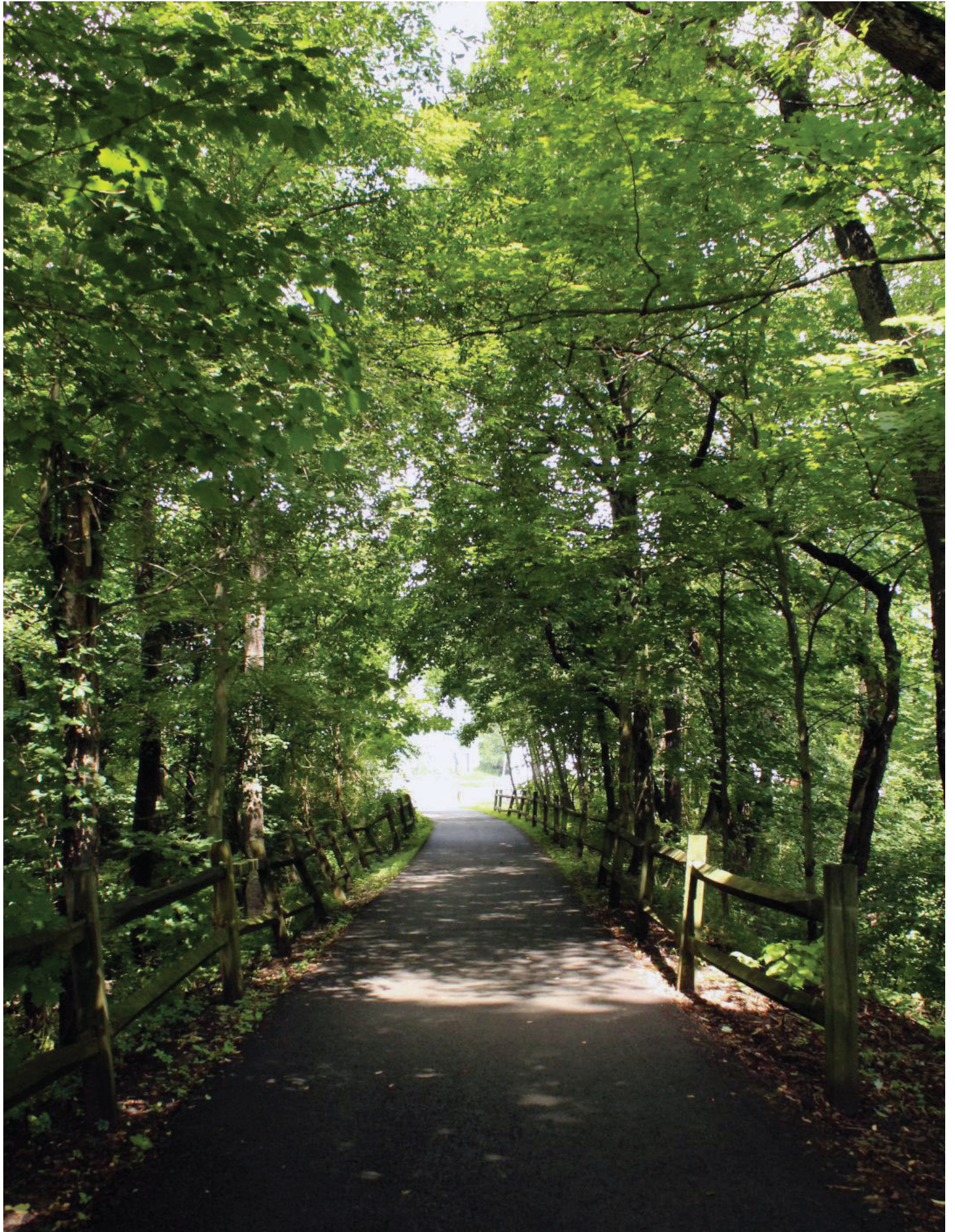


The Loyalhanna Review
2023

TRUB



Pathway to the Light © by *Linda Ciletti*

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Ligonier Valley Writers presents the
2023 edition of its literary magazine,
The Loyalhanna Review.

From the Editor

Thanks to Ligonier Valley Writers' faithful members and generous donors, LVW has been able to return to a fuller slate of events, contests, workshops, and speakers.

Last fall, F.J. Hartland taught our first in-person workshop since the pandemic. His lesson on the short-short play stressed the value of immediacy in all forms of writing to place characters and audience in the middle of the action, "the room where it happens."

Our Flash Fiction Contest has become so popular submissions even arrived from other countries. Our six honorees shared their scary stories at the Ligonier Crumpet Shoppe. You can read them on our LVW website.

In December, we wished one another happy holidays with good food, seasonal readings, and door prizes. This spring, Jim Busch and Rachael Morgan taught the methods and professional values of personal journaling and the treasure trove a journal habit can be for writers.

To celebrate Poetry Month, we presented cash prizes during our Student Poetry Contest award ceremony, attracting a crowd of proud parents, grandparents, siblings, and teachers to the Barnes & Noble bookstore. They came to support grade 4-12 poets reading their winning first, second, and third place entries in nine categories.

Most recently Chris Rodell, nationally known Latrobe author, joined us at Adams Memorial Library to share his stories-behind-the-stories while completing "Six Books in Ten Years."

The Loyalhanna Review was pleased to add another member to the editorial committee, Rebecca Dunn, and we recruited a new webmaster, Linda Ciletti, from within our own ranks.

To remain a vibrant cultural organization, Ligonier Valley Writers needs active members to bring fresh perspectives and willing hands in all capacities for new program ideas, research, and ways and means. We hope to welcome more. We need you.

In this 2023 *Loyalhanna Review* issue, we present voices familiar and new. Without their writing or art talents and willingness to share their work, this publication would not exist. We hope you enjoy our efforts.

Ruth McDonald, Editor-in-Chief

Special Thanks to All Our 2023 Members, Contributors and Friends

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

All Donors and Judges for the Flash Fiction and Student Poetry Contests.

Rebe Dunn, Anita Staub, and Linda Ciletti for their LR, Facebook and Web work.

Jim Busch	Carolyn Holland	Susan and Joe Potts
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Front Cover: **Fire in the Valley** © by *Carolyn Cornell Holland* (bio on p.23)

Inside Front Cover: **Pathway to the Light** © by *Linda Ciletti* (bio on p.28)

Inside Back Cover: **Great Horned Owl** © by *Tamara Di Bartola* (bio on p.28)

Outside Back Cover: **Fish Studying Viewers** © by *Carolyn Cornell Holland* (bio on p.23)

My Hypothetical Career As a Play-by-Play Announcer

© by Joe Potts

It's fun to ponder the occupations we might have entered if we had taken different paths in our distant youth. We all had childhood daydreams about being a movie star or a fireman or the person who invents the warp drive.

As kids, we had little understanding of the talents and abilities needed for those vocations. But one thing I knew I could never be is a play-by-play announcer.

A friend of mine was an announcer of high school football games. I'm in awe of his ability to do this. I have absolutely no skills that would apply to that job, except eating hot dogs.

See, I usually don't talk much. Some days I barely talk at all. Maybe I'll mumble a few words here or there about the weather. So possibly I could have been a laconic weather guy. *"Mumble ... Partly cloudy ... Cold front ... Danged drizzle ..."*

As a boy, I heard many fine announcers. I mean Bob Prince, "the Gunner," are you kidding me? I listened to him and Jim "the Possum" Woods all the time on Pirates games. There'd be a bug on the rug, a radio ball, a bloop and a blast, and you could kiss it goodbye. Occasionally I might hear other greats like Mel Allen or Vin Scully.

But even back then, I knew I could never do what they did. I had a better chance of becoming a Pirate than of being their announcer. The pinnacle of my baseball skills was being able to get in the general vicinity of a fly ball without hurting myself.

Hockey announcers in particular are amazing. Either that, or they're making it all up.

First of all, hockey pucks are like quarks. Who actually sees them? When I watch hockey, I see only a gang of armored cyborgs skating chaotically up and down the rink. Occasionally they cluster around the net in a piranha-like frenzy.

*Hockey pucks are like
quarks. Who actually
sees them?*

Then the goalie pulls a puck from his glove and tosses it out. I think he had it in his glove all along. The other players were just pretending to move the puck around. If I'm the announcer, the puck needs to be three times larger, painted DayGlo colors, and emitting foghorn blasts.

Hockey also has way too many annoying rules and some weird terminology. "And the Penguins take control of the puck. There's an icing call. I didn't even know they had a cake!" I'd say.

"Pierre de Gaulle crosses the blue line. And now Bruiser McBruisey cross-checks him, and look, there's hooking, and whoa, there's a stick to the chops. He's gonna be spittin' Chiclets now!"

This being the most I have spoken in ten years, there would follow thirty minutes of silence.

Let's say we pitch the puck and grab a football. I'm on more solid ground there, as I've been a football fan for years. However, there are a lot of players on that field. Who can keep track of them?

"The Steelers line up, and there's the snap. The quarterback, what's his name? He hands off to a guy, number 22, and wait a minute—the first guy still has it, and he's running around, and throws it downfield. Some guy caught it! What a catch! And he runs for a while and is tackled by an opponent, and—oh, there's the end of the half, and I missed a few plays in the meantime. Don't worry, no one scored except maybe a field goal, so no harm done."

The slower pace of baseball might be more my speed, but other issues would come into play. My depth perception isn't the best, which could lead to some embarrassing moments:

"And there's the swing! It's a long fly ball, that baby's a goner, it's outta here. Wait, the fielder corrals it in shallow center."

That style might add some excitement to the proceedings (which, let's face it, some games desperately need). Baseball games can have long stretches where not much happens. A non-talker would have trouble filling those voids.

"(Prolonged humming.) The pitcher's taking a siesta. (Prolonged silence.) Is that a cloud up there? (More silence.) What? Something happened. Whozit hits a grounder to you-know at second, he tosses it to first for the out. (Prolonged silence.)"

Okay, how about golf? Not a fast-moving sport, and the players go around the course in order. This sounds promising. Of course, there's that pesky golf ball, about the size of a molecule. Who can keep track of it once it's in the air? There's also a lot of terminology to learn.

"And now Tiger Arnie Nicklaus hits a high-hooking fade. It's headed somewhere out there. I've lost it. Wait, it's in the hazard, or is it a bunker or maybe a trap? It definitely rolled through the first cut and into the gorse! He's going to have to play a provisional ball, and his bogey chances look much better than birdie, although I think he winged that duck in the water hazard. He could be penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct, as well as hunting without a license."

It's clear there's no sport for which I would be an adequate announcer. In fact, if through some

colossal fluke of time and tide I ever became one, my first act would be to announce my retirement from announcing.

I feel sympathy for young people, having to make decisions on which path to choose. Science tells us their brains aren't fully developed yet, so how do they know if they should be an accountant or an astronaut?

In my case, it helped to know I shouldn't darken the sports world with my announcing foibles.

And now nothing remains but to announce with my fully developed but deteriorating brain that this is the end of my tome on announcing. ♦

Joe Potts has had humor articles in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and the *Tribune Review*. His fiction can be heard on the WAOB Audio Theatre (website, YouTube, podcast). He lives in Unity Township with his wife, Susan, and feline literary critics Sofia and Nefertiti.

Muddy Boots

© by Paul Turtzer

Attained sixty-five years, diversity being the key
Wine, whiskey and beer
Brown, Brook and Rainbow Trout

Unwilling to forfeit time
Sense the meter is always running

Ditched ego at the trailhead
Knew to keep load light

Strong legs and fluid mind
Good humor to battle absurdity
Capable companions to fill in the gaps

Travel mostly by instinct
Ignoring conventional map

Flat and straight are of little interest
A ridge or bend hints mystique

Eccentric voices guide my humanity
While pragmatist question my sanity

Age may temper enthusiasm
But docile acceptance cultivates death

Clean and unused is no way to live



Bricolage

© by Stacy DiPasquale

Scattered
Everywhere
We find
Bits and pieces
We can use
To create
To begin
Bringing an idea to life
A piece of paper
Feather
Butterflies
And candles
How do these combine
What will they create
How we create
Our life
From bits and pieces
We pick up
Here and there
And take with us
That's who we become
Who we are
A bricolage



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

Moon Burn

© by Candace Kubinec

I love the gentleness of the moon,
softly glowing without intensity,
without fierceness.
We can gaze at each other
without protection —
no need for moon glasses
or moon screen.
Moonbeams drift
harmlessly down to kiss my
up-turned face, and there
is no danger of getting burned.

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

Tanka

© by Jan McLaughlin

daylight drizzles down
grass whispers from blade to blade
dewdrops adorn webs —
orchestras of scarlet horns
raise their trumpets to the sun

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

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

What Kind of Tattoo Would Jesus Get?

© by Walt Peterson

It was right after we tried to bury Colby Barlow that the Miracle at the Mausoleum happened, as my Nadine calls it. It wasn't really a miracle, just nobody could figure how to get Colby's box of ashes into the Wall of Memories, so then we thought Colby, that old joker, come back to play his tricks on us some more.

But then the Reverend Brother Leroy got them ashes all tightened up and torqued down in the wall.

Despite the Reverend Brother Leroy's checkered board past and his tale of, as the good people of Dog Hollow call it, Jail-house Jesus appearing to him in his cell to set him on the straight and narrow when he was a guest at the Governor's Hotel, everyone in the hollow began to believe.

Even Earl, who's got a strong resemblance to Doubtin' Thomas in the New Testament, started to believe more and more after Brother Leroy's Sermon at the New Alexander Demo Derby. That's what Brother Leroy named it when people told him he sure was riled up with fire and brimstone after he stopped the Crashin' for Colby & Cancer Feature Race.

Well, anyway, you ever hear of a church sponsorin' a Crash What You Brung Demo Derby? Reverend Brother Leroy claimed all of this activity was takin' faith to the flock, the real flock—the sheep who needed the Shepherd.

You ever hear of a church sponsorin' a Crash What You Brung Demo Derby?

We all always knew better than to argue with Reverend on matters of faith, just like the Pope.

On that beautiful night under the lights, he grabbed the microphone up in the booth and gave all them drivers what-for for crashin', if you want to call it that, like Punch & Judy puppets (which I never heard about, but the Reverend knew more about scripture than most).

I digress. He just stopped the feature race cold. Drivers was leaning out of their old rusty junkers with crash helmets on. Except for George Hayduke, who was Earl's third cousin and somewhat of a ringer since he found or stole a '75 Oldsmobile station wagon, the gold unicorn in demo-car lore because of its solid steel frame.

But let me get on with the best part. Over the loudspeakers Rev told those drivers, "I know all them cars got three pedals. The pedal on your right, that's the one you dee-press when you get the other guy's junk in your sights. Now, all you, ahem, drivers, just for practice push down hard on that right pedal, a-one, and a-two, and a-three, so you know what to do when I give you the green so you can try to be the last

man standing like a gladiator, or a driver if that's the case, and win the prize money."

Speakin' of men, this is the really good part where, I swear, Brother LeRoy put in his two cents' worth about Women's Lib. "I can take y'all's wives, girlfriends, and even Monroe's little daughter, Rae, who got her first deer this past Holy Season of Deer."

Monroe's little daughter, Rae, got her first deer during this past Holy Season of Deer.

(Everyone cheered. I was so proud! Let me confess, I really can't hit a bull's ass with a spade. Now Genetics on Nadine's side, that's real science I believe in.)

"And they will give all y'all your money's worth."

Brother Leroy was sweatin' and red-faced. His reverend's collar popped out of his shirt like a piston ring when you use one of them cheap, low-buck ring compressors they used to sell at NAPA.

To a man, the demo drivers was inspired—need I say more?

That night, everyone agreed that they got their money's worth of crashin' and bein' crashed into, especially when Earl's third cousin punctured his radiator, third car from the prize money and sat there in a cloud of steam like a devil waitin' to vanish back to Hell or somethin'.

My point is this: After the night of the demo derby, Rev shifted into high gear. *The Lord has anointed me to be an Influencer for Eternity. And Jesus has Branded me as part of his product line.* And, of course, claimin' his bout with Prison Jesus helped him decide to open a tattoo parlor for the faithful.

There, according to him, is where sinners are most likely to congregate. *You can get saved and a tattoo.*

The Lord has anointed me to be an Influencer.

Then he started in on statistics. "You know, Monroe, 30 percent of people have at least one tat (way more in prison, I was thinkin' under my breath, and I was impressed he called them "tats" like a prison old head).

Rev kept talkin'. "An increase of 20 percent over the previous generation." Then he kept on about the age group from 19 to 35. "We can Bible study three

nights a week while people are getting inked.”

How can you argue with logic and facts like that! I said, “You mean like a one-stop Walmart for the soul!”

“Yeah!” he replied. “And with none of that chop suey China crap.”

We can Bible study while people are getting inked.

Anybody with the brains of a shit-house mouse could see his vision had possibilities.

“Where?” I says.

“Down at the Golden Shovel.”

“Pool hall’s boarded up ever since Doc died.”

“Wrong,” says he. “Bob Cat came back and started waitin’ at the door like Doc was still there, alive. We decided that feline knew something about old Doc we don’t, like Colby, so we unboarded the windows. Now Bob just lays there and sleeps all day while he’s waitin’.”

I allowed as how that was probably a true holy sign. In addition, Bob Cat misses the whiskey and sardine salad whipped up to celebrate after Doc beat that Hells Angel biker or some other hoopie in Eight Ball for his Hog.

“Could very well be.” Leroy nodded.

But, well, that’s a whole ’nother story about Doc and LeRoy that I ain’t gettin’ into right now, I mean to tell you. ♦

Walt Peterson, Pittsburgh teacher and author, has taught writing at SCI Indiana and at Mt. Alvernia through PA. Council on the Arts. His latest book is *Talking Smack to the Dead* (Cyberwit Press). “What Kind of Tattoo Would Jesus Get?” is the third story in the trilogy about an unnamed but fabulous garage in Westmoreland County.

Lonely Dusk

© by Jean Podralski

dinner is waiting only to receive finishing touches
garlic bread to be toasted, green beans steamed, and potatoes buttered
the walkway has been shoveled and salted
the sky and snow are but a frost shade of white apart.
the garage light beckons
dark denims are washed, dried, folded, ready to be tucked into your dresser drawer
the tree lights twinkle in time as Nat King Cole wishes us a Merry Christmas
Sadie dog watches the walls for lights and listens for the sounds of a car she knows
the furnace kicks on
warming a waiting home
waiting to see your headlights come down the lane

Jean Podralski has been a poet her entire life. She loves to create and has also been a florist, knitter, painter, baker, and middle school English teacher. Home is wherever she can hear the Pennsylvania peepers at dusk.

After Dinner Dishes

© by Jean Podralski

the light above the kitchen sink
spotlights my yellow-gloved hands in soapy water

out the window, the sun slowly melts down over the tree tops
children should be playing imaginative games, catching lightning bugs, racing against the
pending ominous end of summer
crickets and frogs turn up their sound track to twilight

the sigh when I finish and turn out the kitchen light
is not my own
it is my mother’s sigh
pressing through layers
through dimensions and decades
out through my lungs

Wanda's Cow Story: An Oral Tale

© by Rebecca Dunn

Well now, let me tell you. When I was a young woman in the mid-1950s, I married a Westmoreland County farmer. I knew nothing about farming. But J.R. did his best to teach me what I needed to know to be useful. He was mostly content that I was in the house, cooking and cleaning and seeing to the little ones who followed our marriage pretty quick!

Oh, but he *was* surprised when he learned that I was not a cook. Or a housekeeper. I think I was good at child-rearing since I had only recently been a child. I was, however, and still am, a faithful servant to the Lord God. I taught our children to pray, and prayed each day that I would become a better wife, cook, housekeeper, and mother.

One thing I thought I was capable of doing was calling the cows in from the field twice a day. They wanted to come to the barn and be lightened of their pressing load of milk.

This was an uneventful routine: I walked up the fenceline, called and cajoled and rang a big bell, and the cows came home. Once in the barn, they each found their stall, munched on the hay J.R. had thoughtfully placed in the feed trough, and waited to be milked.

But there was this one evening in deep winter. It was nearly dark. The pasture was high with crisp, frosted snow. A deep pond near the cowpath had frozen over.

For some reason I could not fathom—maybe it was the lack of light, maybe it was the snow cover, maybe it was just to be cows—the lead animal strayed from the usual path and led the herd onto the icy pond. There they stopped. Every last one of them.

I was stunned by the sight. I heard a cracking noise and watched as the ice cap began to descend ever so slightly. These 40 cows, our entire herd, a key source of our income, were going to drop into the water and drown right before my eyes.

I ran to the pond, rang the bell, called and cajoled, and not one of those damned bovines raised a head to look at me. J.R. was in the barn, waiting, and surely didn't hear my caterwauling.

Can cows swim?

I knew that if one cow began to move the rest would follow, but if the ice cracked there could be no stopping it!

What to do?! What to do?! Can cows swim? I didn't know! They huddled together for warmth, not realizing, I'm sure, the reason they were colder!

I dropped to my knees on that snowy frozen pasture and prayed harder than I had ever prayed in my life. "Please, God! Deliver these creatures from the icy pond to the safety of the barn!"

The sound of ice cracking reached my ears again.

I prostrated myself on the ground, calling out the prayer louder. "PLEASE, DEAR GOD! Get these damn sunavabitchingcows off the pond!"

Crying so the snow was sticking to my face, I looked up briefly to see the ice lower further. Water lapped against the cows' hooves. I don't know how I

*These 40 cows were
going to drown
right before my eyes.*

didn't burst into flame from the panic in my heart.

Then the lead cow looked at me, thoughtfully chewing her cud. She moved. They sank a bit more. She gained the ground. The other cows followed slowly.

Crack! Crack! Crack!!

When the last cow was off the pond, the entire ice cap calved and bobbed below the water line.

Shaking and crying, soaked by the snow, I hauled myself up and chased after the cattle. I'll admit to uttering a lot of bad language while still giving thanks to God.

As the cows took their places in the stalls, I clung to the door frame. J.R. looked at me.

"Well, shut the door, woman! What took you so long? These girls are near to drowning in milk."

Unable to speak at that rebuke, I returned to the house. I went to bed less than grateful for life as a farmer's wife.

But I was absolutely assured that God answers prayer—in spite of how many expletives are scattered in the uttering. ♦



This exaggerated extrapolation is based on an incident once recounted by Mrs. Wanda Hepler. When I told her I wanted to fact-check the story with her, she replied: "Oh, whatever you write will be far more interesting than the facts. Do what you will. I look forward to reading it." Sorry that it took so long, Wanda.

Rebecca E. ("Rebe") Dunn has ignored her muse for so long he has taken up knitting so that the yarn doesn't go to waste. Let's hope she continues to craft her creative nonfiction and save the world from more ugly sweaters.

A Fowl Deed

© by John R. Morrow

Wonder why I'm here? I'll be glad to tell you.

I grew up on a farm. We had lots of chickens. I liked chickens. They were smart and friendly and I liked to hear the way they talked to each other. Sometimes when I was lonely, I talked to them. We had lots of nice conversations.

I never had a problem eating chicken. I never gave a thought to how a chicken must feel about being eaten until the day I had to kill one.

My father had a method. You hold the chicken by the legs and stretch her neck between two spikes on a stump and chop her head off.

I caught a nice hen and was preparing to decapitate her—is that the proper word?—when all the chickens gathered around me, watching.

I kept seeing that eye, so full of terror and yet pity, pity for me!

I chopped the poor girl's head off, and her eye—I swear it looked at me, and I shuddered to see the fear and pain and sadness in that eye.

All her friends became agitated. I swear I could hear them mourning!

I went through the rest of the day with a deep sense of guilt and shame—and dread. What was I afraid of? I kept seeing that eye, so full of terror and yet pity, pity for me!

That night I had the first of many nightmares. I dreamed that I was in the chicken yard, and all the chickens had gathered around. They put my head between the spikes and began chanting, "Kill him! Kill him!"

A sickening terror gripped me when I saw the hatchet poised to strike. I shot straight up in bed, screaming and gasping for breath. I slept little the rest of the night and awoke with a stiff neck.

I stumbled through the following days, half aware of my surroundings. My crime would not permit me to rest.

I kept seeing that eye, so full of fear and pain and judgment. It followed me, tormented me, mocked me, accused me, never let me rest. And in noisy crowds I could hear the cries, "Kill him! Kill him!"

I was afraid to go to sleep.

I was afraid to go to sleep. I couldn't eat and was losing weight. For weeks I was haunted by fear of damnation.

Thanksgiving came and Mother prepared the meal for family and guests. When I saw a crispy brown chicken on the table, I shuddered. An icy chill

of fear and guilt overtook me.

The chicken stood and faced me and yelled, "Kill him! Kill him!"

Someone said, "Are you all right?"

I bolted from the table and threw up. I spent the rest of the day curled up in my room, waiting in terror to be taken away.

That night I was once again in the chicken yard. All the chickens were gathered around again, but this time they were laughing and dancing.

The largest of them had me by my feet and my head between the spikes. This time the hatchet came down and I could feel the searing pain.

And then he plunged me into the boiling water and began plucking my feathers.

I screamed out in pain and was still screaming when my mother and father came in. They wrapped their soft wings around me and clucked softly that everything was going to be all right.

My father left the room. I could hear his end of the conversation. "198 Fairfield Drive ... 16 ... severely ill ... No, not dangerous."

Two nice roosters dressed in white came and took me for a ride. That's how I came here.

I like this chicken coop; isn't it nice? I have friends here and feel safe. And the food is good. I hear we're having people tenders for supper.

No, there's nothing I need. Thank you for coming, Reverend. ♦

John Morrow is a retired Presbyterian pastor living in Bear Rocks Community, the father of three children, and the author of *Aishling*, a young adult action/fiction published by Christian Faith Publishing.

A Gathering Most Fowl

© by Candace Kubinec

It was a mob scene,
a larger-than-large gathering,
this gaggle of geese.
Waiting impatiently
for the corn in our pockets,
honking and pushing — then
when we had no more to give,
they swam gracefully to the
other side of the lake
without a backward glance.

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

One More Day

© by Sandra Edwards

Feeding a family of nine back in the 1940s and 1950s was not an easy task, especially when the father worked only when he felt like it. We often had scant helpings at meals.

We were fortunate, though, as my mother's two brothers owned a successful potato farm in the northern part of the state. When they would travel to our house to visit with their sister, they always brought at least one 100-pound sack of potatoes.

I can still see them standing in the basement, Barnett Brothers imprinted in red letters on the heavy brown bags.

We lived in a rented duplex. A house around the corner came up for sale. My mother thought it would be the perfect place for her large family.

Fortunately, her dad had left her just enough money to make the house ours, and soon the Porter house became the Gershman home.

The Porters had filled the yard with beautiful perennials: honeysuckle, lilies of the valley, peonies, irises, hollyhocks, lilac bushes, and my favorite, a pink bleeding heart bush.

They had also planted a cherry, several plums, and apple trees, along with a large grapevine and rhubarb.

My mother used every single fruit in the yard, either serving it fresh or filling her cupboard in the basement with shiny glass Mason jars to help us through the long winter.

During the months when the weather made it enjoyable, she would sit outside in her housedress on an old metal chair and peel potatoes and apples. Every single day she would ready potatoes for dinner and apples for a yummy dish.

I remember applesauce, stewed apples, apple dumplings, apple pie, and apple cobbler.

The warmth of the day would be shining on her face, as she always chose a sunny spot. She had a light smile on her face since she enjoyed her task and the sunshine. She always said the sun was healing and good for one's health and demeanor. I feel the same to this very day.

Her cares were many, her journey fraught with constant financial concerns, endless mounds of laundry in a cold basement and a wringer washer with clotheslines outdoors, in the basement, and in the attic.

Keeping track of seven kids was no easy task, either. Yet she put her feet on the floor every single morning and started her day. One definition of sainthood is "heroic virtue." A perfect description.

When I think of my mother, the metal chair, sunshine and the satisfaction written on her face come to mind. If I had my wish from the Fantasy Island show of years past, this would be my request: One more sunny day, one more apple and potato, and one more day with my mother. ♦

Sandra Edwards has always been an avid reader and lover of words. She enjoyed leaving notes for family in lunchboxes or under pillows. In her correspondence, loved ones have cherished her recall of memories.

Gone with the Rhett

© by Stacy DiPasquale

What makes you the expert
On my needs?
How do you know
What should be done?
Without ever asking
Ever taking me into consideration.

Who are you to assume
My lips never felt the satisfaction
Of a man's?
My tongue never danced with another
While held tightly
Overtaken with desire.

How dare you Rhett Butler me
Without knowing me.
I'm not a southern belle.
A damsel in distress.
Or an innocent lover.
I am a woman.

I know the touch of a man.
Experienced ecstasy.
Been kissed with Passion, Lust, and Love.
But never from your lips.
By my choice.
Perhaps it's you who should be kissed
By someone who knows how.

Stacy DiPasquale was honored to have her story "All Tied Up" in the *Phantom Detectives at Risk* anthology and poetry in a prior LR. She is currently working on a book series inspired by her love of music and New Kids on the Block.

Secrets That Matter

© by Nancy Clark

On a sunny June morning in 1921, a tall, handsome man and his petite young bride huddle with other anxious migrants on a shipping dock in Genoa, Italy. They watch with mixed emotions as steamer trunks plastered with illegible stickers and labels are loaded onto the deck of the *Duca D Aosta*.

The angst of knowing they may never again see the families they leave behind is compounded by the fear of never again seeing the black metal steamer trunk that holds all their worldly goods.

*They stand wordlessly,
wedged between sheer joy
and utter trepidation.*

Fear is paralyzing, but when the young pioneers and their steerage mates board that Italian ocean liner for the 13-day Atlantic crossing to the Port of New York, they do so with faith, hope, and determination to make a better life in the land of milk and honey.

On July 4—Independence Day in the USA—the ship drops anchor in the waters of Bedloe’s Island (renamed Liberty Island in 1956) in the upper New York Bay.

The weary couple join others on deck to stare through the early morning mist at the distant silhouette of the Lady with the Torch.

Many weep and fall to their knees in prayer. Others stand wordless, wedged somewhere between sheer joy and utter trepidation.

On July 8, 1921, the newlyweds undergo tedious immigration processing and are finally reunited with their trunk of worldly goods.

They’ll lug that trunk to the southwest corner of the Keystone State to stake their claim in a bustling, ethnic-rich bituminous coal community. It’s where they—my future grandparents—will rest ... and their steamer trunk will rust.

Long after my very reserved grandparents penned “*Fina*” to their migration story, I salivated for more of it. “Then what happened ...?” became my nagging mantra. I wove in references to the black metal trunk and its contents.

All queries were met with off-putting rebukes: “Why do you want to know?” or “It’s nobody’s business.” Their resolute effort to dissuade my insatiable curiosity only drove me to dive deeper into my maternal gene pool.

I was 10 years old when my teen-detective alter ego, Nancy Drew, and I slipped unnoticed into Grandpa’s off-limits dark, damp basement to sneak a peek at stuff hidden under foul-smelling flannel blankets. We expected to find tantalizing clues to

things old and forgotten.

Our snooping led to a box-shaped relic that was larger than Grandma’s breadbox but smaller than her perpetually humming Kelvinator icebox. A firm tug on the blanket revealed the object of my ballooning obsession, and we gasped in unison as our eyes beheld—and our noses detected—the subject of our scrutiny.

The 40+-year-old steamer trunk was a victim of travel abuse and decades of neglect, its metal skin marred with scuffs, scratches, and scars. A tacky layer of whitish/grey powder and green mold smothered identification and destination labels, and a two-inch ring of rust at the trunk’s base mirrored the rusty ring on the concrete floor.

No shiny brass bands, no supple leather straps, and no key protruding from the large oval, empty keyhole.

“YUK,” we spat in unison. Terrified that some multi-legged, big-eyed creature might slither out of the black keyhole, we threw the cover over our disgusting discovery and high-tailed it to the backyard. The trunk of my daydreams evolved into a daymare.

Nancy D. gradually withdrew from our investigation into *The Mystery of the Locked Trunk*; but the insatiable thirst for more insight into the life and times of my grandparents before I came to be would not abate. Surely there were artifacts in that trunk—photos, records, letters, maybe foreign currency—that would lessen my lust to know.

Decades later I inherited the metal trunk only because no one else wanted “that moldy old thing.” Prying it open exposed its secrets: a few lacy doilies, several five-and-dime porcelain figurines, a tarnished empty picture frame, and a brittle piece of nondescript newsprint.

No titan tributes to the indomitable spirit and bravery of the couple who bore my mother and her siblings.

I still have oodles of questions, but maybe I’m not meant to know more than what has already been revealed to me. In 1 Corinthians 13 we’re told: “*Now we see but a poor reflection as in the mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully ...*”

Perhaps one day, when in heaven we are face to face again, my grandparents will willingly fill in the blanks. But by then, will it really matter? ♦

Nancy Clark and hubby Tom are living the good life as retirees, grateful for good health, just enough wealth, the affection of a growing family, and a treasure trove of friends. Her favorite piece of advice: “Life is short; don’t sweat the small stuff.”

Wolf Rocks Trail Adventure

© Alicia Stankay

After perusing all the trails on the Linn Run State Park map, my husband and I settled on driving past that park and into Forbes State Forest. We found a trail called Wolf Rocks, which sounded intriguing.

Although it was a hot day in July, trees lined the path, sending cool breezes along our way.

There's something peaceful about starting out on a trail and completely immersing our senses in the world around us.

We saw a variety of trees, logs on the ground softened by a covering of moss, and bright-colored mushrooms sprouting along the trail. An occasional yellow butterfly flitted by, and rocks and roots challenge hikers to be careful.

*There's something peaceful
about immersing our senses
in the world around us.*

We'd hear the loud rustling of leaves on the ground, only to be surprised by a little chipmunk skittering away.

Often birds chirped, but sometimes the woods were very quiet, as if nature was waiting to see what we were doing in its domain.

It can be dangerous to touch some things, like hairy caterpillars, and it's definitely not safe to taste many plants, especially mushrooms. We'd touch and sniff soft moss, the rough bark of a tree, or a petal of a flower, but we didn't taste.

This Wolf Rocks Trail lived up to its name. It was impossible to move without stepping on a rock, sliding off a rock, or trying to leap over a rock.

Among our most important assets on this trip were our hiking poles, which really helped us deal with the rough terrain and the many unexpected obstacles in our way.

When we crossed a short wooden bridge over a meandering creek, we noticed that the water was separated by rocky sections.

Later we enjoyed the gurgling of the creek with mini-waterfalls and the occasional clear pools where crawfish and minnows swam. The creeksides were protected by ferns, bright mushrooms, and trees that provided shade.

*An occasional yellow
butterfly flits by.*

By the time we reached the highlight of our hike we were tired and awed at the same time. Piles of enormous rocks filled the whole area in front of us and framed the scenic green trees and blue sky with

puffy white clouds into a magnificent picture.

If you let your imagination run wild, one section of the rocks looked like a giant turtle, another mimicked a dog with floppy ears, and one rock was a bird's head with its beak open.

Aside from these animal rocks, the perfect weather and the amazing view were worth the hike to this destination. We spent some time viewing the scene from several spots and crawled over some of the rocks. My husband even stood up on one.

I then tentatively stood up on one rock that was nowhere near the edge, but I still didn't feel comfortable. I had no desire to plummet over the side, never to be seen again!

After taking pictures of Wolf Rocks and getting our fill of the beauty of the scene and the marvels of the rock formations, we began our long hike back to our car at the head of the trail.

*We saw lots of rocks,
and we didn't
encounter any wolves.*

Although we could have chosen another trail option for the return trip, it was even longer and a little more rugged. We didn't have enough energy left to tackle it.

Still, it's always a little different walking back. The same trail often shows different flowers, mushrooms, rock shapes, and possibly sightings of a deer or snake we hadn't noticed earlier.

When we finally saw our car through the trees, we felt a happy sense of accomplishment.

We'd made it all the way back and had seen lots of rocks, and we were very thankful that we hadn't encountered any wolves! ♦

Alicia Stankay, a writer and nature photographer, hikes local parks throughout the seasons. She enjoys rocky vistas, babbling brooks, hummingbird moths, and colorful autumn trees that make stories dance in her head. They've also given her the impulse to begin writing the next book in her Stonecliff mystery series.

Haiku

© by Jan McLaughlin

bristle by bristle
the old broom disintegrates
nesting birds gather

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

Moon Walking

© by Sr. Sally Witt, CSJ

Early this morning, the moon
called down to me from the wide Kansas sky
as I walked, unaware she was watching.

She was round as the bread not yet broken
on the plate at the altar,
much larger and light-filled.

We beheld each other.
Then I turned, continued walking;
the moon strolled beside me.

Since I am busier than the moon,
which, after all has only to handle earth's wobbling,
tides, seasons, the moods of all people,
and various other obligations,
I walked ahead sensibly, went inside
to breakfast and the day's beginning.

The moon was on her own –
she has eons of practice –
and did not need me beside her,

while I cut short
a communion with one
who can keep me awake, as last night she did,

and surprise me with roundness, her light in dark morning,
the patience of waiting an eon or two
for one moment of stillness beholding each other.

Sally Witt, CSJ, a Sister of St. Joseph of Baden, PA, lives in Ambridge. Her first book of poetry, a chapbook, is due out from Finishing Line Press in spring 2024.

Bird Rescue

© by Nicole Fratrigh

A calm-crisis-adventure
Forces us to hop a fence
And rediscover ourselves on the other side.

Ten minutes later
We're skipping stairs
And chasing stubborn time
With a fierce-winged patient in a box.

Collision averted,
Dead-end turn around,
Mailbox with buzzer.

Rescue complete,
So we unveil the sun
And blast childhood anthems
Until we arrive at DQ.

All the while you feel a rush,
A youthful exhilaration
And unexpected reminder of the
True friendship you've been yearning for.

Nicole Fratrigh is a teacher with a degree in English from Saint Vincent College. She has also been published in *Mystery Weekly Magazine*, *The Twofer Compendium*, and *The Johnstown Tribune-Democrat*. *The Music Makes the Man* is her debut novel. She can be found at www.nicolefratrighauthor.com.

Hillside Morning Melody

© Judith Sturges

As the sun slowly rises over the eastern mountain range, I sit outside observing the peace and listening to the calm of an August morning.

I hear the purling stream as water gently flows over rocks in its bed. The river is low at this time of year. Hidden within are pollywogs, crayfish, and at times, snakes.

The quiet stillness of nature begins to be inter-rupted by bird calls that have not yet erupted into a chorus of song. Unseen birds chirp in response to one another.

As more birds awaken, calls unique to each species increase, creating a melody that resembles a chorus of singers in practice. A lone dove calls in the distance. As morning progresses, insects emerge, evident by their rhythmic chants.

Their sounds become a morning song. The steady babbling of the stream develops the song's rhythm. Two unseen birds add the melody: four high chirps with a neighboring bird's lower one-tweet response. Their consonant harmony is serene and soothing to hear.

Then a rooster crows in the distance, which adds dissonant harmony to the birds' song. As morning progresses, more birds and insects participate in their song.

To me, the sounds of nature on a hillside morning are a gift of serenity, a gift I receive when focusing on the peace and calmness of creation.

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



Moon © by Janice McLaughlin (bio on p. 28)



Through the Pillory © by Candace Kubinec (bio on p. 8)

*Could it be that
goodness waxes and
wanes like the moon?*

— Alan Bradley

*“A dreamer is one
who can only find his
way by moonlight,
and his punishment
is that he sees the
dawn before the rest
of the world.”*

— Oscar Wilde



Angels in the Sky © by Tamara DiBartola (bio on p. 28)



Nature's Tree House © by Tamara DiBartola (bio on p. 28)

*“I am the beauty
of the green earth
and the white moon
among the stars and
the mysteries of the
waters.”*

— Starhawk

*“Our brains are
ravenous for a
deeper attachment
to wild things.”*

— Simon Barnes



*“I placed soft
limestone rocks in
my glass of whiskey,
and drank. If you
conceive of the land
as medicine, you may
want to imbibe or
ingest the land itself.”*

— William Least Heat Moon

Tree Hugger © by *Linda Ciletti* (bio on p. 28)



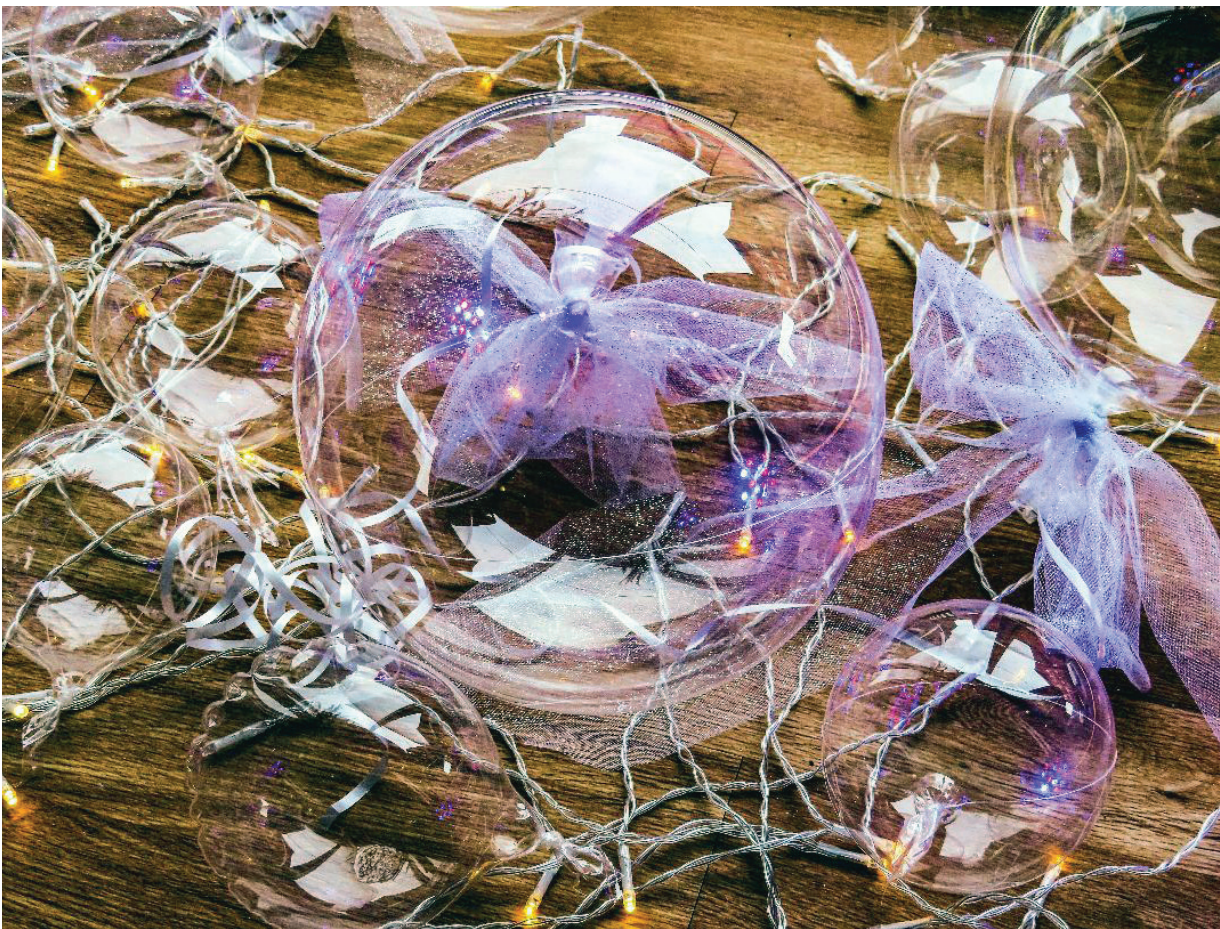
Taking Time to Smell the Flowers © by *Susan Potts* (bio on p. 18)



Reflection in Stained Glass © by Carolyn Cornell Holland (bio on p. 28)



Souperman © by Louise Vrable (bio on p. 28)



Holiday Décor © by Carolyn Cornell Holland (bio on p.28)

The Christmas Table

© by Susan Potts

Contrary to a rumor that has been floating around friends and family for years, I was not born with a camera in my hand. Photographic evidence (ironically) shows a squalling baby with hands in defiant fists, no camera in sight.

With digital photography nowadays, one can click with abandon, not constrained by 24- or 36-negative film rolls. Most of today's memories sadly remain unseen in our modern computers and cell phones.

But back in those olden days, my dad observed how much of my hard-earned secretarial salary I spent getting film developed and said he regretted not having purchased stock in Kodak. Most of these long-forgotten smiles developed by Kodak are now piled into plastic bins stacked in our garage.

My paternal grandmother, Edith Dombrow, passed along to me an interest in family genealogy, along with a love of searching through numerous old photo albums.

In 1959 after the death of my mother, Grandma and Grandpa shuttered their home and moved into our home twenty minutes away in Jeannette to help their son take care of my sister Becky and me.

This gave Grandma the opportunity to spend a lot of time showing us her photo albums. Grandma and Grandpa lived in the tiny village of Penn, Pennsylvania, where a majority of relatives resided. Their house had been built on a steep hillside in 1924 before my grandparents' marriage.

My grandmother had lived through the Great Depression and had watched her 18-year old son go to war for his country in 1943. She was used to sacrificing for her family, who meant everything to her. Evidence of this was displayed not only by the way she lived, but by those memories in the photo albums. Cherished family faces looked back at me while I turned the pages.

In those days before Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org, Grandma shared her detailed handwritten notes containing names and dates about long-lost and much-loved relatives (and the occasional black sheep). She would tell tales of these mysterious individuals whose genes had been passed down to me.

Grandma and I would spend hours turning the black, crumbling pages of albums whose photos were carefully affixed by a serious glue that defied laws of nature. She admonished me, "Make sure you put the names and dates on that picture."

Some of the photos were professional works of art that showed Grandma and her many siblings looking seriously into an unseen studio camera. Grandma, born in 1899, was the first child of a couple of only 17 and 20 years of age.

Maybe a wealthy relative or my proud great-grandparents dug deep into their pockets to fund

those moments of children dressed in carefully stitched homemade frocks.

But most of the albums that Grandma and I studied contained black-and-white images of everyday family activities such as backyard picnics, carefree summertime activities, and my favorite holiday: Christmas.

My favorite photos displayed smiling faces of relatives seated around a huge table laden with a Christmas turkey. I wanted to go back in time and somehow jump into those photos. I wanted to smell the turkey and the pine boughs and see the twinkling lights on Grandma's tree.

*I wanted to go back
in time and jump
into those photos.*

Thanks to Grandma's rule of identifying photos with names and dates, I knew these Christmas memories were taken in 1949 and 1950, several years before I was born. I wanted to talk to those people seated at the table! I wanted to be part of the joy of them all being together during the holidays.

My mother and father still looked like kids, so happy and young and in love. They had not yet had sleepless nights with their squalling first-born daughter.

The Christmas photos had been taken in my grandparents' modest dining room. The dining room table was supplemented with additional tables and spilled out into the adjoining living room. The two rooms were festooned with silver tinsel garlands.

The table was set with Grandma's Quaker Lace tablecloth and her finest china. In the corner of the living room was a gaily decorated tree sparkling with Shiny Brite ornaments. How I loved those special Christmas photographs!

At the age of twelve, I received my first camera as a gift. From that moment on I was consumed with a love of photography. I took photos for the sheer joy of it, mostly just documenting everyday activities.

But of course my favorite time of year to get the camera out was Christmas. I carefully catalogued each Christmas tree, as well as taking the expected group photos.

My long-suffering family now accepts that a portion of each Christmas Day will be spent looking at a camera on a tripod. Click! We are smiling cheerfully or otherwise, depending on the length of this fun holiday activity. Originally it was greeted with a cry of "not again," but all involved would comply eventually.

And despite cries of protest, I always insisted on

taking a photo of our family around the dinner table. No matter if our dinner got cold.

The extra value of these yearly Christmas photos became apparent to me when a relative requested I look at the prior year's group photo. He didn't want to commit the faux pas of wearing the same shirt two years in a row. It then occurred to me that I was not only taking photographs; I was providing a valuable service.

Many Christmases and many cameras have come and gone. My daughter Lisa grew up with the lens of a camera looking her square in the eye. She is resigned to the same fate for her children.

My grandson Josiah was only ten minutes old when this most excited grandmother took his first photo through the hospital's nursery window. Josiah is now a pro at dealing with my camera, and my granddaughters Hannah and Cherith strike a pose even before I take my camera out of its bag. They realize it is quicker to smile and get on with their lives than try to dissuade me.

I can capture the elusive moments of my family's busy lives, but I can't stop the progress of time. A more serious reason has also invaded the pure joy of snapping that shutter.

I feel that I am recording history now. Some of the people in my early photos are sadly no longer with us. Grandma and Grandpa, along with other loved ones, have been gone many, many years.

Other loved ones have slowly disappeared due to fading friendships or changed family relationships. Life circumstances morph and people come and go.

A few of us have been a steadfast part of the Christmas photos year after year, varying only in hairstyles or fashion. Other loved ones are new to our family by reason of friendships, marriages, or the births of beautiful children. We see their smiling faces in the newest photographic memories.

I can only hope that someday my cherished grandchildren will look at my photos with the same wonder and awe as I felt when looking at those black-and-white memories in my grandma's photo albums.

And they will understand why I insisted every Christmas that they pose for a photo of us around that holiday table. ♦

Susan Potts is a retired secretary who enjoys spending time with her family and friends. Her articles and photographs have been published in the *Loyalhanna Review*. Her hobbies include genealogy, photography, and collecting bridal photographs. She lives in Unity Township with her husband, Joe, and therapy cats Sofia and Nefertiti.

Coyotes

© by *Nicole Bradley*

Transformative collaboration of voices in the night, hidden
In mountain pines. Fearless, soft
Feet glide into blue street lights, undetected
By enemies eager to obliterate generations
Of timeless wisdom.

Lone creature of the in-between, shifting
Form with as much variance as the utterance
From your curled mouth.

A haphazard magician, creating
Lineage out of smoke. Rarely exposing
A myriad countenance.

The sum of bodies undetermined, a dozen
Or more voices yip and howl, traversing the
Ridge beyond town. Ethereal chorus of laughter,
Fleshing out a timeless story.

Nicole Bradley enjoys living with her children, a tiny dog and several cats deep in the forest. She is inspired by nature and life experience.

My Father's Time

© by *Rachael Morgan*

Ever sit down with someone
And as they open their mouth,
Another world pours out.
One day, it could be his cats or my mother,
The next day, Vikings or the civil war.
Oh, the magnificent tales I have heard.
Holding on to every last word,
Awaiting the next.
Will it be groundhogs, folk music, or history?
I can never tell.
Having traveled through so many centuries,
I have lived the lives of captains, kings,
And my great grandfather.
I hope the adventures never end.
But I know the time will come,
When I'll reach into the corners of my mind,
And have only the memories of days gone by.
Then, I will open my mouth,
And tell the tales of my father's time.

Rachael Morgan is a mental health therapist by day and dabbles in the creative arts in her free time. She resides in Versailles Boro, PA, with her family, Kathy and Gabriel, plus four spoiled rotten cats. She also enjoys taking photographs in the Ligonier Valley area parks. This is her first submission to the *Loyalhanna Review*.

The Education of Emil Madry

© by Jim Busch

Emil Madry jerked awake as his book slipped from his hands and fell into his lap. He yawned and put the book on the stack of books next to his reading chair.

He removed his wire-rimmed glasses and placed them on the books, stood up, and stretched before moving to the iron-framed bed. He folded his hands and bowed his head.

Stories are how the universe grows.

In his younger days, Emil would have knelt beside the bed, but his creaky knees no longer allowed him to assume this prayerful posture. He hoped God would understand that the spirit was willing but the flesh was arthritic.

Though he lived alone, he spoke softly. "God, let me know your will and let me live in accordance with it. Amen."

Most nights it took a while for the maelstrom of thoughts running through his mind to calm down. But tonight he quickly fell into a deep sleep.

He woke to find his shabby room bathed in a brilliant white light. He couldn't imagine that he had slept past sun up. Then he realized that the two small windows in his room could never make the room so bright.

Throwing back the covers, he sat up and stood. He felt oddly light on his feet. For the first time since the war, his right knee didn't punish him for standing erect.

Everything in his room was luminous. The strange light seemed to emanate from all directions at once.

He walked out his door. Instead of the hallway of the old rooming house, he discovered a space filled with the same strange white light. He must be was in the middle of a very vivid dream.

He was hoping he would soon wake when a gentle voice called his name. "Emil, Emil Madry."

"Who's there? Do I know you? Show yourself."

"A friend, Emil, a brother."

"I have no brother. He died in the war."

"Brother in spirit, Emil. I mean you no harm."

Emil found himself standing in a room lined with shelves of leatherbound books. It looked like the reading room of a fine European university library, far more elegant than anything in his building.

To his left, he saw a tall man in a light-blue suit. The man looked to be middle-aged but fit, with a friendly smile that put Emil at ease.

"Where am I? What is this place?"

"Fear not, my friend. My name is Uriel and I will answer all of your questions. Come, let us sit. May I

get you a cup of tea?"

Waving off the tea, Emil took a seat in one of two leather chairs and asked again, "Where am I?"

Uriel spoke in a soothing voice. "You have moved on to the next level of existence, brother. I think a seeker of knowledge such as yourself will enjoy the opportunities to pursue wisdom on this plane."

"Am I dead, then?"

"Do you feel dead? This is not an ending, simply a transition, much like a child becoming an adult. The child is not gone, he has simply progressed into a new phase of life. You have progressed. Think of it as a sort of promotion, an upgrade, if you will."

"Then this is heaven?"

"Emil, this place can be anything you wish it to be! You have always been a seeker, a man who asked questions that were impossible to answer on an earthly plane. Think of this as a place of answers. For a soul like you, that's a kind of heaven."

"Then you can answer all my questions?"

"I will try, but as a scholar, you know that each answer we receive comes packaged with new questions. The search for knowledge is wider than the universe. That's one of the things that makes it so satisfying."

Emil frowned, trying to follow.

Uriel went on. "Imagine your soul as a beautiful horse. For years it was kept in a tiny stall, constrained by a tight harness and used to pull a plow, its only reward a manger full of dry, tasteless hay. Now that horse has been released on a boundless plain with all sorts of succulent grasses to sample and always another valley to explore."

"There is one question that has tortured me throughout my life."

"Ask it."

"I have never understood why evil exists in the world God created. If He knows all and sees all, why is there so much suffering? How can a compassionate God create such cruel people?"

"That is a fair question. Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be God? To be omnipotent, to completely control every aspect of the universe?"

Imagine an eternity of never being surprised.

"I imagine it would be wonderful," said Emil.

"It is wonderful, of course, but imagine what an eternity of never being surprised would be like, especially for a great intellect? Always knowing what will happen tomorrow and a hundred billion tomorrows after that."

Uriel added, "Now, I have a question for you. What is God's greatest gift to humanity?"

Emil thought and said, "Fire. No, love. ... There are so many gifts, how can I choose?"

"God's greatest gift to humans, and to himself, is the story. Stories make life bearable and interesting. The human race is forever surprising God, sometimes by the evil you do to one another and sometimes by your love and compassion. There always seems to be a twist in the plot of human history."

"How can an omnipotent God be surprised?"

Uriel said, "A surprise ending makes a story interesting. God gave humans powerful imaginations coupled with free will, which led to an infinite number of possible outcomes! He gave them the power, and the freedom, to create stories. From that gift all of God's other gifts flow. You see?"

"Yes," said Emil uncertainly.

"You mentioned fire. Humans saw the lightning strike and dreamed of holding its power in their hands, so some of them told the story of Prometheus and others told of the fire-bringing Raven. You talked about love. Humans took the basic urge to reproduce and invented Aphrodite, Cupid, and romcoms. Imagination plus free will is what makes humans human."

True love, good stories, and great journeys have no endings!

"But why must we have evil?"

"Isn't that obvious? Can you name a good story without an antagonist? How interesting would the Garden of Eden story be without the serpent? Two people eating perfectly ripe fruit for eternity would make for a rather dull tale, don't you think?"

"I suppose."

Uriel laughed. "The Bible needed the devil just as Superman needed Lex Luther. Who would care about Whoville if the Grinch hadn't come along?"

"But all that suffering and all that pain, just for the sake of creating interesting stories, for the sake of mere entertainment?" Emil demanded.

"Yes, there is suffering in the world, but it does not last. There is no pain beyond one's brief time on earth. And stories are far more than entertainment. Stories are how the universe grows. Each new tale turns over a new page in the book of wisdom."

Uriel clapped Emil on the back. "Stories tie us to one another. Stories allow us to touch one another's souls, to understand that we are all very different and all much the same. How else are we to understand what goes on in the minds of others?"

"Please stop! This is all too much. It's all beyond me."

"Emil, calm yourself. Remember your prayer. This is the answer you've sought all your days."

"But all the pain ... all the suffering ... all the evil ... Why, why, why?"

"Were all those you knew on Earth evil?"

"No, many were good and kind people."

"How did you know they were good?"

"They treated each other well and stood up against evil."

"You've answered your own question, my friend. You define goodness as the absence of evil, but without both, neither can exist. Those who do not know the winter cannot appreciate the warm breezes of spring. The contrast makes life interesting."

"I suppose that's true, but I still can't believe that all of human history revolves around God's need for stories."

"God's and humanity's need for stories! What is history but a story?"

"I suppose that's true, but I'm still struggling with that idea."

"That's because you are a true philosopher. You must work things out for yourself; you must ponder things and look at them from all sides."

"This idea will require a very great deal of thought. I am still quite perplexed."

"Well, brother, you have an eternity to sort things out and many friends to help you. Socrates, Aspasia, Aquinas, Spinoza, Marcus Aurelius and many others will enjoy your thoughts, as you will enjoy theirs."

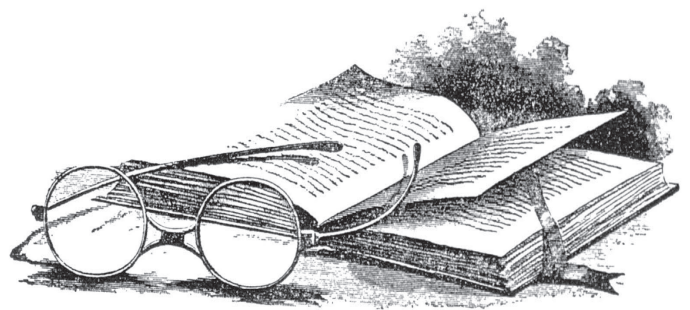
The fear in Emil's voice was replaced by excitement. "Socrates? Spinoza? Truly?"

"Yes, my brother. Shall we begin your journey?"

"Journey? Where are we going? What is our destination?"

Chuckling, Uriel said, "Destination? You need to expand your viewpoint, brother. You are no longer bound by the constraints of time or place. The journey is the thing, not the destination. True love, good stories, and great journeys have no endings!"

Bowing to Emil, and sweeping out his arm, Uriel said, "Shall we begin?" ♦



Jim Busch is a freelance writer and journalist who contributes to several local newspapers and writes a monthly nature column in the *Mon Valley Independent*. He is the principal author of *The Corona Diaries*, a collection of essays published by Point Park University's McKeesport Community Newsroom. Jim lives in White Oak.

My Two Cents' Worth

© by Rod Cross

Except for air travel today, most details of a trip can be handled and controlled by using GPS, Airbnbs and sites like Travelocity.

One night at dinner, some friends and I talked about travel and trips taken with none of these tools, trips filled with mishaps, adventures, and most remarkably, the kindness of strangers.

In 1983 Bob and I were packed and ready to go to the BMW motorcycle rally in Lake Placid, New York. A quick peek at the map and we were off. Trips back then were cash and carry affairs. No credit or debit cards and no cellphones.

I've taken trips filled with mishaps, adventures, and the kindness of strangers.

A tip then was to lay out your stuff, then count your money. Cut your stuff in half and double your money, if you can. Still works for me today.

We had no idea where we would camp our first night out. Thanks to a sympathetic bar owner in the Oneida Lake region, where there were no campgrounds and all land was private and posted, we slept behind the bar next to a backhoe.

The sunrise over the lake was priceless, as was the ham-and-egg breakfast the owner made for us while we broke camp.

I had two flat tires that day, but that only gave us a chance for a swim in an Adirondack Lake that is still the best I've ever had. The water was so clear it was like flying in a cold, wet atmosphere. It was July and very hot.

The rally was on the 1980 Lake Placid Winter Olympic site. The ski jumps were in the back-ground. BMW rallies were short on wet T-shirt contests but long on tech seminars, riding skill contests, good music, and good food.

We met riders from all over the land and had a wonderful time. Sunday and time to leave, but we gave ourselves two days to get home with another night camping ... somewhere.

We stopped for breakfast and rode down through the Adirondack Park. At a stop at Blue Mountain Lake, Bob discovered he'd lost his wallet.

He rode back to where we'd had breakfast, but no wallet. I had \$40 left and we split it. Now we had just enough to gas up in the morning and eat what was left to finish the ride home.

In Waverly, New York, we splurged and bought two buns and bologna for dinner. We came into Pennsylvania on a hot afternoon and stopped at a shaded rest area.

Bob decided that he wanted a cold beer with our

bologna dinner and rode back to Waverly as I relaxed in the shade.

A white van pulled in and I started talking to the couple about our trip. They must have known we were running on empty when they saw the two buns and bologna (which was getting green on the edges).

They were caterers returning from a party in Tonawanda: Would we like something to eat?

Out came fried chicken, fruit salad, cheeses, and desserts. The table was covered with food containers. Then they asked if we would like two bottles of Brut! It was all paid for anyway.

I saw that they had trash and empty bottles in the van, so I asked them for two empties. They had to leave and even invited us to stay with them that night, but they were heading the wrong direction. I thanked them and sat surrounded by an abundance of wine bottles and food.

When I heard Bob coming, I played it for all it was worth. I lay on the table with the bottles and let a half-eaten chicken leg dangle from my hand, a container of pie on my chest.

Debauchery at its finest. How I wish I had a picture of Bob's face when he removed his helmet!

We ate heartily and drank the then-warm beers. That evening we camped along Muncy Creek near Picture Rock and enjoyed stream-chilled champagne under the stars. You guessed it, priceless.

We did fill our tanks in the morning, then went to a McDonald's and ate what was left of the money. I got two cents back in change.

The Karmic wheel turned even more in our favor. When Bob got home there was a note saying that his wallet had been found and was on its way, with all the money, less shipping.

Debauchery at its finest.

So that is my two cents' worth on how to not plan a trip, unless you want to enjoy it and laugh about it for the rest of your life. Remember, though, that you must be open to and grateful for the kindness of strangers. ♦

"My Two Cents' Worth" was previously printed in part in Mature Living magazine, April/May 2023, a publication of West Penn Media. Permission to reprint by the publisher.

Rod Cross rides, fishes, and works in the Laurel Highlands. He is an educator/guide at Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. He is a longtime journal keeper, and stories like "My Two Cents' Worth" come from those pages. His pieces have appeared in the *Loyalhanna Review* and *Mature Living* magazine.

Waiting

© by Sharon VeZolles

So I'm in Room #310, and sometimes I'm even in the halls, in this very restricted area of the hospital in Kennedy Township.

I've been here for four days and am finally allowed to trade the cold hospital gown and pants for my own clothes. But my wrist still wears the hospital bracelet, which the nurses must scan before they give you your medication. It's a funny feeling walking around with a grocery-store SKU number to identify yourself.

They said I can't have my bra. I could strangle myself or someone else with the wire. "But it doesn't even have a wire in it," I whine.

"We accept only sports bras," I'm told. Sorry, I didn't think to buy a sports bra before I made a last-minute decision to check myself into this psychiatric unit.

I cannot have my book because it's a hardback. Presumably I could hide drugs in the spine or lob its heavy weight through the air (gleefully, I would think!) at some unsuspecting, but perhaps deserving, nurse or fellow patient.

Only paperbacks are acceptable on the unit. They do give me a paperback on hand: Dante's *Inferno*. Whaa?? If it were not such a serious situation I'm in, this would be hilarious. I desperately need *light reading* right now, not the Nine Circles of Hell.

I desperately need light reading right now, not Dante's Inferno.

So passing the time with a favorite book is not an option. Nor is music, which is usually a great coping mechanism for me. They lock up your cellphone, so no tunes from YouTube.

But there are good things. Seriously. The therapy groups are very pleasant and helpful. An intern named Josh, with his lovely personality, has talked with me for what seemed like hours.

The doctor seems intelligent enough, but he's a little scary. I knew he had some humanity when he pushed the Kleenex box at me as I sobbed.

I have my own room. The showers and bathrooms are clean, though you have to get a staff member to open the bathroom door every time you need to use it.

At some point in my stay I realize that the reasons why I came into the hospital are now solved. I can go. But they continue to hold me here for observation as they introduce a new medical injection.

One afternoon I feel I cannot bear to be in this place for one more minute. The atmosphere is friendly, but to me it represents literally hundreds of hospital stays, and I can't cope with it any longer.

I cannot bear to be in this place for one more minute.

I have to get happy NOW, to force it if needed. And so I begin to sing. Softly to myself, at first.

Then anything I can remember, from *Mary Poppins* to *Cinderella* to '80s rock. I sing Christmas carols loudly as I twirl and pace the halls, no longer helpless or despairing. I sing for joy.

And I dance, taking off my hospital socks with their uncomfortable treads. I twirl, I stomp my feet; I clap and snap my fingers for nearly three hours.

I pull up Rachmaninoff's "Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini," bobbing my head as I personally conduct a whole symphony. I feel the power of a whole orchestra in my head.

There's no manipulation here on my part, only my current coping mechanism.

Occasionally I fight my shyness and discreetly peek around me. I spot a security guard when previously there were only nurses. Is he here for me? After all, I'm still a mental patient and can go off at any moment.

Then I detect a quiet concern and confusion in a fellow patient/friend's eyes. There is a feeling, suddenly, of understanding and a very cautious solidarity.

And no one bothers me. I'm not really causing any trouble. As Maya Angelou said,

*"You may drag me through the very dirt
(my mental illness, all these years)*

But still, like dust, I rise.

I rise ... I rise ... I rise."

One nurse gently but firmly takes my hand. "It's dinnertime, honey. Don't you want to come?"

I try to pull away my hand, peacefully. "No. Not hungry." She finally relinquishes my hand and lets me go back to my dancing. I feel so joyful.

And then I stop, exhausted.

Later on that night, my heart skips a beat when I realize what I've done. It calms down when I remember my dad telling me happily that I can live with him and my mom.

I just have to be patient until they let me out of here. I have a home now. ♦

Sharon VeZolles is a retired educator who enjoys music, playing the piano, cooking, baking, writing letters, reading, and taking long walks where she sees many deer, rabbits, and the occasional turkey. She finds belonging in her local church and creative enjoyment in plays by The Iron Horse Theatre in Ambridge.

Weeds Poem

© by Anita Staub

Weeds mock,
mimic,
infiltrate.
They are stealthy.
They are pretenders.
Weeds trick.

I think about this as
I detect look-alike weeds
for the third time,
after thinking I was done
weeding.

Anita Staub of Ligonier is retired from pharmaceutical sales after 31 years with Eli Lilly. She's been published in the *Pittsburgh Quarterly* and the *Loyalhanna Review*.

*What is loved
reveals its
loveliness.*

— *Bonnie Friedman*

Untitled

© by Carolyn Cornell Holland

Withered fingers
Offer gifts to God
In the sunset of life

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

How to Write a Poem

© by Candace Kubinec

Take your pen, the old-fashioned kind
with a nib, and reach it deep into your
heart to find the words you need

Let those words swirl across an empty page,
line by line, making declarations of love,
or envy, or loss, or friendship, until the ink

has faded to shadows and your heart
has nothing more to give.

Candace Kubinec lives in Greensburg. She is a member of the Ligonier Valley Writers, Pennsylvania Poetry Society, and Westmoreland Photographers Society. She has had work published in chapbooks and anthologies. Her photos have been displayed in local and regional juried shows.

Whimsical Winter

© by Janice McLaughlin

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

I begin my journey as simple unpretentious drops of frozen rain,
exquisitely etching frosty ferns, upon your window pane.
Glittering in the moon and stars, in the frozen night;
glistening, glimmering, sparkling — bathing the land in light.
Lulling you to sleep in a world of brown, waking you to a world a gleam;
forming ice crystals edged in lace, bordering the flowing stream.
Blowing across your dreams, wind tangling in your hair;
watching the breaking dawn and breathing life into the air.
I am draped in a feathery boa, frozen in time and space—luring you
back to childhood, you awake with rapture on your face.

I am a gossamer flake of winter snow on cold and driven wind,
answering a skier's prayer for a stunning snowy weekend.
Tumbling, dancing, and spinning, finding my way to earth,
playing snowy games with all who dare, inspiring glee and mirth.
Drifting in rows of purest white, piling deep before your door;
inhabiting this year's snowman, but existing nevermore.
Singing the music of the wind, composed magically into song;
tiptoeing in with volume low or blaring in loud and strong.
I am the icy lips of the wind, whispering secrets so intense;
guarded, mysterious, intimate — tinged with excitement and suspense.

2,548 Kindergarten Sundays

© by Marge Burke

You can't be a kindergarten Sunday School teacher for almost fifty years and not learn more than you've taught.

Five-year-olds are a teaching mechanism of their own, and the lessons are hard. The tests are first; that's *how* you learn!

Most of the time my co-teachers and I come away laughing, but once in a while I really wish I had a direct Red Phone to the Big Guy Instead of just my cellphone.

I have taught my own two children, my two granddaughters, my nieces and nephew, their friends, my neighbors, and childhood friends' children and grandchildren. The variety and creativity of these children have ranged from soup to nuts, and then some.

This might be a typical day in our little downstairs classroom.

*

"Harry, we're ready to start class. Could you come out from under the table and take your seat?"

He shook his head no.

"You know we have a great craft paper to do later, and you'll want to do that."

Another no.

"And snack. We have animal crackers for later." The rest of the kids clapped and cheered.

Harry just shook his head no. Regardless of enticements or admonishments, there he stayed. He always left the class smiling, and his parents would comment on how well he retained the lesson concept.

I guess if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Moving on.

*

Mike was way more vocal. "Don't tell him what to do. He can do what he wants, and so can I." Mike proceeded to plant himself on the carpet to play with the blocks.

"Mike, it's time for the lesson, so please come to the table."

"If you say that one more time, I'm going to tell my dad. He'll call the police and they'll come and arrest you." He added another block to his tower. "He knows a lot of policemen."

So I'd heard. That was disconcerting, but we survived his antics as well. Is it wrong that we rejoiced with the angels when he was promoted to the first grade classroom?

*

We made it through numerous lessons this way and moved on to the take-home papers. "Josh, take a crayon to color the picture of Moses. Then pass the crayons to Rylie."

Josh used a black crayon and scribbled. This was nothing new, because he had a routine. Black crayon, scribbles. He knew how to color; it was just his M.O.

He passed the crayons to Rylie, who shook her

head and just sat there. No coloring for her.

Lexie took the crayons from Josh and chose purple, then passed them on. Josh scribbled; Lexie concentrated on the purple. Rylie just sat there. Again, it was routine. Sigh.

*

The following week I said we'd be studying King David. Joe and Noah love the David stories.

"I know that one!" Noah exclaimed. "He killed Goliath with a slingshot and cut off his head and killed lions and bears and watched his father's sheep and grew up to be king!"

Joe pouted. "I wanted to tell it! You didn't tell how David hid from King Saul and could have killed him but didn't. You didn't tell how he just stole his coat and ran away!"

The other students looked up at me expectantly. "Well, that's all certainly true. How about we start from the beginning and go over it a little slower?" I said.

Joe and Noah nodded reluctantly. They had just taught three weeks' worth of lessons out from under me. Sigh.

*

I've had students who assumed the role of teacher. It wasn't uncommon for me to say, "Dom, could you come back and sit down? You can be the student and I'll take a turn to be teacher."

It was seldom received well, but it was a temporary reprieve.

Last week a cup of orange juice overflowed all over the work station. "Dabs" of glue ended up the size of vanilla cupcakes, and finger paints were more like up-to-the-elbow paints.

In September we started the fall quarter. I was introducing the new material and talking about which new students would be in our class.

"We are going to learn about everything God created, and also about His love for us," I explained.

Max looked up at me, puzzled. "I already know everything there is to know about God. But I guess I'll stay in the class, anyway. I think God would want me to be here."

I said, "Um, I think you're right. This is a great place to be to please God. Maybe you'll actually learn something new."

"I doubt it. God and I are really close. I read the Bible all the time."

"I didn't know you could read already, Max!"

He looked thoughtful. "Well, I can't. But my parents read it to me so I know the whole thing."

I liked his attitude. "Great! When you're old enough you can teach a class, too. Maybe in a few years," I said.

He grinned. His brother raised his hand.

"Yes, JJ?"

“Did you know Max is going to marry Gracie?”

I glanced at Gracie, sitting on the floor beside Max. She was smiling. “No. I didn’t realize!”

“Yes. They’re having a beach wedding so they can play in the sand.”

“Well, that will work. I hate to mention this, but do you have money to pay for a house, and food, and clothes? You may have to save up for a little while before the wedding.”

Gracie nodded, still smiling.

“Oh, that’s no problem,” Max said. “I have lots of money.”

“Yeah!” JJ said, excitedly. “He has \$76 in his piggy bank.”

“Well, there you go. All set. Be sure you invite me. I love beach weddings.”

“We will. You and Miss Mary (the other teacher) can come. Don’t forget to bring presents.”

I assured them that gifts would be involved—probably sand toys—and then I steered them back to the lesson.

*

Holidays were a special treat. Our class was going to re-enact the Nativity while the junior high students read the scriptures.

I explained that we had costumes for them to wear, and they excitedly discussed being angels, wise men, and shepherds. They were extremely disappointed to learn that baby Jesus was a doll.

On the night of the play, as was pre-arranged with parents, all the students came dressed in their Nativity costumes. All except Ricky, who was front and center dressed as Batman. His mother stood in the wings, wringing her hands. She approached me nervously.

“I’m so sorry, Miss Marge. Ricky insists that if they’re wearing costumes, he’s wearing his Batman costume. He refuses to budge.”

I thought about the audience and what their reaction would be. I smiled. “You know, God accepts us all just the way we are. And I think Batman would be welcomed at the manger with open arms.”

She hugged me, then hugged her son and took her seat. As they say, the show must go on.

*

The holidays were coming to an end. After a lesson review and a recitation of the memory verse, we were singing songs and playing a game. We were talking about God’s gift of Jesus to us. I had an empty box, wrapped and tied with a bow.

They passed the box around as they said the memory verse. Kyler watched the box go around the circle a few times.

“Teacher?”

“Yes, Kyler?”

“Who did you say was in that box?”

“Well, it’s Jesus in the box, because he’s God’s gift to us. This will help you remember what a great gift Jesus is.”

“I don’t think you should keep Jesus stuck in a box.” Kyler shook the box and handed it to me. “I think you should let him out.”

Out of the mouths of babes ...

*

There were also the days that we saw the fruits of our labor. I decided that for the lesson on Daniel I would pretend that I was his housekeeper and would tell the story from her perspective.

I told them how reverently Daniel prayed, even when his life was threatened, and how God saved him from a horrid death.

We had a large class that day, and they sat spellbound. They were relieved and excited when Daniel walked out of the lion’s den unscathed, and when the king even promoted Daniel to a higher position.

Emily, who was a visitor, was very moved. As the kids filed out of the room for junior church, she hung back. She slipped over beside me and handed me a dollar bill.

“This is for my offering, but could you please give it to Daniel? Let him know that I’m very proud of him!”

That is why I teach. ♦

(See Marge’s bio on p. 28.)

Signs

(See Sally’s bio on p. 12.)

© by Sr. Sally Witt, CSJ

A neighbor’s small front yard displays three signs:

first - Private Property. No Trespassing

second - Security Dog. Beware

third - Welcome

Our lawn does not give such messages. Still, I hope we, too, might be welcoming by at least a third.

Seraphina

© by Nicole Bradley

I fell asleep to your clockwork breath
a metronome keeping time.

Your chronometer wound into a long

White sheet, like a silver coastline

On an infinite sea. We traveled

To the edge together.

When I awoke, your small cold

Body was not keeping time. Rhythm

Is earthly music. Now you sing

In unbounded rubato.

(See Nicole’s bio on p.18.)

Student Poetry Awards 2023

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

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

On these two pages, we reprint those three best of the best poems.

You can see the list of all the winners, read the other winning poems, and see photos of the student poets at both www.LVWonline.org and LVW's Facebook page.

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

Five teachers had multiple winning poets in their classes: Kelly Ankney of Ligonier Valley Middle School, Janelle Lombardi of North Allegheny High School, Jennifer Boyd of Norwin High School, Carol Aten Frow of Belle Vernon Middle School, and Mike Swinger of Somerset Area Junior High. Congratulations to them too and thanks for encouraging their students to write and to enter the contest.



Graceful Tree Limbs © by Carolyn Cornell Holland
(bio on p. 23)

John L. Naccarato Memorial Award

Sponsored by Michele Jones

*These are the top three winners of
LVW's 32nd Annual Student
Poetry Contest.*

*Congratulations to them
and to all the winners.*

The Best of the Best in Grades 4-6

The Music

© by Cole Kramer,
Ligonier Valley Middle School, Grade 6

The Music bounces through my head
And dances on my brain.
It wriggles out my left ear
And lands upon the floor.
It shimmies down the hallway
And floats up through the wall
Out into the big, wide world,
Ready to explore

The Best of the Best in Grades 7-9

The Five Stages of Grief

© by Olivia Mastren-Williams,
Chartiers Valley Middle School,
Grade 8

i.
I wanted to believe that it wasn't real.
I wanted to wake up from my nightmare—
Open my eyes and see you sleeping next to me.

ii.
In my letter,
I gave you my still-beating heart.
I wanted you to know that I would keep bleeding
for you.

iii.
The flowers that had blossomed within my bones
Had begun to rot away.
Withered violets hung from my ribcage,
Killed by your pestilence.

iv.
I wanted nothing more
Than to spit the acid that boiled in my veins
Into your eyes.

v.
The smoldering remains of you finally cooled.
I no longer know your name.

The Best of the Best in Grades 10-12

how to love a thing that stains

© by Kathryn Mi, North Allegheny Senior High School, Grade 12

This is a form of contrapuntal poetry where you can read each column separately as its own poem, after which you can read the whole text from left to right to create another poem.

and i want this memory forever
i want it trapped in amber,
in the underbelly of your faith,
the years inside us transmuting into
something more infinite,

and i want to kiss you soft as
your flower-frail fingers—
look: here is the orchid sunrise,
the rainfall and the petrichor. there,
the orange sitting on the kitchen counter,
half-sliced, looking almost red where it lies

peel it back for me. let me see:
against my lips, you must press in the fruit
if you want to love me enough—

so i want to dance and dream about dancing,
seeking the blood still singing
inside our blameless bodies
it's october again and
i ask, would you still love me in another life?
please: tell me you know this ache.

and never changing.
i want to be caught nestled
in your bared animal smile—
something crude, something violent,
something more beautiful.

the bruise on your cheek,
my blooming watercolor mark.
my splintered knuckles,
the exposed flesh of
your chest wound burgeoning,
low-lit by the lulling lamplight—

darling, turn your splintered rib
death-side down, and don't stop bleeding.
god, feed me.

i want to be the wolf in your woods,
in your throat, gorged on the grotesque
—so let this love ravage us.
i am once more ready to harvest.
and you say, *of course*, just listen to me, then
yes: swallow me whole.

Join Us at LVW

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

For details as they become available, visit LVWonline.org. You can also email jgallagher@LHTOT.com to get on LVW's Members & Friends email list.

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

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

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

You can read winning flash fiction and student poetry from past years, as well as pieces from past *Loyalhanna Reviews*, at LVWonline.org. You can also read all 30 of the 2023 poems and see photos of the poets at the website and LVW's Facebook page.

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

For more about local authors who are LVW members, visit the Published Authors page at LVWonline.org

Mission Statement

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

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

LVW Calendar 2023

- **July 22 (Saturday), 7:00-9:00 p.m.** *Loyalhanna Review* publication party. Enjoy readings, hors d'oeuvres, and camaraderie. Hempfield Church of Christ, 144 Hugh Black Road, Greensburg.
- **August 15.** Deadline for Flash Fiction Contest entries. This year's topic: jack o' lanterns. No entry fee. Three cash prizes plus three Honorable Mentions, editing by a professional editor, readings of the six winning stories during the Halloween season, and publication at LVW's website.
- **September 10, 3:00-5:00 p.m.** Annual LVW picnic. St. Michael's of the Valley Church, Rector.
- **October (dates TBA).** Readings of the winning Flash Fiction stories at local venues.
- **December 10, 3:00-5:00 p.m.** Annual LVW Christmas Party. St. Michael's of the Valley Church, Rector.

Please check www.LVWonline.org or [www.facebook.com/Ligonier Valley Writers](https://www.facebook.com/LigonierValleyWriters) for the latest info and date confirmations.

Author and Artist Bios.

Tamara Di Bartola uses various art forms to bring her creativity to life. She believes art offers therapeutic qualities and hopes to make a positive contribution through her artistry. Her pieces have appeared in the *Loyalhanna Review*, Westmoreland Art Nationals, Latrobe Art Center, Latrobe Hospital, and SAMA.

Marge Burke retired from full time in 2019 but works part time for Pinnacle Auto Sales. She has been published in local magazines, newspapers, and anthologies. Her hobbies are her flower gardens, volunteering at Hanna's Town, and her five grandchildren. She's STILL teaching kindergarten Sunday school!

Linda Ciletti, writer, photographer, and occasional artist, is the author of seven published novels: two time-travel romances, two medieval romances, and a romantic fantasy series, with a fourth book on the way. She lives in Southwestern Pennsylvania with her clowder of persnickety cats and writes when they're not sleeping on the keyboard.

Carolyn Cornell Holland is prolific in multi-genre writing: journalism, magazine, blogs, and short stories. She's also writing a historical fiction book about Rosalie de Level, a French Revolution émigré involved with Gen. Henry Knox in 1790s land speculation. Her photography topics are equally varied.

Janice McLaughlin does layout, design, and book covers, while working on her tenth children's book with companion coloring/activity book. She recently published a new poetry book titled *Darkness Falls*. Another, *Reflection*, is underway. She loves research and learning and believes that as long as you are learning, you are alive.

Judith Sturges is a professor emerita from the Pennsylvania State University, the Eberly Campus. She has written numerous scholarly articles. Upon retirement, she is now writing in several other genres.



Great Horned Owl © by Tamara DiBartola

