bad luck was back."

"I know how you feel."

"Didn't I tell you? One of *those* days. I'm just glad it wasn't the garbage. I would have just lost it. Anyway, by the time I cleaned up, it was time to get the kids. That's when Caleb told me he needed poster board for his project that's due Friday. He's a sweet boy, like I said, but he just can't remember anything. How is he supposed to finish his whole project by tomorrow? We've got Little League after school! So I told him I'd pick up the poster board after the PTA meeting tonight."

"Mrs. Campbell, I'm begging you, please. Can you just tell me what happened in our store?"

"Your store, right. Well, I went to the meeting and put out my muffins, you know, and started talking up the other parents. Don stayed home to fiddle with our showerhead, but that man doesn't have a handy bone in his entire body. If he did, don't you think he would have replaced the showerhead in the first place? I swear, this morning my foot hurt so much, I thought I'd broken a bone! But I guess that's not important."

"No kidding."

"Officer—Stuart—are you making fun of me?"

"No, Mrs. Campbell, really, I'm not."

"Well ... okay. So I got to the meeting, and there's stuffy Rick Peters and that little gossipy wife of his. Cheryl. What kind of name is Cheryl? It sounds like someone slipping in the mud. But I didn't let them get to me. No, sir, I got up there for my speech and put my heart and soul into it. I told the parents how I had the kids' best interests at heart and I would work hard to make sure the PTA really stood for something."

"Sounds like you'd be a good president."

"I know, right? But I guess the other parents didn't agree. When I got to Target, I pulled out my phone to ask Don what color poster board Caleb needed, and my friend Jessica texted me that I'd lost the election."

"So that's what made you scream? You were frustrated after a long day. I completely understand

how you feel Mrs.—"

"Oh, no, that's not what made me scream."

"What did, then?"

"The zipper on my purse."

"The ... zipper. On your purse."

"Yeah, see, I've been having trouble with it for about a year now, and Don keeps telling me he'll fix it, but there's no way he can handle that. I mean, he can't even handle the—"

"The showerhead, right."

"I couldn't get the zipper to pull shut, and I just ... I just lost it, you know? I'm really sorry, like I said. I probably looked like a crazy person, just standing there in the aisle and letting out this horrible scream, but I just ..."

"You'd had enough."

"Right! You know, Stuart, you should be a psychiatrist. You're such a good listener."

"They say that half of psychiatrists end up as patients."

"Really? I've never heard that before."

"Never mind. I'm glad you're feeling better, Mrs. Campbell." ♦

Ekta R. Garg uses her master's degree in journalism from Northwestern to write and edit articles about everything from healthcare to home improvement to Hindi films. She's a freelance editor for other writers' fiction and nonfiction projects. Ekta also manages a website that has short stories, book reviews, and parenting adventures. Access it at <http://thewriteedge.wordpress.com>.

The Lion's Tooth

© by Candace Kubinec

Fierce and brave, you
Prowl through my yard
Your yellow mane a happy
Harbinger of Spring
Your young toothed leaves harvested
By the old folks next door
And cooked for lunch
A peasant meal now embraced
By health enthusiasts
Have you, dear dandelion,
Long reviled by men
Pushing lawnmowers,
Become the new kale,
Showing up at farmers' markets
And grocery stores?



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

Just What I Needed

© by Marge Burke

It started as a quiet evening with a book I had been saving for just such a time. It was just what I needed.

Snow was drifting heavily, and I was more than content to stay tucked under my Snugee, sipping a cup of hot tea, with Lee Greenwood softly crooning Christmas music in the background. I hadn't lugged out the decorations yet, but it was early. In fact, the fridge was still crowded with leftovers from Thanksgiving dinner.

What would really taste good right now, with hot tea and "Silver Bells," was warm cookies. Hmm. How long could it take?

I shrugged out of my blankie/robe, marked my place in the book, and grabbed chocolate chunks off the pantry shelf. Just for ambience I lit the candles in the kitchen. They flickered as I grabbed mixer and flour and spices and—wait. I had no brown sugar. You *cannot* make soft, chewy chocolate chip cookies without brown sugar.

I called my neighbor across the street. No answer. I tried my sister a few blocks away but got her answering machine. Where could these people *be*? Didn't they know there was a blizzard out there?

No help for it. I'd have to battle the blizzard and run to Shop 'n Save three miles down the road.

Not a soul from my housing plan had broken a trail on the streets. They were smooth as icing on a frosted cake. I slid around a few corners and totally missed two stop signs. By the time I paid for my purchase (I was the only customer in the store by then), I could barely see my own tracks. But that's western Pennsylvania—and it wasn't even officially winter yet.

My tires spun slightly as I crested the hill to my house. At my driveway I realized that if I drove on the snow it would pack tight and I would not be able to clear it off cleanly.

I parked along the road, praying the snowplow would *not* come until I could move it, and went into the house. I donned my snowmobile suit, ski boots, thermal gloves, wool scarf, and tassel cap.

The shovel? In the shed. Bummer. I turned on the floodlights and tramped through the deepening snow down the hill. I could barely see the combination. It took several tries, but I finally yanked open the door, grabbed a shovel and the rock salt, and lugged them back up the hill.

Can't shovel without music, so I turned on the old boombox to the Christmas station. I had barely started when the music gurgled and quit. Batteries.

Off came the gloves and boots. The batteries were upstairs in the fridge, which meant shedding a trail of snow through the house. But soon I was rewarded with music and was tossing snow every which way.

Fifty minutes later, exhausted, sweating, but happy, I stripped in the laundry room, threw the wet clothes in the dryer, and realized the car was still at the road. I streaked upstairs, grabbed pj's and a robe, and slipped into boots and a coat again. No sliding on the driveway this time. Ahhh. I shut the garage door as the snow slid off the car and puddled on the garage floor. Something else to do tomorrow—clean out the garage. But not tonight.

I retrieved the brown sugar from the car's front seat, kicked off the boots, hung up my jacket, and once again embarked on the cookie process.

Just as I pulled the last batch out of the oven, I heard the basement door open.

"Mimi? We came to visit!" my granddaughter shouted up the steps. She was soon standing by the counter, eyeing the warm, gooey cookies.

"Hey! What brings you out on this balmy night?" I raised my eyebrows at my son and wiped my hands on a dish towel.

"Had to grab milk at Shop 'n Save. The girls wanted to say hi." He reached across Chrissy and grabbed a warm cookie. "These are great," he mumbled.

"Can we have some, too?" Autmn stood behind Chrissy, trying to press closer.

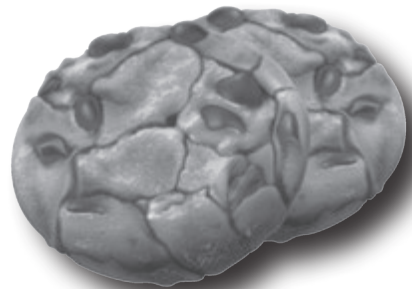
"Sure. Just let me get some hot cocoa, and we'll all share."

"Could we spend the night, Mimi? It's Friday. No school tomorrow!"

"Mom, I didn't put them up to this. Honest." Nate stuffed another cookie in his mouth, grinning.

"Of course not." I hugged the girls. "Well, the driveway is shoveled, at least for now. The cookies are baked and the house is warm. Let's put in a Christmas movie, eat popcorn and cookies until we pop, and snuggle in for the night. What do you say?"

*Need
Need
Need*



"Yeah!" Both girls jumped up and down, tumbling into each other.

Nate helped get the girls settled into makeshift pj's, packed a doggie bag of cookies, and spun off into the swirling snow.

As for me, the tempting book, the glowing

candles, and the soft holiday music fell away like melted snow. There would always be days for quiet. Tonight, I would cuddle under blankets, munch goodies, and laugh at the movie with my girls.

It was just what I needed. ♦

Marge Burke has worked at Smail Automotive and Pinnacle Auto Sales for 51 and 21 years, respectively. Published in local magazines, newspapers, and anthologies, she loves history, research, her flower gardens, and her six delightful grandchildren. Her Civil War novel, *Letters to Mary*, is currently available at www.margeburke.com.

Dandelion Love

© by Alicia Stankay

"Grandma, here's some pretty flowers."

I look down to see four-year-old Beth Renee holding a wilted clump of dandelions in her grubby hand. "I picked them 'cause Grandpa's in the hopsital."

I stop stirring the spaghetti sauce and lean over to kiss her face. "Grandpa will be home tomorrow," I promise her. I'd explained about Grandpa having something fixed so his heart would work right. My simplified version of the minor adjustment to Martin's pacemaker had satisfied her curiosity.

"Thanks for these pretty flowers. They'll certainly cheer him up." I carry the dandelions over to the sink and open the cupboard to take out a water glass.

"No, Grandma. Use that pretty vase." Beth Renee points. "The sparkly one Grandpa gave you a long time ago."

Oh, my, she's talking about the crystal vase Martin bought me for our first wedding anniversary. "But this glass has pink and white flowers on it," I cajole. "I thought you liked it."

Beth Renee shakes her head. "No, the sparkly one is spatial. You said that to Mommy."

I smile and pat her head. I'll let her put the dandelions in my vase but place it on a shelf high above her head. Taking my *special* vase from the cupboard, I fill it with water and carefully arrange the limp dandelions.

"There! How does that look?" I ask. The poor weeds won't last very long. Maybe she'll forget about them in the excitement of having Grandpa home tomorrow.

Beth Renee tilts her head and frowns. She rubs one hand across her cheek, leaving a streak of dirt. "They don't look right. We need the green things like in the store."

"I have all kinds of ferns in the garden, honey. Let's go pick some."

We bring in a handful of ferns. Beth Renee inserts them into the vase while I hold on to it tightly. When my granddaughter is finally satisfied, she applauds our efforts.

"It's bootiful, Grandma." Her face glows, and I thank her with another kiss. However, as I place the vase on the shelf, Beth Renee shouts, "No, Grandma, not there!"

"But it looks perfect in between the pictures of you and your little sister."

Her bottom lip trembles and she waves her arms in frustration. "I gave it to you to take to Grandpa in the hopsital."

I place the vase back on the end table and reach for Beth Renee. "Let's sit here on the sofa." I open my arms and she crawls onto my lap. "Now tell me exactly what you want, honey."

"Grandpa's sick in the hopsital, and I want to make him better." Her big blue eyes threaten to spill over with tears.

"Maybe we could pick some other flowers, too," I suggest, wondering why she scavenged the lawn for dandelions when we have a garden full of roses, marigolds, and zinnias. "How about the red roses? I'll pick them if you're afraid of their thorns."

Beth Renee shakes her head. "Grandpa likes the lellow ones best."

"How do you know that?" I ask, mystified, thinking of Martin's face as he weeded dandelions out of the lawn.

"He always picks them. He only looks sad 'cause he has to put them in that ugly bucket." Her face reveals hopeful determination. "Grandpa will get better now. He'll be so happy to see his fav'rite lellow flowers in your spatial vase!" ♦

Alicia Stankay is a writer and nature photographer. Her fiction ranges from short stories to mysteries to a teen time-travel novel. Wandering the trails of local state parks, Alicia has collected an abundance of nature photos, including many shown in her 2017 exhibition at Merrick Art Gallery in New Brighton, PA.



Yellow Bird House © by Carolyn Holland (bio on p. 10) **Groovy Boots** © by Colleen Wakefield (bio on p. 2)



Two Deer Enjoying the Snow © by Alicia Stankay (bio on p. 14)



Playing Possum © by *Louisa Fordyce* (bio on p. 2)



Cosmos © by *Tikvah Feinstein* (bio on p. 2)



Angel Baby © by *Susan Potts* (bio on p. 2)



Flying Orchid © by *Colleen Wakefield* (bio on p. 2)



Mohawk Falls, Ricketts Glen © by Alicia Stankay (bio on p. 14)



Icarus Ascending © by Colleen Wakefield (bio on p. 2)



Happiness Is a Perfect Sunset © by Colleen Wakefield (bio on p. 2)

The House that Happy Built

© by Jim Busch

More people have died in my bedroom than met their demise at the Bates Motel! Unlike Norman Bates's guests, the people who passed from life in my home went peacefully. In the very spot where I lay my head each night, my wife's parents and grandparents exited this world the way they lived in it, surrounded by their loving family.

Our home is a family home in every sense of the word. It is situated on a hill, "the hill" to us, on land that has been in the family for over 200 years. Originally a large farm with an active coal mine, over the years it was divided and subdivided until the hill became a patchwork of smaller lots, many still occupied by distant relatives of my wife, Glenda.

Our piece of the puzzle was deeded to my wife's grandparents, Jesse and Edna Myers, as a wedding gift shortly before World War I. Edna grew up on the hill. Jesse grew up along the Potomac River (he pronounced it "Pot-O-Mac") in western Maryland. After a poor but idyllic childhood, he joined the mass migration of country people to the gritty, grimy, bustling Pittsburgh region in search of work. In time he took up the machinist trade, married Edna Stewart, and started a family. As he was a personable and ever-pleasant man, Jesse's friends began calling him "Happy."

Despite his delightful nickname, Jesse Myers's life was not always happy or easy. Working-class families of the era lived a hand-to-mouth existence. Jesse worked hard for his family until he was involved in a deadly industrial accident. One of his shop mates accidentally took hold of a live high-voltage line. Seeing the man's distress, Jesse tried to pull him free, but the voltage surged straight through his buddy's body into his. A third man grabbed Jesse and became part of the painful circuit.

When the power was finally cut off, Jesse's two buddies were dead and Jesse was severely burned. His life was spared because the power flowing through his body was not as intense as those at the source and at the ground end. His exterior wounds healed, but the damage to his nervous system took much longer to recover. The doctors weren't sure if it was the electrical surge that he endured, the sight of his friends being electrocuted, or a combination of the two, but Jesse suffered what was then called a nervous breakdown.

In addition to his medical problems, Jesse faced financial ruin. In those days before OSHA and workers' compensation, he was given a fruit basket and summarily fired from his job. Jesse and Edna had two girls and a son by this time, and the young family survived only through the kindness of her family and the produce from a large garden.

In the spring of 1927, Jesse had no money, a

serious nervous condition, and a growing family. The only thing he and Edna owned was the slice of worthless, overgrown sheep pasture they had received on their wedding day. Most people would have thrown in the towel, but Happy Myers decided to build a house.

With more optimism than carpentry skill, he borrowed a wheelbarrow and a handful of tools and began to clear the land. Each morning he would walk down the hill with his wheelbarrow to scrounge building materials. Like a robin in the spring, he gathered all sorts of materials to build his nest.

He collected stones from creek banks, bricks from decrepit buildings, and packing crates from outside the railroad freight station. He dug a foundation pit with his garden spade and built walls with whatever he had gathered the day before. To this day, our basement walls contain sections made of stone, brick, and block in random patterns.

Once the foundation was finished, he followed the same practice in erecting the walls. Before I painted the basement side of the first floor, many of the boards featured the stenciled addresses used to deliver the Railway Express crates they came from.

He installed secondhand windows and doors and covered the house with a tar paper roof he paid for by doing odd jobs. In building the little house, Jesse also rebuilt his shattered nerves and his hopes for the future. The family moved into the semi-finished home in the fall of 1927.

Originally the house had just two rooms, a large bedroom and a combination kitchen/living area. The "plumbing" was an outhouse in the backyard. Water came from a pitcher pump supplied by a brick-lined hand-dug cistern near the backdoor.

*More people have died in my
bedroom than at the Bates Motel!*

*Fortunately, all of our ghosts
are of the Casper variety.*

Over the years the little house has changed, as time and finances allowed, Happy added another small bedroom and a kitchen. He finally scraped together the cash to hook on to the gas line, and the original wood-burning stove was replaced by a gas range and a Warm Morning gas heater. The house was electrified in the 1930s and finally got indoor plumbing after World War II. For some reason, Jesse never thought to include closets in his architectural design.

Though the 750-square-foot home would easily fit inside the great room of today's McMansions, Happy

and Edna raised three children there. They never turned anyone away from their door or their table.

At times during the Great Depression, the house sheltered seventeen members of the family. People slept in shifts sharing beds with their kin. Edna served up simple but filling meals straight from Happy's large garden. She would tell her guests, "Yesterday we had corn and tomatoes, so today I thought I'd make tomatoes and corn!"

My wife's parents moved in after the war. Glenda's dad had seen a great deal of action and had trouble adjusting to peacetime. John struggled with alcohol and holding down a steady job. The young couple moved in "just till we get on our feet," and remained in the little house for the rest of their lives.

Jesse helped his son-in-law get his life together and Edna helped her daughter, Eleanor, care for her twin daughters born in 1947 and for my wife when she came along a few years later. The little house now housed seven people in cramped but loving quarters. Jesse, who loved singing sentimental ballads and old hymns, had to endure Elvis Presley and Janis Joplin records on the stereo. He also eventually had to endure the loss of his wife and his own declining health.

My wife and I were expecting our first child when Jesse was diagnosed with terminal cancer. We promised him that if our baby was a boy we would name him Jesse. Jesse joked that we were just telling him that because we knew he wouldn't be around to check up on us. I think he willed himself to hold on long enough to see that we kept our promise. In the last picture we have of Happy Myers, he is sitting in a wheelchair holding his great-grandson Jesse in one arm and his birth certificate in the other, a big smile on his face.

A couple of years later, I graduated with an English literature degree during the 1970s recession. My poor educational choice hit home when my wife and I, with two kids in tow, moved in with my in-laws. When we told them the arrangement was just until we got on our feet, John and Eleanor just smiled. Our children are grown and her parents grew old and passed away in the little house on the hill, and we are still here.

The spirit of Happy Myers radiates from every brick, board, and nail in the house he built. Six people from three generations living in a tiny house with no closets and one bathroom seems like a recipe for disaster. But just like my wife, my children grew up with a superabundance of love from their grandparents. My relationship with my in-laws was one of the most rewarding of my life. I treasure the life

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

lessons I learned from them.

My children complained about the cramped quarters and lack of privacy growing up (my daughter-in-law likes to show her friends a picture of our tiny house to brag about her lawyer husband's humble beginnings), but I think they've come to appreciate what they had.

Today just my wife and I live in the little house on the hill, but we are never really alone. We are surrounded by the ghosts of all the people who lived and loved here. My wife still bakes her grandmother's cinnamon rolls in Edna's kitchen. Our yard is shaded by the trees Jesse planted and brightened by the red blooms of Edna's firebush. Every room is filled with tangible memories of my in-laws. We still have my mother-in-law Eleanor's cat, Sheldon Leonard, and I still use my father-in-law John's tools to keep the old place together.

We don't talk about it much, but I know that when we sit down for a quiet dinner we still hear the old commotion, the squabbling, and the laughter. We remember the arguments over who gets to use the bathroom next and trying to keep our children quiet so their grandfather could sleep.

Fortunately, all of our ghosts are of the Casper variety, very friendly. I've never been convinced that our spirits linger here on earth when we pass, but I do know that my wife's grandfather brought joy to everyone he touched and that joy lives on in the house that Happy built. ♦

Porches of the Past

© by Janice McLaughlin

It was a summer of wisteria,
in the grass fireflies drifted.

Out on the porch, a mood, a feeling.
From magnificent galleries to humble back stoops.
A transition from the primitive outdoors
to protected, treasured interiors.

The porch, a place to conduct business,
turn away salesmen,
welcome friends, and converse with family.
The porch, a place of charged encounters of love and hate.
Always remembered with a swing and rocking chairs,
freshly made lemonade or iced tea.

The light slap of the screen door,
the creak of the swing's chains.
The carpenter bees, black and fat,
drilling holes in the eaves.

A flyswatter nearby.
Gone now, this piece of a vanished world
we barely know how badly we miss.

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

Where Poetry Lives

© by Candace Kubinec

i think i got it all wrong
poetry does not live
in the soft moon-glow
or twinkling stars

it's in the gray dove that
sits on the knobby bare branches
of a chokecherry tree
puffed up
warming itself in the
morning sun

the small squirrel
the one with a slight limp
that stuffs its cheeks
full with seeds the sparrows
have dropped in the
grass under the birdfeeder

the hissing of the
shiny tea kettle filled with hot
water bubbling and bouncing
on the back burner of a
flat-top stove ready to
become my morning tea

Candace Kubinec is a member of Pennwriters and Ligonier Valley Writers. Her poetry has been published in *The Loyalhanna Review* and in the anthology *The Official Poet's Guide to Peace*. She blogs at www.rhymeswithbug.com.

Trees Lining Washington Street

(as seen from a fourth-floor window)

© by Sally Witt

In morning their eastern shadows
reach across
to partners on the other side.

Near noon,
they gather into silence,
shading only what is nearest them.

By early evening,
west extends to east,
again lacing the street in patterns intricate, precise.

After dark they stand alone,
incapable of reaching out
or knowing how their strength is built.

When light returns, again they spread protective shade
as all of us would do
if we were stately, gracious, and rooted deeply.

Mountain Overlooking Brownfields

© by Sally Witt

The mountain above Route 51
looks down on road, on river,
on land where mills
once smoked into its lungs.

In spring this hill of strength
turns delicate,
bearing tender blossoms and new growth.
Could it ever seem more fragile
than in the fledgling buds
of just-April?

Some years ago
a section of the hill was sliced
to make the road more safe.
Not much grows there now.
But, ah, to see how April green creeps cautiously
and blossoms dare to open, even here,
would stir your heart to gentle courage.

If that were not enough
to send you to your soul in search of beauty,
this year,
from the mountain's wounded side,
redbuds stretch magenta limbs
embracing everything.

Sally Witt, CSJ, is a Sister of St. Joseph of Baden. She lives in Ambridge, PA.

My Hall of Terror

© by William Flow

Every night I have a dream. I am in a hall that seems to go on forever. I never dream of anything else. I used to talk to my friends about it, but they thought it was weird, so I started making up stereotypical dream stuff instead, like finding out I'm naked at school or sleeping through my alarm.

I've been here in this dream thousands of times, walking past glittering pictures that line the walls and ceiling. They're all different sizes, some small as a Post-it and some larger than I am, but they are pieced together in such a way that there is no space in between. Some are beautiful and light, showing images of happy people, magical landscapes, fantastical events. Some are more mundane, showing a kitchen or schoolroom. Some are dark, depicting horror, terror, pain. I avoid those; they scare me.

*The shrieks now
seemed to be coming
from in front of me.*

This hall with no beginning and no end seems dead at first, completely silent, with no echo even if I shout. It seems wrong to shout, like there's someone sleeping in the next room and I don't want to wake them. But sometimes some of the pictures move. They're like GIFs, repeating the same snippet over and over. For years nothing changed, until today.

I was walking through like normal when I saw a smallish picture showing a colorful circus. A bright-blue elephant with golden tusks posed over and over. An overwhelming urge to touch the image came over me. I'd never had that urge before, but before I could think about what I was doing, I reached out and touched the elephant.

I was suddenly falling through a whirl of color. I felt sick, so I quickly closed my eyes, then felt myself come to a stop with solid ground beneath my feet. The air was warm, and there were all sorts of sounds and smells that shouldn't exist in the hallway. I opened my eyes and saw clowns, rides, popcorn, animals dressed up in ridiculous outfits, and a huge crowd of people: normal circus stuff.

It took me a while to notice that everything was a bit off. Everything looked real out of the corner of my eye, but when I looked at something closely, it was blurred, out of focus. I wandered around for a bit, completely ignored by everyone around me. It was as if they couldn't see me, but they knew to move around me so we wouldn't collide.

In front of the big top, I found the blue elephant with a tiny trainer sitting on his head. Both were oddly in focus. The trainer was resplendent in a lime-green circus master's jacket with gold epaulets and a tall green hat sporting a huge purple plume. I watched the trainer work with the elephant and came to realize she was a child, maybe five years old.

Being completely ignored was freeing, so I had no qualms about staring at them. Unexpectedly the trainer looked me straight in the eye and frowned. There was silence as all the blurred characters around me froze in the middle of what they were doing and turned to stare at me as well.

"Who are you? How did you get in here?" she asked accusingly. "No one's supposed to be in here."

"I'm just wandering through," I replied nervously, trying to ignore all those eyes burning into me.

"But how did you get here? This is just for me! It's my place!" She was getting angry, and the figures around me started to melt into less friendly shapes.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you. I don't know how I got here." I started to panic. I didn't know what would happen if I moved, but the figures were slowly coming toward me.

She howled "This is my place! MINE! You're not supposed to be here!"

I turned and ran, dodging the claws and teeth that were trying to grab me. I had no idea where to go but figured if I went in a straight line I would get out of there eventually.

The shrieks now seemed to be coming from in front of me, and I found myself running toward the elephant again. The girl was still sitting on his head, but now she was in full tantrum mode, screaming, with tears and snot rushing down her red face.

I paused in shock, but feeling the claws rake my arm broke me out of it. I ran, again coming back to that godforsaken blue elephant. I had no idea what to do; I was obviously trapped, and even though I knew I had to be dreaming, those claws and my blood felt awfully real.

I noticed a spot where the air shimmered and ran toward it. Coolness hit my face. I had to stop suddenly as a wall appeared in front of me. I was back in the glittering hall.

I awoke in my bed, panting and covered in sweat. It took a moment to calm myself before I could look at my phone to see what time it was. Scratches were on my arms where those monsters had attacked me. They weren't as deep as in the dream, and there wasn't any blood. But something had obviously scratched me, and I don't know how. ♦

William Flow recently transferred from Derry to West Hempfield High School. He won an award in the 2018 Ligonier Valley Writers Student Poetry Contest.

Anxiety

© by *Megan Hannah Lindsay*

It's 5:37 in the afternoon.
Probably. About.
I've been sitting in the shower
With my knees up to my chest
For at least ten minutes.
I'm absently wiping liner out of my eyes
And my hair out of my face.

I'm here because the thought of meeting
with an old friend tomorrow
Frightens the thorns
under my skin and coiled around my bones
Until I'm frozen
Still as a flower-stem on a windless day
Tightens my cords
Into the steel-tight
Of a knot so old it's forgotten how
To just be rope

I'm here because the feeling
Of water hitting my arms
Makes it seem for a moment
Like the thorns are on the outside too
It's better than the pressure of them
Just under the skin
That tooth-aching draaaaag of sharp

This towel smells like incense.
I'm not even supposed to burn incense here
But who's gonna stop me?
Not me, that's for sure.

I stumble into bed and grab headphones
like a heroin needle
Shove them into my veins
I think I'll stare at the ceiling
And rip off bits of my fingernails
For an hour or something.

Whatever.
It'll probably be fine.

Megan Hannah Lindsay says, "I grew up in Springdale and had a serious passion for reading and writing, thanks to being homeschooled for the majority of my life. I had a falling-out with it years ago, but I'm working on getting it back. My poetry mostly deals with my struggles with mental illness."

Invisible Suffering

© by *Tamara DiBartola*

My face conceals true me,
real me, lives behind a facial screen
I show a face of healthy happiness
under it lives me, suffering

Why put on a happy face?
while false, it doesn't cost much
body scars are hard to cover
internal pain is masked easily

My smile returns a smile
my frown a frown
enough sadness, I want happiness.
I smile at you so you smile at me

I smile to hide my anguish.
Internal and misunderstood
lies of happiness sell easily
no one welcomes suffering

My smokescreen clouds your vision
to see through it you'd have to know me
before I was altered
by a persistent thief of my health

Without personal experience
it's hard to comprehend what you can't see
multitudes endure hidden affliction
oppressed, in endless torment

It is true, things are not always as they seem
what you think you see is not true behind the scene.
Kindness, understanding are precious gifts
a shared smile is valued treasure

Tamara DiBartola feels the arts are a blessing. She believes shining a bright light into life's brokenness uncovers pieces of good to uplift, inspire, and strengthen. She was previously published in the 2016 *Loyalhanna Review*.

At the Zoo

© by *Maxine Ruble*

Cradling her baby,
The ape stared into my eyes,
Mother to mother.

Maxine Ruble is a former teacher and currently a semiretired nurse with two adult children and two grandchildren. Though she has written poetry since childhood, this is her first submission.

Becoming a Part

© by John Grey

Pine trees tremble like strings plucked by the wind.
It's the touch. The tenderness.
All living things feel in their own way.

The lake is gleefully sunned on,
its gentle muscle rippling from shore to shore,
while the sky, in blue costume, is all around me
and a hawk runs circles around the hilltop haze.

On a day growing ever brighter,
the edges meet like drinking companions,
in giddy but perfect union.

A pine cone drops and spins a little
to cast seed like a fisherman
so the minerals, the moisture,
will take the future's bait.

At water level dragonflies buzz relentlessly,
lord over insect clouds, feasting and flapping
their silken wings at light speed.

Not even my presence
can put a stop to one single facet
of what surrounds me.
In fact, I feel welcome,
anointed, my care, my attention,
having passed some kind of unspoken test.

I lie back on the lake bank,
head slightly aloft,
taking in
what has taken me in.

John Grey is an Australian poet and a U.S. resident. He recently published in *Nebo*, *Euphony* and *Columbia Review*. He has work in upcoming issues of *Leading Edge*, *Poetry East*, and *Midwest Quarterly*.

Swampland

© by John Grey

At first glance, I assumed the swamp was a dead thing.
Now I cannot choose one from among many.
I proclaimed it a poisoned swamp.
But do not judge the liar for his unwitting lie.

A frog croaks. A snake slithers.
An alligator's eyes bear fading light
into the surrounding mangrove roots.
A sunfish rises, inches from my boots,
as if I am here to meet it.

Planned Adolescence

© by Luke Duffey

Through the jail door you go
You look to the other side of the small room
Many layers of bars await
At the end lies a blinding light
The door snaps shut behind you
Left in here with only a board that says
1 + 1 =
2
You say
But you can't find chalk to write it
You search the tiny room
Again
And again
A day passes
A month
A year
Finally the chalk is passed to you
through the bars of the door
You write 2
The door towards the light opens
You enter
It snaps shut
On the board it reads
My favorite animal is
You think dog
Again you search for chalk
Another year
Then it is handed to you once more
Many rooms pass
You enter the next room
The final room
The board reads
I want to be a _____ when I grow up
You don't look for chalk anymore
A year passes
Then another
An eternity
For chalk that is set right in front of you

Luke Duffey is a student at Blairsville High School. He started writing poetry about a year ago and had written a few short stories before that. He recently won an award in the Ligonier Valley Writers Student Poetry Contest. This is his first attempt to publish his work.

So complex. That's my problem.
Every one is merely one inside another.
The reed is the wing of a dragonfly.
A fox sparrow lives a lifetime in the thicket.
A heron dances without company.
A raccoon scours the remains of a shell.

Some men venture into space.
They will never have this.

When I Was a Child

© by Patricia Orendorff Smith

Life was cookies and cream when I was a child.
I splashed in the rain, caught raindrops on my tongue,
patted mud pies, swung on swings Tarzan-like,
trapped lightning in a jar, camped out in teepees,
played cowboys and Indians, dressed up in fancy
gowns and Mama's heels. I painted my face and nails
and held my pinky high while sipping tea.
I swam like a fish in the sea and sculpted sandcastles.
Summertime lasted forever. I danced while the stars shined
and the silver moon slid across the sky. Time didn't exist
when I was a child,

Patricia Orendorff Smith is published in national, regional, and local publications. Forty-one poems appeared in *The Indiana Gazette* in 2017. "Happenstance" was published in Penn State's *Wild Onions*. A videotape was featured at the Med X Conference at Stanford University in 2017.

My Six-Pointed Star

© by Milton Ehrlich



Whenever I go portaging in the Adirondacks
across the good-enough-to-drink waters
of the Fulton Chain of Lakes, I feel less alone
when I look up at a star-studded sky
and see a six-pointed star.

I evade comets and asteroids as I ride along
the top triangle of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars,
and connect to the bottom triangle of Pluto,
Venus and the moon.

It grounds me in the union of heaven and earth
and leaves the door open
for my conduit to the cosmos.

My beloved hexagram assures me it will cut
the tongues out of the Jew-haters of the world.

But where are the likes of the King of Denmark?

When the Germans invaded his country,
he was the first to wear the Star of David
even though he was not a Jew.

My Star reminds me that I'm nothing more
than stardust brought to life, and I can now
be frozen into existence in standstill time.

(See Milton's bio on p. 26.)

Something Rare

© by John Grey

The stork roams the far edge
of the pond,
pecks among the pebbles and reeds.

A birdwatcher
peers through binoculars.
Forget tiny warblers,
it's their larger brethren
he's tracking.

How many this year
compared to last?
And what do these numbers
say about extinction?

The stork is unaware
of the size of the picture
it is a part of.

The man's lens
captures a small fraction.
His worry does the rest.

(See John's bio on p. 24.)

It's Only Make Believe

© by Barbara Purbaugh

Every day, I put on my pretty dress and my happy face
and go out into the world.

You see me, laughing,
acting smart,
pretending to be wise,
and you think I've got my act together.

But inside I'm a withering hag,
Snow White's evil stepmother.
Every day, I eat the pretty red apple,
swallowing the poison, trying to kill the darkness inside.

But every day it lives.
It lives, and I put on my pretty dress and my happy face
and go out into the world.

(See Barbara's bio on p. 6.)

If I Don't Deserve a Nobel in the Art of Love, Then I Don't Know Who Does

© by Milton Ehrlich

My love for you comes galloping in
every time I hear the luminescence
of your voice or see you—
even if you are fully clothed,
without as much as a nipple in view.

I'm in awe of your present perfection,
smitten by your elegance, charm
and the *elan vital* of who you are.

You are a butterfly in flight,
and I'm firmly on the ground.
I built a permanent bridge
from me to you.
We mesh seamlessly.

My love for you plays show-biz tunes
that make me want to dance,
even though I'm too shy to let go
on any ballroom dancing floor,
let alone join a Hora or tag along
on a Conga line.

I caress your body and soul
until you sing love's sweet song.
You're as delectable as a bunch
of Medjool dates and ripe Turkish figs
on top of ruby-red pomegranates.

All you Swedish judges—forget about dynamite,
and see if I haven't earned a Nobel in the art of Love
before I segue in to the immensity of the world beyond.

Milton P. Ehrlich, Ph.D., is an 86-year-old psychologist and Korean War veteran. More than 150 of his poems have been published in periodicals such as the *Wisconsin Review*, *Descant*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *Toronto Quarterly Review*, *Chariton Review*, *Vox Poetica*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Huffington Post*, and the *New York Times*.

Springdale Memory

© by Laura Lovic-Lindsay

Lodged in my mind: it must be the late 1970s and every Moyhend Street kid—fifteen of us? twenty?—is in Scott Z's backyard, some playing whiffleball, some eating mulberries up in the alley, some plotting the evening's ninja-spy activities.

It's a small yard, and we have to be careful not to knock the ball into the Sleppys' yard next door or their dog will eat it. It's inevitable—someone hits it in. My kamikaze brother David is the obvious choice to fetch it. Skinny and fast, he crawls into sewers for footballs, up trees to fetch stuck cats, under fences to let the rest of us in. He may be the closest thing we have to a superhero. We beat the back gate with sticks to draw the dog's attention while David dips in for the rescue.

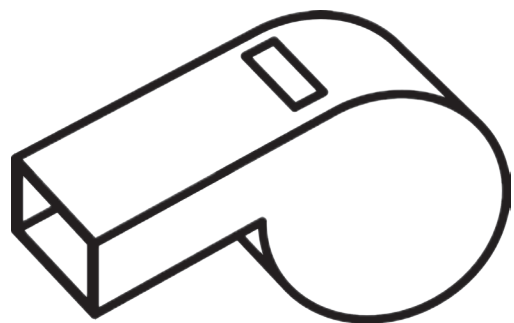
There's a storm moving toward us, but right now it's warm and only sprinkling. We're wrapped in the velvet of summer. No one wants to leave.

We were always camped out in someone's yard, foot racing under streetlamps after dinner, daring each other into the cemetery. In the woods, we'd pass each other on paths. By the river, we'd nod as we biked by to our separate destinations.

My mom blew a small silver whistle at night to call the three of us in. The little cork bead inside it shook in terror of what would happen if Teresa Lovic's children didn't come home immediately. Most other kids followed the Streetlamp Rule.

I read a thought on Twitter last week that said, "One day, you played with your friends, not knowing it would be the last time you'd do it."

I'm wondering if my brain crafted this wedge like a bookmark guiding me back to my favorite passage in time. It is a kindness for which I am grateful, here at my desk: a fifty-year-old woman in the middle of a hard, dry winter. ♦



(See Laura's bio on p. 4.)

Old Laurel Camp

© by Laura Lovic-Lindsay

Step one is maneuvering our car over root highways
and mudgullies. The children, who've been sitting
much too long, burst forth from the van like the seeds

of jewelweed pockets. Step two is brooming out
the mouse-droppings and spider *festungen*
from the rustic cabin that will be so dear

in a week. Through this work, we buy
one more year to keep nature from reclaiming
these stone-and-wood castles. Through fifty-one

weeks' worth of window dust, I see sixty people
approach to hug, remember. All other steps
are quickly forgotten in the joy of reunion. My

children are dragged into the forest by their singing
tribe. Blueberries, wild and tart and warmed by sun,
line the old roadpaths down to our cabin below all others,

where frog and toad and salamander freely associate
with these curious Summer People who oust them
from their own homes and villages. Cabin mice mark

their calendars in anticipation of our arrival, nightly feasts
a sure thing. Up here on the Holy Mountain, the air is cleaned
by the pure smoke of a persistent woodfire, no sweetgrass

or sage needed. I am accidentally anointed with olive oil
in the kitchen. If that isn't blessing enough, there is plenty
of mud sweetened by July storms. I meet my children, next,

in line at the dining hall and already they are different
than I knew them. They hold baby bats and know no fear.
My daughter learns to whistle through acorn hats. My too-little

son is introduced at dinner to the only babysitter he will ever have:
Kat. He goes to her so freely and she carries him on her hip
like a sister. She will give him a T-shirt and he will adore her

and speak of her for years. Never will I feel so safe in the "real world"
as when guarded by three teenage boys, sentries by the fire, until long
after the last notes of vespers singing fade and as I walk

past them, they interrupt their stories and boasts to confirm all is well
with me. I travel the forest road to the Low Camp, where I hear the song
of the only owl of my life. I pat two sleeping children, pull my

color-splashed wool quilt up to my chin and tell the gentle
rains goodnight. Either the sweet silver bell awakens me a bare
moment after my eyes close, or I have truly reached the Summerlands.



(See Laura's bio on p. 4.)

The Protector

© by Helen Collins Sitrler

"Take her hand," his mother urges in his native Swedish. She repeats for me in English as we encounter the first stone staircase at Vadstena Castle. Three-year-old Erik is a modern cherub in jeans, sneakers, and a red baseball cap. He and I reach toward each other at the same instant while his parents attend to his one-year-old sister.

His hand is warm and soft in mine, his grip firm. He is game. Erik's legs rise to almost half his height to reach each new stair. He ascends one riser at a time: right foot up; left to meet it on the same stair; right foot up; left to meet it on the second stair. The brim of the red cap dips as he focuses on the stones, judging his movements carefully. Up we go, one stone stair at a time.

Soldiers, servants, kings, and ladies have preceded us up these stairs. In 1545, King Gustav Vasa began constructing Vadstena Castle to protect Stockholm after Sweden extracted its independence from Denmark. Soldiers climbed these stairs to the billet, no doubt raucous with laughter, shouting, and gambling.

Up we go, one stone stair at a time.

By the late 1550s, when Vasa's consolidated power made battle less necessary, servants hefted fragrant trays of roast pork, boiled potatoes, and apples to dining rooms on upper levels. Ladies and gentlemen in their finery climbed to the Wedding Hall for special occasions.

Erik and I ascend, gently holding onto each other. How many stairs? Fourteen? Seventeen? The red cap brim rises when we reach the first landing; huge, high windows invite looking out. We gaze at castle towers bent out of proportion by the wavy medieval glass that kings peered through.

We turn on the landing. Another staircase. The red cap tilts downward; Erik eyes the first step and lifts one knee high. Up we go again. At landing after landing the sequence repeats. Windows, turn, more stairs. How high is the floor we're intent on finding, the living space—bedrooms, a ballroom, the chapel? The staircases rise endlessly.

Erik's tiny sneakered feet and mine make gentle tapping sounds on the stairs. We are all physical action, hands intertwined, legs pumping. His knees piston easily as we climb. He treks upward undaunted, slow step after slow step. Moving with sureness, he holds my hand for safety—his protection on these long stone staircases—but never needs me to steady him. I marvel that he never tires, that he approaches each new staircase as if it were the first.

Three years earlier, the only way I could navigate my own home was with Erik's two-feet-per-stair approach. Ground glass had taken up residence in my knees. A staircase was torture. Pain also wrenched my hands and wrists. Holding a spoon and turning it toward my mouth? Misery. Gripping a jar? Squeezing and turning a bottle top to open it? Impossible. Rheumatoid arthritis had surfaced with a vengeance. My body attacked itself from every direction.

With the pain came fear. Will my friend have to help to change my fitted sheets forever? What if my hands hurt too much for me to drive safely? What if my hip gives out, and I have to call in sick at work once again?

Nine months passed before doctors found a medication regimen that allowed my body to hold most of the pain at bay. Even so, heat sometimes flared in my joints, desperate to burst into flaming agony. I learned to reduce activity that stressed my joints, but I was not always successful.

I relive the worry-fear of the period before the medications worked as Vadstena staircases unfold one after another and Erik's hand grips mine. But his dogged ascent paces me, and his warm hand feels soothing. At last we reach the top of many flights. Seventy-five stairs? More? He arrives filled with so much energy he is ready to burst. I arrive without twinge or ache.

Erik's laughter rebounds from the medieval walls in the large rooms on the castle's upper floor. He runs and twirls and hides briefly in one corner, too much in motion even for a photo. Gustav Vasa had this castle and his soldiers to protect him from the strife that might have destroyed him. In a surprising role reversal, I have been protected by a three-year-old's warm hand and his too-small legs. ♦

Helen Collins Sitrler is retired from teaching. She spends her time traveling, writing, and enjoying unscheduled time.

Class Reunion Mystery

© by Janet R. Sady

A tropical breeze ruffled Nelson's hair and blew it back from his furrowed brow. His sunglasses hid the revulsion in his eyes as he glanced at his wife, Rachel. Her once luxuriant auburn hair was now peppered with grey, and she had allowed herself to gain at least twenty pounds. She really should take better care of herself. He supposed she still had some attractive features—like her boobs, which seemed to be spilling out of her halter top. Who was she trying to attract, anyway?

This was to be a fun trip with Rachel and two other couples from their twenty-fifth high school class reunion, among them her old friend Janice. Some of the members had raved about a snorkeling trip off the coast of Maui Island. Rachel had insisted that since they were here in Hawaii, they had to go too. When would they ever have another chance?

Captain Nick Houser had also been a classmate. Rachel had dated Nick until Nelson made a play for her, and Nick lost out. Now here they all were on Nick's luxury cabin cruiser, headed out on an excursion. Nelson wondered briefly if that was why Rachel had insisted that they take this trip.

Nelson had balked at going, since Janice still had the power to reduce him to jelly. Nelson closed his eyes and relived the encounter in the hotel with her last week. The softness of her skin and the way she kissed him, eager and breathless, sent tingles down his spine. She was still as slim and beautiful as in high school, when they used to meet behind the bleachers. Oh my, he needed to stop thinking about that. He contemplated how ridiculous Nick looked in that captain's hat.

Nelson squirmed in his seat at the thought of his mistress and his wife on the same boat. It was extremely uncomfortable. He took off his sunglasses and looked around to see where Rachel had gone. She seemed occupied with receiving instructions from Captain Nick as she fussed with her life jacket.

He glanced at Janice. She tossed back her strawberry blonde hair and winked. Sweat trickled between Nelson's shoulder blades as he glanced at her breasts. He thought about his plan to use this trip to his advantage. If Rachel suspected anything, she sure wasn't showing it.

Captain Nick brought the boat around to the cove and threw out the anchor. Nelson watched as he hoisted two coolers tied to a rope over the side of the boat and started wading the few feet to the shore. He considered helping. But why should he? He wasn't the captain.

"Everybody out. This is the best place to see a variety of fish. If you all keep some distance from each other, you'll have a better opportunity to view sea life. The water is only three to four feet deep for about a mile out. There are buoys to warn you not to go too far. Swim out the opposite way from where we came in. When you get tired, come on back. I'll build a fire and cook lunch."

"I don't like us all being out there alone," Janice said. "Rachel, why don't you come with me? I never was a very good swimmer, and you always won the swim meets."

Nelson gulped. Why would Janice want to go with Rachel? This could complicate his plans. Maybe she intended to tell Rachel about their affair. Well, that was never going to happen. There would be no divorce and community property in this marriage. There were other ways.

Nelson watched as they pulled on their goggles and fins and jumped into the water. He waited until the other two guys also jumped and swam off in different directions. Then he fingered the knife at his waist used for filleting fish, and he too jumped in the water and swam after Rachel and Janice.

Captain Nick watched for a few moments, then dropped the coolers onto the sand and waded into the water. He saw the flipper on Nelson's fin go under the water and quickly followed him.

An hour later, Captain Nick removed the baked tilapia from the fire and set out the salad, candied jams, and pineapple on the picnic table.

Five of his passengers trudged up onto the beach. "Where's Nelson?" Nick asked.

"Isn't he here? We thought he was already back," Rachel said. Her voice rose with panic. "Someone please help me look for him. Surely he should be back by now."

Captain Nick waded back to the boat, taking one cooler with him. It took a few minutes to heft it over the side. He switched on his radio and called the Sea Patrol's Search and Rescue Team. The group arrived quickly and searched for three hours, but no trace of Nelson was found.

"Must have gone beyond the buoys and become disoriented and drowned," they said. "We are so sorry. We have a helicopter scanning the ocean. Was he wearing a life jacket?"

The friends looked at each other and shook their heads. No one remembered seeing him put on a life jacket.

The helicopter radioed the Sea Patrol that they had searched a twenty-mile area, but no one was sighted. They would check again on their way back to the base, although visibility was declining as the sun set. The patrol radioed this message to Nick as he packed the remaining cooler for the return trip.

Rachel cried softly into a towel as Captain Nick started the motor to carry his remaining passengers back to the mainland. A grief-stricken Janice sat in stunned silence.

Captain Nick glanced in Rachel's direction and inclined his head ever so slightly toward the cooler. Rachel's eyebrows lifted in acknowledgment. None of the other passengers noticed as they scanned the water for signs of Nelson.

Nick pushed the throttle forward as an imperceptible smile played at the corner of his lips. He stared straight ahead making his way back to the Maui coast. ♦

Janet R. Sady is an author, poet, storyteller, and speaker. Her work has been published in twelve anthologies and appeared in *The Loyalhanna Review*, as well as the magazines *Our USA*, *Cross and the Quill*, *Alamance*, *Small-Town Life* and *Ideals*. Three books, *Miracle on Green Mountain*, *Consider the Sparrows*, and *The Journey* are available on Amazon.

Timeless

© by Michele Jones

Eons pass.
Yet for him, time stands still.
Forced to observe. He stares.
 Longs for more.
 Detached from life.

Darkness falls.
A stone heart beats once more.
His body protests. He stands.
 Ready to soar.
 Fears that first step.

Wings unfurl.
He leaps into the night.
Falls toward earth. Wings spread.
 He flies once more.
 Free from his own prison.

Daylight nears.
Time draws short.
He must return now. He flies.
 Curses the sun.
 Another night goes by.

She appears.
Something inside him stirs.
He yearns for night. At last.
 He flies, searches.
 Dawn breaks. He returns. Alone.

Time passes.
Still he searches for her.
Finally, they meet. They talk.
 Dawn nears. He flees.
 His curse is killing him.

They meet.
He confesses his secret.
Proclaims his love. They kiss.
 His stone heart soars.
 His for eternity.

Michele Jones lives in western Pennsylvania with her husband and two spoiled dogs. Michele writes memoirs, short stories, romance, and poetry, but her passion lies in writing paranormal, suspense, and thrillers featuring strong heroines and dangerous villains. You can see more of her writing and connect with her at michele-jones.com.

Hotel

© by Cheryl Shively

Take me to a hotel.
I am different in hotels.
Those anonymous rooms
That require nothing of me,
Where alarm clocks and schedules
Do not form the boundaries we must keep.
Within this kind of freedom
Places within me open up.
Emotions
That are usually chained and bound
Creep from their hiding places.
They stretch and explore,
Testing this new atmosphere.
Tiredness falls from my limbs.
I find myself wanting
To skip with joy
To dance on invisible threads of music
To climb upon floating sunbeams.
Passion can find its way here.
In this indiscriminate place
I do not have to be me.

(See Cheryl's bio on p. 4.)

Kahaluu Bay

© by Judith Sturges

It's about noonday in Kahaluu Bay.
As the bright sun beats down on the water,
the surface sparkles like a fireworks display.

Turquoise blue water breaks into white foam.
As I glide through the waves, I am engulfed in their power,
Rocking me as if in a cradle.

Under the surface another world comes alive.
Corals and fishes of all colors and designs,
some turtles, octopuses, an occasional eel.

Minimal sounds are heard below the water line.
The silence broken only by my breathing, or
the thump of a fish plucking food off the coral.

Colors of the undersea world change
as the refracted light creates varying patterns
reflected in the sands, rocks, and corals below.

Snorkeling in these waters is refreshing,
making me want to absorb this serene world,
to stay in its tranquility forever.

Judith Sturges is an associate professor at Penn State Fayette. She has written numerous scholarly articles. Now she's learning to write in different genres.

Edith Is My Name

© by David Landsperger

The house on the corner was much like all the other modest, red-brick, late 1950s houses on the block, but it was more worn, more overgrown, somehow more tired than its neighbors.

The door with the torn screen opened. “Boys, come on over here. You look hot. Come get a drink.”

Given that I hadn’t been called a boy for at least thirty years and we had worked up a good sweat hiking through the woods on a muggy Mothers’ Day morning, the invitation sounded appealing. She stepped out from behind the door and motioned to us, looking impatient and hopeful at the same time. “I won’t bite. You just look hot, is all. Come here.”

“What do you think?” I asked, looking down at my son. “She looks pretty harmless to me. What say we take a chance?”

“Sure, Dad, she’s okay. I talked to her before with Nick. She gave us cookies.”

“Edith is my name. Edith LeFevre. It’s French, you know. I’m not French; it’s my husband’s name. But he’s dead now, you know. Listen, I just made some fresh iced tea. Would you boys like some?”

I told her we certainly would. As she shuffled off to the kitchen, I looked around the room. It was like stepping back in time: faded flowery wallpaper, well-worn green scroll carpeting, fuzzy felt, teal-colored furniture, and a fake fireplace with a mantel on which rested yellowed photographs in thin metal frames.

One picture of a ballerina caught my eye. It was an old black-and-white photo that had been hand-painted with pastel watercolors.

Edith saw me looking at it as she came back with the iced tea. She said, “That’s my daughter. She was a dancer, but she died of cancer. See, I made a rhyme. She studied under Andre Gallard. Or was it Andre—that other man? One of them. It was so long ago, so hard to remember some things. Anyway, she was quite a dancer in her day. Toured with some of the greats, even came here to Pittsburgh. But that cancer took her away from me. It happened just like that, you know. She was here, and then she was gone. It just wasn’t fair.”

She stood there motionless, as if in a fog, with the glasses sweating in the humidity. The water dripped off her fingers like icy tears.

She shook her head just a bit and said, “I’m sorry, boys. You didn’t come here to hear me complain. Here’s your tea. I put some mint in it for you. I grow mint out back, you know. I used to grow Japanese orchids, too, but they got too hard to keep alive.”

She handed us the drinks. “My husband served in Japan, you know. He wrote me letters about their beautiful orchids and their beautiful temples. He said he was going to take me there someday, but somehow he never did.”

I asked her how she found a French husband. Edith said, “He wasn’t *French* French, he was American, but his great-grandparents were from France. His name was Michel, Michel LeFevre. Isn’t that a pretty name, even for a man? He took me to Normandy once to meet his family. They were nice, but the weather wasn’t. We got to stop in Giverny, where Monet lived. He was a famous painter, you know. His flower gardens were beautiful, just like in Japan. Here’s a picture that I took.”

She picked up another pastel photo from the mantel and held it up. “This was the Japanese bridge, but it was in France, not Japan. Paris had a lot of bridges, too. They were bigger, but not as nice. Michel was nice, but he’s gone, too.”

We finished our tea, and she insisted on giving us refills. I asked her if she was living alone as I thought about the overgrown shrubs.

“Oh, no. Picasso lives with me,” she said. My son and I glanced at each other.

“She looks pretty harmless to me. What say we take a chance?”

“He’s my cat. He stays in the basement on hot days like today. You need a mouser when you live next to the woods. Did I tell you I used to be a painter?”

She pointed to a picture hanging in the dining room. “That’s my son, Michael. I painted him when he was nine years old. I dressed him up in a clown costume. Picasso used to paint clowns, you know.”

I asked her where her son lived and she said Youngstown, Ohio. He didn’t get down to see her as much anymore but he was coming that day to take her out for Mother’s Day. She smiled broadly as she said this.

I was happy to hear she still had some family to look after her, even if they were two hours away.

We had Mother’s Day plans of our own, so we thanked Edith for the tea. I said I hoped we’d meet again.

“You boys are welcome here anytime, you hear?” she said as we waved goodbye. “I’m going to tell my son what a nice time we had today.”

That October we took another walk through the woods to Edith’s neighborhood. Several of the neighbors were raking leaves. Edith’s bushes were neatly trimmed and a middle-aged man was sitting on her porch.

Curious, I waved to him from the street. “Hi. The place looks nice. Are you Edith’s son?”

He asked me who I was, and I explained about our iced tea stop that spring. He said his name was Andre Langer. He was Edith's nephew from Youngstown.

"Aunt Edith didn't have a son," he said. "My

uncle left her a few years after they were married. All she had was this old house, but she managed to hold onto it with her job as a grade-school art teacher. She loved kids, but she never had any of her own." ♦

David Landsperger is retired from the world of tungsten manufacturing. He now splits his time chasing the sun in Pittsburgh and Sarasota, Florida. In his nonwriting time, he rides his bicycle and pretends he is still young.

Ligonier Valley Writers Calendar of Events

— 2018 —

- **July 28, 7:00-9:00 p.m.** *Loyalhanna Review* publication party. Ligonier Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art (SAMA). Garden and art tours, wine, hors d'oeuvres, readings, and camaraderie.
- **August 15.** Deadline for submissions to fourteenth annual Flash Fiction Contest. Cash prizes and readings of the winning entries.
- **September 16, 3:00-5:00 p.m.** Annual Ligonier Valley Writers potluck picnic. Attendees are invited to read from their work in progress.
- **September 29, 4:00-6:00 p.m.** Seven LVW authors will take part in a book signing at the Lincoln Highway Heritage Corridor Headquarters on Route 30 at the Kingston Dam.
- **October.** Readings of the winning Flash Fiction stories at local venues. Details TBA.
- **November.** Joint workshop with Westmoreland Museum of American Art on writing memoir. Details TBA.
- **December 2, 3:00-5:00 p.m.** Annual LVW Christmas Party. St. Michael's Church, Rector.

— 2019 —

- **January 2019.** Dues are due for 2018. \$30 per year; you can download a membership application from LVWonline.org or just send your check with "2018 dues" on the memo line to Ligonier Valley Writers, PO Box B, Ligonier, PA 15658.. Benefits include free admission to most LVW events.
- **January 2019.** Call for Student Poetry Contest entries for students in grades 4-12. Cash prizes in 30 categories, no entry fee, and an awards ceremony and booklet of all the winning poems.
- **March 11.** Deadline for Student Poetry Contest.
- **April 27, 4:00-5:00 pm.** Student Poetry Awards Ceremony at Barnes & Noble. The winning poets in grades 4-12 will read their work to the audience. LVW will have a bookfair at B&N.
- **May 1.** *Loyalhanna Review* submission deadline. (Reading period is February 1-May 1.) Check LVWonline.org for guidelines.

*Please check www.LVWonline.org for the latest info and date confirmations.
More events will be added in 2019.*

Come Join Us in LVW

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

Membership is only \$30 a year and provides discounts to most LVW events. You can download a membership application at LVWonline.org. If you'd like to get on our Members & Friends list to be notified of upcoming events, send your email address to jgallagher@LVWonline.org.

The Return of the Phantom Detectives

Phantom Detectives on Vacation is the third collection of short stories in the Phantom Detectives series. Each collection is published by the Greensburg Writers' Group as a fundraiser for LVW.

The collection features seasoned Detective Brendan Manelli, whose search for justice is aided by the Sleuths and Serpents Writing Group, an eclectic band of authors who meet behind a red door in the archives of a fictional town library. How do they solve the unsolvable? It's simple—they don't. They all have ghostly advisors to help them solve cases. Each writer from the Sleuths and Serpents is inspired by

a different paranormal sidekick who abets them in their quest for answers, although somehow there is still a lot of legwork involved.

Phantom Detectives on Vacation is the third standalone anthology created by the Greensburg Writers' Group, featuring stories by Ronald J. Shafer, Barb Miller, Judith Gallagher, M. A. Mogus, Michele Jones, Marge Burke, and Thomas Beck, a poem by Barb Holliday, and an introduction by Ed Kelemen.

Members of the Greensburg Writers' Group are finishing their stories for the fourth volume, *Phantom Detectives at Risk*, out soon.





Crown of Glory

© by *Thomas Beck*