



REFLECTIONS

2023

Poetry and short stories by residents of LeadingAge
Oregon Provider Communities

LEADINGAGE OREGON

LeadingAge Oregon is the statewide association for not-for-profit and other mission-directed organizations that are dedicated to providing quality housing, health care, and related services to the elderly and disabled.

Reflections

A Collection of Short Stories & Poems By Seniors of Oregon

2023

Reflections contains original writings submitted to LeadingAge Oregon by residents of member communities. These authors have vastly varying backgrounds and experiences. All are published here in their entirety, as originally submitted by the author.

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Poetry

Judges Choice Winner

Holladay Park Plaza's Mari Partenheimer
author of *Everyday Folks*, *Everyday Mystery*

* Honorable Mention

The Every Day Poem, by Joyce Adams | Willamette View [5] *

... Or So It Seemed, by Mary Kay August | Holladay Park Plaza [6] *

The Inheritance of Aunts, by Darla Barlow | Capital Manor [8]

Ringo, by Jane Cadwallader | Willamette View [10]

Writing Nothing, by Rufus Day | Holladay Park Plaza [12]

My Life is Held in the Memories of Others, by Laura DeVries | Mennonite Village [13] *

How Could My Heart Not Break Open, by Esther Elizabeth | Holladay Park Plaza [15]

Love's Throne, by Sandra Felkenes | Willamette View [17]

Sounds of Life, by Patsy Fitzgerald | Willamette View [18]

Caregiver's Lament, by Judy Francis | Rose Villa [20]

Eddie, by Janet Friedman | Willamette View [23] *

The Raffle of a Lifetime, by David Greysmith | Capital Manor [24]

Willamette River Passage, Salem OR August 9, 2011, by Sharon Gross | Willamette View [25]

Goldfinch, by Alice Hardesty | Rose Villa [27]

Spinning Hope, by Louise Kasper | Holladay Park Plaza [29]

Deja Vu, by Karla Klinger | Holladay Park Plaza [30]

Things Disappear, by Dorthy Louis | Mennonite Village [31]

Bravo!, by James McGoodwin | Terwilliger Plaza [32]

Our Hidden Sadness, by James Moon | Cascade Manor [33]

Weak Knees, by Donna Moores | Willamette View [34]
Thoughts at 76, by Elizabeth Moss | Cascade Manor [35]
Everyday Folks, Everyday Mystery, by Mari Partenheimer | Holladay Park Plaza [36] **Judges Choice**
HATE, by Charlotte Peterson | Rose Villa [38]
Passing By, by Jo Senters | Holladay Park Plaza [39] *
Courage, by Jan Taylor | Capital Manor [41] *
Indian Territory, by Jean Urbanski | Capital Manor [42]
A First, by John Van Peenen | Cascade Manor [44] *
Where Did It Go?, by Brian Williams | Capital Manor [45]
Oh God, by Carol Zimmerman | Rose Schnitzer Manor [47]

short story

Judges Choice Winner

Capital Manor's Mary Jane Williams
author of *Mrs. Buxton's Afternoon*

* Honorable Mention

Miss Mansfield, by Ted Ames | Holladay Park Plaza [48]
Meredith from Lihue Airport, by Vicki Barram | Capital Manor [49]
If You Want to Know Me Hold My Books, by Kate Belt | Holladay Park Plaza [51] *
An Ode to Mothers, by Estelle Leong Bergstrom | Friendsview [52]
Stuff, by Kate Birdsall | Rose Villa [54]
Our Angelic Visit , by Eleanor Blair | Mennonite Village [57]
To Go or Stay, by Dennis Gilliam | Willamette View [59]
The Surprise Visitor, by Delores Gradin | Parkview Christian Retirement [62]

Gardens, etc., by Joan Graves | Capital Manor [65]

Accidental Bozo, by John Holderness | Willamette View [66]

The Kindness of a Stranger, by Helen Hollyer | Cascade Manor [70]

The Thank You Letter, by Walt Lundberg | Willamette View [73]

Jack!, by Joel Meresman | Willamette View [74]

Taylor Road, by Elliot McIntire | Rose Villa [77]

How Could I Have Lost Them?, Bibi Momsen | Willamette View [79]

The Day the Universe Tilted, by Gordon Nagai | Cascade Manor [82] *

Magnus and His Supportive Spirit, by Carl Petterson | Rose Villa [87]

Off to Alaska, by Fred Rauch | Willamette View [90]

A Day in the Life of Proverbial Pete, by Gladys Richter | Parkview Christian Retirement [92]

The Strange Adventure of Amigo the Cat, by Jean Rouslin | Capital Manor [94] *

My Life's Secret, by William Sarnoff | Cascade Manor [97] *

Summer Etched in Memory, by Joline Shroyer | Willamette View [100]

The Cataract Saga, by Deanna Sundstorm | Willamette View [103]

The Flow of Nature, by Lloyd Taylor | Willamette View [105] *

Buying Garden Birds, by Virginia Taylor | Capital Manor [106]

How I Succeeded at Hitchhiking, by Ron Ture | Willamette View [108]

Mother's Advice, by Patricia Watne | Willamette View [110]

Mrs. Buxton's Afternoon, by Mary Jane Williams | Capital Manor [112] **Judges Choice**

The Buick and the Oldsmobile, by Betsy Wilson | Mennonite Village [116]

Joyce Adams | Willamette View

The Everyday Poem

Read it every day.

A poem gentle and deep,

like a comb

pulled through freshly-washed hair,

releasing magic slowly

if you read it every day.

Your eyes are on words,

not on hawks hunting the river banks

or bees in the Black-eyed Susans

or on the old dog, head on paws,

dreaming of fresh walks on old roads.

With what is in your hand now,

reach into the layers waiting

within the poem

you read every day.

Mary Kay August | Holladay Park Plaza

... Or So it Seemed

Remember that stone...

The one you found by the river,
With a silky-smooth feel, And a blue tint
That grew bolder under water,
... or so it seemed.

You were eight
When you discovered that stone. It was a lonely, cloudy day.
You put it in your pocket
And everything got better
...or so it seemed.

That stone
Became your Alladin's lamp, Granting wishes,
When fingers and palm
Rubbed away uncertainty and fear
...or so it seemed.

That stone encouraged Bravery
And brilliant restraint;
it also comforted
When child-sized strategies failed
... or so it seemed.

Continued Next Page

That stone had a special resting place
A nest of three Whitman candy papers
Which were nestled in your sock
drawer. The stone slumbered and,
Gathered energy among your socks
...or so it seemed.

When you moved away,
You gave me that stone,
Saying it belonged close to where it had been found
That stone has always rested in my sock drawer,
And graced me with gentle, good fortune,
...or so it has seemed

Darla Barlow | Capital Manor

The Inheritance of Aunts

Great-aunt Ida – fashionista

Tall with broad brims and long loops of pearls

Six feet of perfect posture without the hats

Contacts with downtown designers made her

Our expert witness to outfits before we dared wear them

In public

Visits meant clothing with sales tags still attached

Aunt Ida's advice, choice, and lastly

Glasses of strong black tea

Auntie Elvira – adventurer feminist activist

Encountering impoverished artisans

Connecting faraway women artists with upscale Boston

Department stores

Certified gemologist not commanding a jewelry counter

Deep instead in Afghan and Peruvian mines

Evaluating reporting traveling in time to return

To march on Washington with MLK

Evelyn youngest aunt – would-be aunt

Can't be aunt because born in South Dakota

Nobody in my family had made it that far

From Massachusetts

Continued Next Page

Aunt Evelyn walking me all over Boston to
Opera, folk dancing, theater, coffee houses, concerts
More intimately knowledgeable than my homegrown self
About me and my town

Now I feel obliged to pass along
The inheritance of aunts
To mentor an eye for quality, a commitment to equality
Compassion toward other cultures
A taste for tea
I'm thinking someone new on the scene
My first grand-nephew not yet old enough to travel
As soon as he gets his passport
We're off to the mines

Jane Cadwallader | Willamette View

Ringo

I found you in a shelter
When you were 8 weeks old.
You meowed at me so loudly!
(Your siblings never showed.)

I brought you home right then, my dear,
So tiny and so bold.
You even battled "bully cat"
Though only 8 weeks old!

I named you for your Ringo tail
And Ringo Starr for sure,
Since you were fun and happy too,
For loneliness, the cure.

You purred so loud to have me near,
And cried when I was far,
And you were always close at hand
When I wasn't up to par.

Continued Next Page

Now as an old man, you still try
To talk to birds and deer,
You still can jump up on the sill
Whenever they are near.

You wake me up at 5 a.m.
To get your breakfast ..now !
You purr and snuggle next to me
When you've had your cat chow.

You also snore a tiny sound,
So welcome by my side.
You're like a dog who follows me
Wherever I abide.

Ringo, you're my buddy now.
You warm me when I'm cold.
And I'm so glad I brought you home
When you were 8 weeks old.

Rufus Day | Holladay Park Plaza

Writing Nothing

I sit here writing nothing Nothing is what I'm writing The fact is I'm afraid.

To quote my wife: "The world is a mess."

Covid-19 is still mutating and our population acts as though the pandemic's over.

Terrorizing the world, the Russians are killing Ukrainians to no-one's benefit.

Half our politicians act as though political power lies in their telling lies. Ice at both Earth's poles is melting and the oceans are rising.

I keep reading the New York Times, watching PBS, NBC, CBS, and ABC. Day after day, Russians killing, Viruses killing, Lies, Environmental Inundation.

I can't write a thing. I'm afraid. What are we on this planet for? To make things better?

My wife is right- the world's a mess.

Why is humanity so obviously headed in the wrong direction? No. I can't write anything.

Well, at least I got it off my chest.

Laura DeVries | Mennonite Village

My Life is Held In the Memories of Others

I have a past but its memories are not held by me
I know my past only through the story telling of others.
Among their memories are woven my actions and events ...
but not my thoughts or emotions
which are forever lost.

(I listen to their re-telling and I am intrigued ...
there, another piece of who I am, who I was ...
Did I really do that? Do you really remember me so?)

But when there is no one left to tell their stories
those memories will be lost to me forever.
When I am alone my past will no longer exist ...
except in facts recorded
and a handful of images
fading like old sepia photos.

Continued Next Page

What remains is this moment.
This is who I am, all I ever will be
without memory
of life's major events or
of life's small happenings,
of friends and family,
of laughter and tears,
of sharing and caring ...

I am overwhelmed by my loss
And I am very alone.

Esther Elizabeth | Holladay Park Plaza

How Could My Heart Not Break Open

It's only been a short time since his death
Elsa from the streets has disappeared
Horrific devastation of war continues
Weather disasters forever changing lives
Another shooting, another shooting, another shooting

I want my heart to break over these things
I want to be disturbed by them

But today I'm thinking about a different kind
Of heart breaking open
The kind that isn't in the news
That breaks open my heart
Not with pain,
But with joy, with awe, with wonder

Witnessing the sun rising directly above the mountain peak
Watching as it casts a golden shadow like none I've seen
Four hummingbirds sitting at one feeder
Friends dropping off muffins, chocolate A double rainbow
Living yet one more day

Continued Next Page

Despite everything going on in my world that begs to tell me differently

Life is still good, gratitude is still my guiding principle

I let the door to my heart break open

I walk in to it all, pain and joy, grief and wonder

Sandra Felkenes | Willamette View

Love's Throne

Love--her throne is in the whirlwinds
of every life, on every stage, within each
soul.

Listen, look, feel each moment
as if the wind were carrying a song so faint
that impatient minds or those wedded to darkness
could mistake the sound.

Love is a mentor. The pain of human blindness
and deceptions demands an uncovering and a quest
unbound by the reaches of time.
We are the toilers.

Though veiled among the rocks in the froth of
powerful ocean tides or beside waves rising and falling
between gladness and loss, Love sustains the toiler.
Her goal is envelopment – we embroider her crown.

So, Love's throne moves from death to life and
life to death through the whirlwinds,
empowering hope every second for every seed
of her creation.

Patsy Fitzgerald | Willamette View

Sounds of Life

A tiny babe is born
his mother's life at risk
far away the fog horn sounds on the river

A tiny heart beats
tiny breath sounds sing
far away the fog horn sounds on the river

Father sits, head hangs low
Tears splash
far away the fog horn sounds on the river

Mother wakes,
Nuns count beads at her side
far away the fog horn sounds on the river

Angels, clad in white, watch
precious life fighting to exist
far away the fog horn sounds on the river

Prayer prevails, Hope prevails, love prevails
Mother sings, Father smiles
far away the fog horn sounds on the river

Continued Next Page

Background: When my first son was born he was 5 weeks premature, and he weighed less than 5 lbs. He was born at the old St. Vincent's hospital in Portland which was high above the Willamette River.

Judy Francis | Rose Villa

Caregiver's Lament

The phone rings.

I answer.

The doorbell rings.

I answer.

The computer beeps.

I answer.

"Can you help?" she asks.

"Yes." I tell her.

"Are you coming?" he asks.

"Yes." I tell him.

"Will you do it?" they ask.

"Yes." I tell them.

"I'm so worried!" she says.

"Don't be." I tell her.

"I'm so sorry." he says.

"Don't be." I tell him.

"Please don't go." they say.

"Don't worry." I tell them.

Continued Next Page

“What would we do without you?” they say.

“How could we carry on?

You’re always so bright and cheery,

It’s like you bring the sun.”

“The songs that you sing are so moving,

The relief that you’re here is so strong,

The sound of your voice is so soothing,

What will we do when you’re gone?”

“Thank you so much.” I tell them.

“Your words and your warmth touch my heart.

I look forward to your hugs and your laughter.

I know I’ll be sad when we part.”

But . . .

Who takes care of the caregiver

When the caregiver can’t keep track?

Who takes care of the caregiver

When the caregiver can’t give back?

Continued Next Page

How do I keep on going
When I'm just too tired to move?
When the weight of caring is heavy,
And emotions too jumbled to soothe.

How do I say no to others
And still feel good about me?

I'm weary.
But I still say yes.

Janet Friedman | Willamette View

Eddie

Through the brick arch
A fat curving line of bodies
Descending College Hill.
Slowly snaking its way down the path
Amidst cheers and shouts on either side

First comes a solitary man, class of 34.
Then, class-by-class, each year walks by.
Finally, there they are, 2014, loose black
robes and sharply cornered caps against
the blue sky: scattered clumps of jubilant
students rambling along.

His Grandmother, squeezed sideways
against the fence, reaches out for a hug.
“Mazel tov”, she whispers, kissing his
flushed cheek. Filled with grace, he smiles.

My father’s namesake, Edward.
Dad would have been so proud.

David Greysmith | Capital Manor

The Raffle of a Lifetime

Might as well play.

Declining to pay

does not cost you your ticket.

We all get one. A few get more.

No matter.

It takes but one to win. The same one

it takes to lose.

Winners own their secret. Losers claim theirs.

Sharon Gross | Willamette View

Willamette River Passage, Salem OR August 9, 2011

Two canoes with five figures

Toasted in the sun.

Wooden paddle dipping into coolness

Rhythmic propulsion.

The Willamette, a ribbon of blue

Framed in green with

Spangles of gold and stalks of pink.

Three siblings and two spouses turning a bend

A first time for the five on this water

A first time without children alongside

A first time without three loved ones

A type of passage.

Dip and pull

Glide and watch.

An osprey swoops down

White throat, black and white striped wings,

Hovers, plunges into the blue,

Sweeps up,

Shakes off wetness like a flutter of moon drops,

Soars back to its nest high atop a bridge pole.

Continued Next Page

Along the bank
Still as a statue
Gray as the rocks
A great blue heron peers at the current.
Then suddenly rises up and lifts off
Gliding upward
With certainty, flow and grace
Like a flowing swirl.

Dip and pull
Muscle full
Ever forward
Paddles cutting and forcing the watery blue
Bonds among the five of us-- unspoken and beyond words.

Blue ribbon flowing inexorably towards the sea
The five of us bound together before, now and hereafter
As a family
Holding memories of those
No longer gliding with us.

Alice Hardesty | Rose Villa

Goldfinch

Sliced peaches in whole milk
a scattering of blueberries
pungent scent of coffee.
We eat in silence
fresh from kisses
sunlight on rumpled sheets
press of damp skin
the soft transit in and out of sleep.

My spoon pauses midway
at the sudden thud of bird
against glass. I rise to see
the brightest finch stunned
below our window. I want
to bring in the cat but fear
nature will trump obedience.

Continued Next Page

Looking to you for guidance
I notice your hair
has become so gray
your mustache thin
already your face has lost
the boyish glow that always
comes with love, your eyes
bluer than ever.

Louise Kasper | Holladay Park Plaza

Spinning Hope

Dear Earth,

How ya doin' today?

You've had a rough year and it's not over yet.

You survived floods, earthquakes, fires, storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts, glacier melts, sink holes, landslides, eruptions.

You watched migrations, unrest, demonstrations, pandemics, bombings, invasions, oppression, wars, abductions, cruelty,

Take some deep breaths. Keep on spinning. You have some company with not so nearby planets.

You are
inhabited.

What's
next?

Where's hope?

New babies, celebrations for centennials, gentle winds, bird songs, fluffy clouds, blossoming trees,

Homes for the houseless, shoes for unshod, food for the hungry, warmth for unsheltered, care for the sick and the dying, compassion for the imprisoned,

Kindness for each other.

Stewardship, dear earth.

Karla Klinger | Holladay Park Plaza

Déjà vu

I performed as if I were five. Trying to tie my tennies last week,
I wrapped one shoelace too tightly around the first loop (a bunny ear).
Couldn't tuck the second bunny ear under that lace. Arthritic fingers couldn't perform.

When learning to dress myself, I stuck my head
inside my fuzzy sweater, searching for sleeves.
What satisfaction, head emerging,
even if my sweater was "wrong way round."
Today, as my head poked through my muumuu,
I saw the brand name, back to front.

Deja vu.

Dorothy Louis | Mennonite Village

Things Disappear

This first month of a new year
we go forward each passing day
towards our return to dust
Before we are born, we do not exist
After we die, we do not
Our life in between is brief
It may be significant or have no purpose
other than to exist
a mayfly
flower
cloud
or a raindrop
in spite of their beauty will disappear
never again to be seen
Like the thoughts
random
disconnected
useless
that blow through my mind then vanish
sometimes as loud as a waterfall
sometimes as silent as the moon.

James McGoodwin | Terwilliger Plaza

Bravo!

It's time for jubilation-

For dancing in the streets!

A time for celebration-

And singing songs of glee!

The U.S. gov't has acted well!

(Not one of its usual feats.)

It has turned its high-tech explosives,

To a use that's pro-civilization.

They're not aimed to cause annihilation

Nor some other form of abomination

It has found a means

Of using its high-tech explosives

To defect comets!

James Moon | Cascade Manor

Our Hidden Sadness

No one feels the pain that surprises us when it seeps out in unguarded moments.

What they see is the thin social veneer that we think covers our warts
and unique ways.

What we feel is what our daily numbness barely allows .

What we show is the part of us that we semi- know and semi- censor.

What we each miss is our mutual unshared sadness blocked by our superficial
judgements.

What we lose is the healing connection that only compassion and kind
understanding bring.

Donna Moores | Willamette View

Weak Knees

And then one day you look in the mirror.

What have we here?

This person is old with grey hair and weak knees,

Gnarled knuckles, poor hearing, fighting gravity.

We've come so far, now to be faced with a test

Of our mettle; our true strength is what we have left.

Now that physical agility and memory fade

We dig deep to find out of what we are made.

To focus on what might have been or was lost

Is to give in to dying before that line must be crossed.

Keep the future's worries and regrets of the past

As the bittersweet spice of today's fresh repast.

So screw up your courage and brace those weak knees.

You'll never be younger but can do as you please.

Enjoy the love of your life. Find a new mate for your soul.

Indulge in hobbies and friendships. Go back to school.

Nap when you want to and scurry when you're able.

Invite family and neighbors to join at your table.

When fear comes around, stare it down and be bold.

Death is so permanent. Enjoy being old!

Elizabeth Moss | Cascade Manor

Thoughts at 76

An new ache, a new pain,

What does it mean

Am I starting to die

People I know are

Succumbing.

Will I be next???

Will it be slow

Painful

Sudden

Unexpected

Soon

A long ways off

Will I even know

How will I know the end is at hand

How will I react

Who will be with me, or would I rather be alone

All these thoughts running through my head

All because of a new little ache

Mari Partenheimer | Holladay Park Plaza

Everyday Folks, Everyday Mystery

She inhabited the earth eighty-five years, he one hundred, then slipped quietly from this place.

They lived small lives, by most folks' standards, rarely leaving their native Midwest,

bordering themselves with family, work, and church. They left no great legacy by which to be remembered-

no great accomplishments, no wealth with which to be memorialized. Their peers are gone, their friends and siblings.

But we remember, we children and grandchildren. They live on in our hearts and minds.

We remember her, pattering about the kitchen, baking bounteous desserts and other treats.

We remember him in the garden, or sitting in his recliner with book and pipe, ever-learning to the end.

We remember her gentle smile, his hearty guffaw, her tendency to worry, his to worry even more.

We remember how they loved their grandchildren, and how the grandchildren loved them back.

We remember our bedside concert in her waning days, her eyes aglow as we surrounded her with favorite hymns, our voices breaking, tears unquenched.

We remember his grief and loneliness, then firm resolve and surprising new life in fresh surroundings.

We remember the joy and mirth with which he- and we- celebrated the centennial of his birth.

Yes, we remember, we children and grandchildren, but for how long?

And what happens when we forget or are not here to remember them any longer?

Are they then truly gone, relegated to gravesite markers, mentions in dusty census records?

Or did their lives, quiet and humble,

Continued Next Page

change the world in ways we will never know? Did the children she invited to Sunday School, the neighbors given a caring ear,

or we descendants nurtured by their love make contributions that would not, could not have existed but for them?

And what of us, unexceptional people, too.

Is earthly immortality reserved for those who live in fame or infamy?

Like a pebble tossed in a pond, do our lives ripple out, then fade without a trace?

Or are we more like the sourdough starter that lived for years in my refrigerator -

appearing dead but ever ready, with a dash of flour and water, to bubble back and leaven a fresh batch of dough?

An ordinary image, for ordinary folks.

Charlotte Peterson | Rose Villa

HATE

Incident: December 1957

Eggs and oranges hit our cars and home,
“Jesus killer”, “kike,” hit our ears and hearts.

These were neighbors, friends turned against us.

Because of something we did?
No—because of something we didn’t do
We didn’t have a Christmas tree.

Tears and fears turned into anger—
Hurt made us want to hurt back

“Wait” spoke the elder,
“Those with so much fear and ignorance need compassion.
We must walk tall & be kind”

That might confuse...
That might plant questions...
That might not lead to more hate...

Jo Senters | Holladay Park Plaza

Passing By

A jaunty walk in the neighborhood Scents of summer passing
A last red rose, tall purple asters Trees slanting red and gold
Soft mist infuses the air First drops of Autumn rain
Form tiny pools beside each step

As I walk

On the sidewalk Someone's son Curled up on his side His hand for a pillow
Eyes closed to the world Exposed to any passerby Who might wish him harm Or otherwise
disturb

As I pass an empty parking lot Someone's daughter
Stands shouting I am dying I am dying Hearing no answer
Cries out the same words again
In the silence not even an echo

Bent over in his wheelchair Someone's brother
Stares at his shoes
Hood like a shroud pulled over his head Half of a burning cigarette
In a dangling hand

Surveying her grocery cart Someone's sister
Spreads plastic sheet over the mound Of her worldly goods
Tucks in a comer here and there Making sure to keep out the rain Rolls the cart half a step
Looks up the street then down Uncertain what direction to go

Passing by, I wonder What are your stories at this moment
you each seem quite alone What decisions did you make
What decisions were made for you

Was there a point of turning Forward or backward
How did this come to be

Jan Taylor | Capital Manor

Courage

She walks down the hall

Her head down, seemingly aimless

A pause

Then her head comes up

Jaw sets

Determination in her posture

Her hands grasp the appreciated but hated walker

Emotions fluid on her face

Sadness, confusion, anger, resignation

Bewildered by dependence

She is unsure of how to be.

She doesn't yet see me

This confident, capable, creative woman

I have loved over scores of years

I walk toward her

She will need reminding today.

Jean Urbanski | Capital Manor

Indian Territory

My papa was born
in the Indian Territory
and was sent to
the Jones Academy Indian School
where he learned
not to look like an Indian
not to talk like an Indian
not to think like an Indian
not to pray like an Indian.
Not to be an Indian.

Dressed like a white man
in his Oklahoma Highway Patrolman uniform
he bounced me pony-boy on his knee
always called me his Grandbaby
sang me songs like "Old Blue"
told me silly rhymes
and whispered in my ear that
Choctaws are better than Cherokees.

Continued Next Page

That was just about all
he could tell me.

I know more
but they are other peoples' stories.

I stole them
off flat metal grave markers
at the Indian School
and out of a roll book.

One day I sat listening and eating
the cold baloney sandwiches
with yellow mustard
on wonder bread
the women gave me
outside the Choctaw Presbyterian Church
where I stole more stories.

They all wear Nikes now.
Maybe they're afraid
they'll be sent off
on another long walk.

John Van Peenen | Cascade Manor

A First

There are icy footprints left
on the sidewalk I didn't clear
when you stepped on your way to school
in this millennial year.

The sun has found the asphalt
and melted our snow-white street,
but still it spares the footprints
left by your booted feet.

Left when you walked to school,
for the first time without help,
red and blue in your parka,
and found the way by yourself.

Brian Williams | Capital Manor

Where Did it Go?

“Catch it”, I yelled
as it slipped out the open window.

Neighbors heard me
and began running after it.
“I almost had it”, one exclaimed.

Others joined in
running down the street
like a pack of dogs after a car.

It was elusive,
ducking under pickups,
slipping between fence posts,
running through bushes
until it hid just out of reach
under a Chevy Tahoe.

Continued Next Page

Then it made a break for it
leaped onto a birch tree.
Up it went, climbing high
to a branch just out of sight.

I tried enticements to bring it down,
metaphors, similes, synonyms.
I threw in a conjunction or two.

But nothing I tried brought it back.
The thought that had escaped me
the moment I put pen to paper.

Carol Zimmerman | Rose Schnitzer Manor

Oh God

Oh God

Let me be

As the hummingbird

In flight.

Sipping “Thy” nectar

Of

The Light!

Darkness

Slipping away...

Releasing

Spirit “Divine”

Always

Mine!

Ted Ames | Holladay Park Plaza

Miss Mansfield

Late in the Fall of 1956, a shy college student was given a fraternity initiation challenge to have his picture taken with Jayne Mansfield, the buxom Hollywood and Broadway star. At that time, she was starring in the Broadway play "Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter".

Armed with a Polaroid camera and a well written note, he took the train one cold and wintry Saturday to New York. He screwed up his courage and with trepidation, knocked on the backstage door. A gruff man opened the door and asked what the kid wanted. He explained his challenge and asked the door-keeper to give a note to Miss Mansfield. The man agreed and came back, telling the boy to be on the street after the matinee. The young student then went to the show, but could hardly sit through it in anticipation of what was to come.

Good to her word, Miss Mansfield spied the young man, who was nervously waiting outside the theater. He was part of a small crowd hoping to get an autograph. She asked her entourage to organize the

picture. When she saw the photograph, she realized that the picture didn't do her bountiful assets justice. She then took off her heavy fur coat, revealing a tight knit dress and the body beneath. Taking a model's pose and a deep breath, she indicated she was ready for a second photograph.

A minute later, she looked at the photo and said, "That should take care of those Yalies".

Flustered, he forgot to ask for her autograph on the Playbill. I still have the picture.

Vicki Barram | Capital Manor

Meredith from Lihue Airport

An unexpected, last minute great deal on airfare had allowed my daughter, Wendi, to join me in Kauai for a refreshing fall week of balmy island air, breathtaking sunsets, long beach walks and good reads in the shade of the stately poolside banyan tree. Kidless and briefly carefree, my mother's heart was glad to see her slow her usually frenetic pace and breath easy for a few days.

All too soon the week had slipped away and we were heading home. Destination Portland, OR, the week before Thanksgiving meant arriving to much cooler temperatures for mainland bound passengers. Along with fellow travelers, our sandals & shorts had been packed, replaced with shoes and socks, long pants and jackets thrown over our shoulders we knew would be needed before touching down in the Rose City.

Clearing the Alaska Airlines check in kiosk with Wendi, I moved behind her to have our bags tagged at the counter. A young woman was ahead of us and it soon became apparent she was in a challenging situation. Wendi couldn't help overhearing that she was using the agent's personal cell phone to call her father in Georgia for additional funds to get home. Her little body was agitated and shaking as she spoke to her dad. Unlike the rest of us, she was dressed in flip flops, shorts and a sleeveless tee. When she finished her call Wendi simply said, "Some days are really rough." She turned around and we could see her broken tooth and badly bruised face. Sensing our compassion, she vomited her story of having come to the island 8 weeks ago with her boyfriend who turned out to be mean & dangerous.

She had managed to escape him that morning with only what she was wearing and her ID. No phone, no cash, no credit cards. What an awful predicament, I thought; what will she do? Glad she could reach her father.

Next I realize my Wendi is on the ground, has opened her suitcase and is pulling out her new & ever so cute, pink Nike shoes, a couple of pairs of socks and a sweatshirt and is helping her put them on right there. I'm stunned. Other passengers are gathered watching. Next, Wendi hands her some cash. Unable to find her business cards, she grabs a piece of paper and writes her name and number with instructions to call should she need anything additional. They embrace. Then she's on her way to her flight to the east coast and we never see her again.

Wendi and I enjoyed an uneventful flight home to the usual safety and welcome of family and friends. A few days later Thanksgiving was celebrated and the holiday season had begun in earnest. Kauai was simply a sweet memory.

But a few weeks later Wendi received a surprise text saying, "Thank you for being one of the good people left in the world. Merry Christmas!" Wendi replied, "Who is this?" "Meredith from Lihue Airport." She included a cute photo of her with her 3 grown sons. "You and your mom were my angels that very sad day. I want you to know I'm doing well and so grateful." Always the encourager, Wendi told her "you are beautiful and stronger than you know", which led to some happy tears on both ends of the call and a commitment to stay in touch.

I couldn't help thinking about what had happened and how beautiful my daughter's response was to someone in such desperate physical and emotional need. It was automatic, as if it just flowed out of her nature. As in the gospel story of the Good Samaritan, Wendi simply saw a need she could meet and met it. I was deeply humbled by her example of selflessness that hadn't even occurred to me.

It was an early holiday gift and a great reminder that every day, if we pay attention, there are Merediths in each of our lives. There are always those we can lift up and encourage by a smile, a good word and if necessary, opening our suitcases.

Kate Belt | Holladay Park Plaza

If You Want to Know Me, Hold My Books

If you want to know me, hold my books. Go through my bookcase, uncover others stashed across my space. Include the Kindles.

Don't just put them in the giveaway box or bag, or the recycling bin, or the garbage can.

Examine each title. What does it mean?

Cruise inside the pages. Seek my highlights, underlines, notes, the "*****"s and punctuation marks!

If you want to know me, hold my books.

Discover the words from my mind that declined to exit my mouth.

Taste my insatiable hunger for knowledge, to know other people, the histories and stories from other places that hook me into other ways of seeing. Where is the lament? Where is the hope?

Find my discoveries of new knowledge. Find my knowledge of new discoveries. I am a lifelong learner, continually seeking understanding of the world we live in, where it came from, who am I? Why am I here? Who are the other people on this planet? How do their stories intersect with mine and yours? What brings me closer to the mystery that I know as our Creator God of all matter and matters.

If you want to know me, hold my books.

Give equal attention to the novels, the fiction, the poetry; they prophesy truth.

Know the tears I could not shed in front of you- for myself, for the world, for you, for us.

Hear the music I could not sing aloud because my voice could not find the notes, songs of lament, songs of joy, songs of love, songs of fear, songs of loneliness, songs of hope,

If you want to know me, hold my books.

Will you embrace my dance, the choreography of my life?

Estelle Leong Bergstrom | Friendsview

An Ode to Mothers

“The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world,” embedded in an ode to mothers written in 1865 by the American poet William Ross Wallace, is a tip of the hat to mothers everywhere — acknowledging their powerful influence on their offspring as they pass along the culture, traditions, and heritage of their forebears.

Because meals prepared by her are central to family gatherings, a mother’s cooking surely influences “the world” of food enjoyed around her table, especially the foods meant for special days and cultural holidays.

Many of us have fond memories of foods associated with our families, and we may still prepare these meals ourselves on those same special occasions and from the same recipes passed along by long-gone family members.

In a small box on my pantry shelf, my mother’s best family recipes are saved on hand-written 3x5 cards. Here are treasured recipes that list names of ingredients, but often without any measurements and without detailed instructions. These dishes were prepared regularly so Mom had no need for step-by-step instructions as she measured the ingredients she had on hand to suit her taste. (It’s a shame I wasn’t at her elbow more often then, attentively watching and learning from her as she worked her magic.)

On another shelf, I have several cookbooks culled out from the dozens I collected before moving to retirement living; the best of these were gifted to me or purchased because of some need at the time. What to do now if I am tempted by a new recipe? I ask myself two questions: Will it require ingredients I don’t have? Will it require kitchen tools I don’t have? Answering these queries saves me much time, money, and shelf space when confronted by so many beautifully designed cookbooks with pages of luscious-looking photographs!

That said, I have to admit that a cookbook author who includes recipes with headnotes or sidebars sharing interesting personal experiences, who relates a recipe’s origins, or who shares a helpful tip — well, that cookbook could very well end up in my collection, to be passed on to someone close to me someday!

With a box full of hand-written recipes and a pared-down cookbook collection in my pantry, I've found cooking for two during the pandemic means relying on the old standards with some easy-to-prepare, no-recipe meals on a regular rotation. You guessed it — simple, traditional home-cooking, just like Mom's.

If preparing food and sharing meals with those we love is basic to all humankind, then thank goodness for our mothers whose hands and hearts nourished us and prepared us for being human in so many delicious ways.

Kate Birdsall | Rose Villa

Stuff

The house I grew up in had a butler's pantry – a small room between the kitchen and dining room. On one long wall and the end wall were floor-to-ceiling cupboards, with the lower ones deeper than those above, creating a long, narrow shelf about waist high. At the other end of the room, between the kitchen and dining room doors, was a deeper counter, and below that were a flour bin, a drawer for storing potatoes, and other drawers. The kitchen had only one small cupboard, so almost everything you would store in the cupboards of a modern kitchen was in this pantry. I always thought it odd to call this room a butler's pantry, since the idea that our family would ever want or need (or afford) a butler was ludicrous. But I came to understand the name as a description of the kind of room it was rather than implying that a butler was anywhere on the premises. We, of course, just called it "the pantry."

Once a year my mother would set us three kids the task of removing everything from the pantry, stacking it all on the kitchen and dining room tables, and washing the shelves. While we were cleaning the empty shelves, she would look everything over, wash what needed it, and set a few things aside. One of her maxims was "If you haven't used it in a year, throw it out." Invariably we'd have one or two fewer items to put back into the cupboards.

Through the years I came to understand this maxim of my mother's as aspirational guidance rather than a strict rule. After all, there were a number of things in the attic that hadn't been touched in many years other than by curious childish hands. But overall, it served my parents well, especially when they sold their house and moved into a 30-foot Airstream trailer. Even with that, though, they carried too much with them. The extra weight broke the rear axle of their Chevy Suburban. The second time this happened, the rig, with them and everything in it, ended up on its side. They replaced the wrecked trailer with a 36-foot Airstream, bought a tow vehicle with a sturdier axle, and continued their travels a few more years, finally settling down in a very pretty, very small house up one of the hollows in the North Carolina mountains.

From the house with the butler's pantry, I followed my sister and brother to a college with a cooperative program, which alternated classroom study with periods of work experience. We students would move from campus to a job somewhere and back again once or twice each year. I could store a few things in the basement of the dorm when I was off working, like my stereo and

records and, if I worked somewhere warm, my winter clothes, but this periodic back and forth every three to six months worked to limit how much Stuff I could accumulate. And for the three years after college I lived in various Army barracks, which continued to constrain accumulation. My sister kept a box of heirlooms and mementoes for me, but I could have very little with me.

A year after leaving the Army, I was planning to marry. Valerie lived with her parents and I had a one-room apartment – a place New Yorkers refer to as a bed-sit – so we needed something larger in which to set up house together. One place we looked was on the top floor of a wooden building with a Mansard roof. Between the apartment walls and the roof was a continuous closet, like a long attic. I knew that was a bad idea. By then I had learned that empty space just naturally accumulates Stuff. As long as there is room to store it, there is little incentive to get rid of it. So even with my mother's dictum in mind, I knew it would be hard to manage the natural accumulation if we lived there.

After marrying I joined the Coast Guard, and during the next five years we moved six more times, limiting what we could accumulate. After that, things began settling down – we moved only three times during the next five years. One of those moves was to Phoenix. I found a three-bedroom house of less than 900 square feet. There was minimal storage space. Remembering my mother's dictum, I considered whether to keep our winter clothes. We would be in Phoenix for two years and have no need for them, but we would be in Phoenix only two years and there was no telling where we'd go after that. Puerto Rico? Alaska? I found a corner in which to store them.

When my parents had been breaking up their house to move into their trailer, my mother had divvied up the items of family value between us three kids. Both my sister and brother had established households, but I was still at college then, so she gave me many of the smaller things. Somehow, though, I ended up with my great-aunt's piano. All these years later, I can't imagine what prompted me to ask for it or for my mother to agree to give it to me. I'd reluctantly taken a year of piano lessons when I was about 10 and hated them. In college I could still pound out a rousing version of "Chopsticks" and might have been able to stumble through a one-handed rendition of "Für Elise," but the piano was more a memento than something I would use. It was a spinet – a small upright – and I could lift one end easily, but it required two people to move any distance and took up room I could ill-spare in some of the places I lived. Somehow neither my mother nor I thought at the time of her maxim "If you don't use it ..."

When Valerie and I were divorcing and breaking up our household, I wanted to get rid of the piano but my daughter Casey wanted to keep it. Neither Casey nor her mother could play it, but

she saw it as a family keepsake. I was appalled that she would want to keep anything so large and unwieldy and essentially useless. I told her she should keep things that were smaller and more portable, forgetting that I myself had begged for it and had subsequently moved it more than half-a-dozen times. We gave the piano to a friend.

As a teenager, I read a lot of science fiction. In Frederic Brown's "Rogue in Space" the criminal protagonist says that a man should never own more than he can hold in both hands at a fast trot. This statement had resonated with me, but even so I've always owned more than that. Like my mother's maxim, I saw it as not literally achievable but something to strive toward. This served me well when I started traveling by motorcycle. Even on our longest trip of several months, my second wife and I fit everything we needed into two saddlebags and a box behind her seat. And as stuff accumulated during the trip, as Stuff always does, we would pack up a box of what we no longer needed and mail it to a friend back home.

When my second wife died, I began putting everything I didn't want to deal with in the basement. Over the next year the basement got so full that it was hard to move around down there. The worst of the adjustment over, I began going through it all. I kept coming across items that had little relevance to my then-current life and situation. Well aware of my own mortality, I would think: "Casey will never know what to do with this; I should get rid of it." On one of my phone calls to her, I told her of this process and she replied enthusiastically, "Yeah! Go for it!" Gradually I whittled it all down to a manageable size. Manageable, that is, until I decided to move to Portland and had to get the house ready for sale.

Years ago, when my parents were living in their little house in North Carolina my mother told each of us kids that they were in the phase of their lives when they were getting rid of things rather than accumulating them. They had everything they needed and didn't expect any gifts. However, if we felt we needed to give them something, make sure it was consumable – flowers or something to eat. Now, as I approach the age my mother had been then, I've told my daughter the same thing: consumables or nothing.

Living at Rose Villa, Andrea and I have a nice apartment that is the perfect size for us, with only a limited amount of storage space. I remind myself of my mother's dictum, but it remains a continuing challenge to avoid being overwhelmed by the natural accretion of Stuff.

Eleanor Blair | Mennonite Village

Our Angelic Visit

It was the first week of January 2001. Doug and I had finished loading up the fifth wheel with all the clothes, food and necessities that we needed for a three month trip to Imperial, CA. Doug had put two halves of the china cupboard he had made for Bill and Becky's home in Imperial in the back seat of the extended cab pickup. We locked up the house, got into the pickup and headed through Sisters to Bend.

We headed south towards Klamath Falls. About 90 miles south of Bend we commented that this was sure a better day than we had the previous year when we came down. The sky was blue, the sun was out and there was not much traffic on the road. All of a sudden, a couple of miles down the road Doug hollered, "Here we go!" I wondered what he meant and I found out we had hit black ice and the fifth wheel was coming around towards the pickup. We continued across the highway into this empty field where the pickup landed on its driver's side and the fifth wheel at a 90 degree angle and on its entry door side.

As we were stopped and gathered our thoughts, I realized that we were not hurt in the crash. I sat there and looked out the window, wondering if anyone was going to come and help us. I saw one car go by gawking at us and they immediately hit the black ice and went in to the ditch but I guess they got out. Finally Doug decided to unfasten my seat belt and I immediately fell down on him! He then climbed over me and tried to open the door which was overhead, to no avail. It was too heavy and too hard to hold open. We couldn't hold it open and get out at the same time.

All of a sudden there were two men and a teenage boy standing by the pickup ready to save us! The boy climbed up on the truck immediately, opened the door and then the man helped Doug get out. When it was my turn one of the fellows said, "Lady, I don't know where I'm going to grab you!" I said, "I don't care, just please get me out of here!" And they did. We looked around and I don't remember seeing them leave. We never saw them again...

In the front of the fifth wheel was my portable sewing machine lying on the ground. It was the last thing Doug put in and it had to go in the front cargo department in the fifth wheel. That is the only thing that fell out. I picked it up and picked up all the pieces that had fallen out. I carried it around the rest of the time that we were waiting for somebody to come and help us. Finally, an EMT ambulance came by and stopped to see how we were doing and we said we were fine. They

wanted to take us down the street a little ways where there was a small gas station. Finally we gave in and went down there. While we were inside there was a couple that came in and she looked at me and said, "I just saw you just standing back there just smiling!" I thought, "Why shouldn't I smile? We were both safe and the vehicles could be replaced!"

I had a new cell phone that I had gotten just before the trip. It was a miracle that I had full service where we were. Remember, this happened way back in 2001 when there were not many places you had service while traveling roads like the one we were on. However, I had a clear signal and was able to call our insurance agent, AAA, Bill (to tell him we weren't going to make it to Imperial), and the owners of the RV place where we had bought our RV. We needed their permission to have the trailer and truck towed to their lot where the insurance adjuster could come and check it out. We also had to call a friend in Sisters to come and pick us up. He agreed to come with a pickup or trailer so we could load up the things that we could take from the pickup home.

When the AAA tow trucks came it was very interesting to watch the process of righting the fifth wheel. It took quite a while but we were really fascinated by that. When our friend arrived we loaded his vehicle with our bicycles and other things that were in the pickup and headed for Sisters. It was dark when we got home. When we turned into the driveway and had some lights on, our neighbor came out on his back porch across the road and hollered, "Who are you and what are you doing there?!" I told him it was us and it made us feel good to know that he was keeping tabs on our place.

Our truck ended up being brought to the RV service place that night but the fifth wheel was towed to Klamath Falls, coming the next day to Bend. They were both totaled by the adjuster since they had stayed connected at a 90 degree angle.

At the end of the day I knew there was a reason why this had happened and nobody had been hurt. Then this year (21 years later) I read a book about angels and how they appear in different looks and realized that those two men and boy were truly angels. They just came from nowhere and then disappeared, never to be seen again. God is good and He was taking care of us as we needed to be home at this time. Three weeks later our grandson from Silverton was killed in a car accident. Because of our accident we were only 2 hours away from our daughter and her family instead of days away in California...

Dennis Gilliam | Willamette View

To Go or Stay

Recent reading of “The New York Times” gave me two differing perspectives on life and happiness. First, “The 7-Day Happiness Challenge” touted the benefits of interacting with others. Then came their 72-page special supplement section “52 Places to Go”. Confessing a level of buy-in to both, I was still left wondering about a conversation with daughter Karey, loosely remembered, when she said something like “One can easily create an entire travel world within five miles of your present home.”

Hmmm, to what extent is that possibly true for me? For years I traveled extensively for business and pleasure, but now find myself with zero interest in boarding another airplane for foreign travel. (At least I carved out an exception for our upcoming trip to Hawaii).

Come along as I put the journey of staying home to the test on SE 32nd Street, From Harrison Street to Johnson Creek Boulevard in the Ardenwald neighborhood of Milwaukie, Oregon.

Jim’s Barber Styling still displays the sign I designed for him 40 years ago. Since I stopped using him as my barber, does he suppose I’ve died? Traveling north one block my mind’s eye sees the Milwaukie Plywood mill pond gorged with fat logs waiting to be peeled and sheeted into plywood. And across the street I see the vibrant P&C Tool Company where Larry’s Mom worked making quality nationally distributed wrenches and screw drivers.

Scores of small houses comprising the Hillside Park community were brought here after the Vanport Flood of 1948. Presently it is a modest-income county housing complex. I go there annually with Rotary to deliver Christmas presents to kids. Dolansky’s Farm was across the street. At present it is home to Milwaukie Providence Hospital but started life as Dwyer Memorial Hospital. Our second daughter Karen was the first baby delivered there. A small but important claim to fame for our family. Dr Stiff, Marie’s ob gyn, delivered her. Somehow, a Stiff birthing new life does not sit well with me.

Up the hill where I regularly rode my Schwinn to the public swimming pool, a developmentally delayed young man waved at me to stop. Then, unexpectedly, he spit in my face. What gives? Oh well, stuff happens. Further up that hill, walking home from Milwaukie Junior High, Dick and I opened a paper bag evidently tossed from a car window. Wowza, did I get my fill of pornographic photographs!

There's Cheryl's dog grooming studio where our Golden Doodle Emma gets trimmed and styled, and next door is the auto repair shop where Luther repaired our cars for many years. Oh, and across the street is my personal favorite--Foss Confectionery. Green Rivers, comic books, bubble gum with baseball cards and root beer shakes made with chocolate ice cream; all served up by ol' man Foss in his spiffy white apron.

Renard's Hardware building is still there. We shopped there often. When first married, my parents plotted to open a hardware store. Instead, Renard facilitated an electrical apprenticeship for my Dad; his lifelong trade. If Renard had a first name, I'm clueless. And right there sat "The Oregonian" Branch 31, newspaper drop off site where I picked up papers for my daily and Sunday route. Getting up at 5:00am never bothered me. The payoff was my end of month commission after settling my bill. Supplementing this by selling garden seeds door to door kept me flush.

There's where they sold unlikely favorite foods of my childhood--cow's tongue, liver and smelt--in the neighborhood Lisac's Market. Of the three I'm still up for a good smelt fry. The same family still sells pellet stoves in that building. Next door was Quinn's Blacksmith Shop. When we arrived with a project, he would stop welding or making horseshoes and create a special time for me by magically pulling a silver dollar from behind my ear. Easily the world's best magician. Across the street stood Auntie Esther's. She made great chocolate sundaes for all "her neighborhood kids".

There was tall grass on that corner. My tall grass. I usually had to pee like a racehorse when the berry picker bus let me off there, hot and tired, on that corner. Drop to my knees in the grass and let 'er fly baby. In that house lived Gertie, the insurance lady. She had a crippled leg and walked everywhere on crutches. She knew me and always had time to talk. A great lady. The Italian guy who lived in that house grew amazing "pride of the hood" tomatoes. Those deranged teens who one day robbed and murdered him were a blight on humanity. Across the street an attractive high school acquaintance engaged in a widely-rumored lucrative whoring business for many years.

This building was originally a neighborhood grocery store where I'd deliver bacon fat in cans to somehow aid the WWII war effort. Years later, when it became a roofing store and lawn mower shop, I'd rent a mower, mow a lawn, pay the rental fee and pocket my earnings. Across the street is the beautiful Congregational Church. Someone bought the church building and developed it into what appears to be an alternative lifestyle "hippie" commune. While still a church, the organist's son aided the girl in training with occasional visits to a nearby field of tall grass.

That bridge is above the old Bellrose streetcar tracks and Ardenwald Station that eventually transitioned into Springwater Trail. It also was my favored dumping spot for undelivered papers from my newspaper route, until they made my Dad and me clean up the entire mess. I'll never know why. They did no damage. And right there, see that bush? I picked pussy willows there every year for my Mom on Valentine's Day. My, what a good boy am I.

Some might suggest that 32nd Street is all at once a Neighborhood, a City, a Region or a World. Who am I to disagree?

Btw, enjoy your upcoming and richly deserved trip to Paris. Time's a wastin'. Get on that plane and go! Nothing doing around here.

Delores Gradin | Parkview Christian Retirement

The Surprise Visitor

Miss Alice Mabel Werley was in charge of our one-room country schoolhouse in central Saskatchewan in the fall of 1953. No teacher could be found, and she was not a teacher, but a middle-aged high school graduate who would supervise correspondence lessons for all grades through the tenth.

Her job was a challenge. For one thing, she had no community support. Most of the children's parents knew of her, and only a few knew her well. She had a glandular disorder, and the community's members were whispering, "Hermaphrodite." That would have been hard enough, but they were also saying, "She, er...she's religious." Miss Werley was prepared to be kind to all the pupils, but she was unprepared for what was ahead.

My family and I saw Alice Mabel at church, which met every Sunday in the very schoolhouse where she would be teaching. We had known her for a long time, and I liked the odd little lady because she was nice to me. But odd she was, and a little shorter than I, for I was thirteen and growing. She wore old-fashioned dresses, and she had no figure. Her black hair was wiry, sprinkled with gray and held down with a hairnet. She had a gravelly voice, and sadly, it was obvious that she had to shave every day.

Miss Werley was nicer to me than any teacher up to now had been, and it helped that I was growing up and becoming a cooperative student. I knew her better than most of the other students did, because few of their families joined us at the Sunday meetings.

The school numbered about twenty-five children. The largest class was first-graders. I had only two classmates: red-haired Arlene who was very quiet and obedient; and Tommy, a big boy who could be difficult.

Gary, a stripling, was a grade behind us, and Biff was a wiry sixth-grader, but we all were about the same age. Tommy and Biff hung out together and had already developed a reputation in the community.

One warm day in fall, when Tommy, Biff and Gary had each built up a backlog of misbehavior, Miss Werley had had enough. That day had already been hard for her. She had made a habit of

getting half an hour of fresh air daily at lunchtime, and today she had lost her hairnet in the school yard. Her steel-wool hair stood out in a bush, making her face with its balding brow look larger than usual.

Then she'd fallen off the last two front steps, flat on her stomach on the cinders below, fortunately unseen by anyone but 11-year-old Jane and me. We were too grown up to laugh and kindly helped her up. She seemed to be not much hurt, though she rubbed her pink-sweated elbow ruefully.

The final difficulty was that Biff had been seen walking outside the school yard, and he steadfastly denied it. Miss Werley jumped into action.

First she surprised Tommy with the strap. He got out of his desk and began to move away from her around the room while she followed, strapping up at him all the while. He was loud-mouthed and rebellious and made threatening gestures. "Don't you touch me!" she shouted more than once.

I stole a glance behind me where the action was and saw her face, which was terrifying. Her eyes glittered furiously, her face was red and she spoke through her teeth. The wild hair added to the effect. She was like a treed bobcat!

The biggest boys, Darren and Eddy, watched with interest. They were men in body but not at heart, and they were not heroes. Their parents, too, had ridiculed Miss Werley at home.

Leaving Tommy, she advanced on Biff. Before she could land one blow, he leaped out of his desk like an animal and bolted out the door, with Miss Werley after him. In a few seconds the whisper went around the tense room: The inspector! He ran right into the inspector!"

This was a departure from the ordinary. Usually students were on their best behavior when the inspector came, and he always came unexpectedly. We would wear virtuous expressions, pay attention to the teacher, and pretend we always sat perfectly straight, hands folded, listening. Tommy said then, with a relieved grin, "Boy, am I glad I've had mine!"

The three came back into the schoolroom, and the inspector was now in charge. Asked repeatedly, Biff denied even to the inspector that he had been out of bounds. The inspector inquired how many of us had seen him outside the school yard. A number of girls put up their

hands. I was one of them; we had been in the school building and had seen Biff run by the other side of a fence post.

Biff was asked to stay when the rest of us went home. We could not guess what would be his punishment, but speculated. Would the inspector strap him? That would be horrible, but the girls thought these boys deserved whatever they got. Everyone walked home talking about what had happened.

At home, hearing the story, Grandma said, "She must have been praying that the inspector would come."

The next day we found Biff had been put ahead one grade. He was only a few months younger than I, and the move put him into the seventh grade, where he would have to work harder. He was capable of it, but we felt this had been more of a reward than a punishment. Biff never said, and no one other than Miss Werley knew, what else might have happened after school.

Note: All names have been changed.

Joan Graves | Capital Manor

Gardens, etc.

One of the pleasures of living in a retirement community is time to walk and explore. In my community exploring means observing a variety of resident gardens. Walking and thinking as I pass the villas both old and new, my mind is talking to me. The first villa I pass has a garden that is clearly elegant, neat and beautiful. The next is just the opposite, the garden has an abundance of flowers and shrubs with odds and ends that give the appearance of having been blown in by the breeze. I wonder - if I knew the residents would I think of each of them using the same adjectives, elegant or the appearance of having blown in with the breeze. Consider friends and acquaintances. Surely some could be called elegant and some I guess you might call casual and having just blown in with the breeze?

I often walk around the grounds – sometimes I stop to chat with one gentleman who sits in his electric chair in his driveway. He always greets me with a smile and “hello” as I go by. We comment on the weather, the state of his garden and not much else. Recently when I stopped by our conversation exceeded just gardens and we talked a little bit about his life.

A few days ago, thanks to a friend, it was my good fortune to have dinner with the same gentleman. I learned that he was a German teacher and also a guidance counsellor, a wonderful photographer, and altogether a really interesting guy. I’m not sure how I had pictured him up to this revelation, we never talked about his garden, he was just the friendly guy sitting in his driveway. Now I’m anxious to know more about his life, not his garden. It is a great lesson on the fact that all too often we look at the surface and ignore the content – gardens and people.

John Holderness | Willamette View

Accidental Bozo

Dallas in September is still very hot, humid, and bright, and coffee shops serve as refuge from the climate as much as meeting places and wifi hotspots. Charles entered one called the Daily Grind, a block away from the office where he had an appointment in an hour. The coolness was very pleasant, and he felt a calm satisfaction at being where he was supposed to be without a hitch and with time to spare. He ordered a plain coffee and biscotti and then moved aside to wait for the coffee.

As his eyes scanned the room, they passed, and then snapped back to, a grey-blond woman, 50ish, in office clothes, sitting at a small table and looking intently at him. Her expression conveyed both surprise and hostility. Nancy! Charles' calmness disappeared. His return to her face had been too obvious to permit him to pretend he had not seen her. His only choices were to abruptly turn and leave the shop or to simulate a civilized recognition and meeting. The first choice, as attractive as it was, would be cowardly, plus he knew right away there was a good chance she worked in the office where he was due shortly. So there was nothing for it but to feign pleasure and make the best of it. He picked up his coffee and walked over to her table with a smile.

She looked up at him as he approached and said in a sassy way, "Well, well, ...my long-lost Bozo. I thought you might come to see George one day. Sit down, son-of-a-bitch."

This greeting, as unwelcoming as it was, was issued with an ironic smile. Charles, actually feeling relieved, sat with an exaggerated hangdog expression, and, after a moment, said, "Nancy, I'm glad to see you. You're looking well. Thank you for your greeting—richly deserved, I know. How are you?"

She pushed her cup and saucer aside and leaned toward him across the table. "I'll bet you're glad to see me!" she said. "For one thing, you probably thought I'd killed myself. For another, you're lying; I'm the last person you were hoping to see." She sat back, glanced at the customers at a table nearby. She dropped her voice.

"You really broke my heart, you know. I was trying to defend myself, but you were sooo convincing, and acted sooo devoted.... And when I was truly hooked, you called me up and dumped me. I can remember how it felt, both before and after. It took a long while to get over."

Charles felt ashamed. The facts were as she said. He had been sorry and guilty for his treatment of her ever since.

She continued, "You were wise to stay away. Some of my friends might have hurt you. Even your old pal George, a big Bozo himself, was mad." The physical threat, even though far in the past, bucked Charles up, like a poke in the chest with an angry finger.

His own side of the story was not as simple as she thought, and he was pretty sure she didn't know it. Would he want her to? Would he have wanted her to then? He had thought about it, and, at different times, had understood it differently. And now, across the table from her twenty years later, he wondered whether it would be kinder to leave her understanding as it was—whatever it was—or to explain what had happened from his standpoint. He decided to leave it alone.

"I know, and I am sorry," he said. "I was desperately needy, and the woman I had tried to leave when I met you was there, in San Antonio, and I couldn't stay away from her. I tried, but I couldn't. I told you I was going back to her when I called you, and I did, for a while."

"You know what?" she said. "That's what they mean in court when they say 'the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.' There's more to the truth than what you told me then or now. You did get away from her, as I heard from George a long time ago, but not to be with me. Don't tell me you got away from her and became a monk—that'd be even worse."

Was it vanity to think the truth about the change in his feelings for her would have been so hurtful then, or now? Yes, it was vain, but it would still have been cruel, and even his indignation at having been fooled by her hadn't made him want to hurt her. He had just wanted to break off with her. But that was then. And here she was, clearly OK, if she could be ironically sassy with him and then honest about having been hurt.

"Shall I tell you how it was for me? The parts I left out back then?"

"I'll bet I could tell you, and I'll tell you if I had it right when you've finished, but go ahead," she said. She put her elbows on the table and her chin on her hands.

"OK." Charles stopped, looked down, composing his thoughts, then looked at her and said, "Remember when we met, at that party at George's house? I had driven up from Houston with friends. I really was needy after breaking up with the other gal, and you were there, in your boss's house with his clients and friends and a couple of other women from the office. You were

being very cool—svelte, I called you. Kind of French, with your ash-blond hair in a stylish cut, wearing dark glasses for some reason, a tight skirt, net stockings, seeming very assured and sophisticated. I was so taken.... That was who I wanted you to be—who I thought you were.” He paused and sipped from his cup, looking over it at her.

“Boy was that not who I was!” She said. “But I didn’t think I was fooling anyone. Everyone else from the office knew me very well.”

“That’s who I wanted you to be,” he repeated, “and I clung to my vision, but, really, you were either too honest or unaware to keep it up, and after a while I saw that you were quite different. Remember when you put on that baseball cap when we were going out somewhere, and I objected? It didn’t fit my vision. With that hat on you looked like a ten-year-old tomboy.”

“Well, I was thirty-some, but otherwise...,” she said.

Then, serious again, “It took you long enough! And all that time you were so positive and so avid. Up here most weekends or me down there, on the phone all the time, lots of sex, even on the phone—Christ! What a son-of-a-bitch when you turned all of that off!” She laughed.

“I managed to convince myself you’d been fooling me deliberately, and I was mad about it,” Charles said. “That helped me feel better. But you weren’t, were you? I came to that after some time.”

“No, but I may have been more aware of what was happening than you thought. This is not coming as a surprise.

“I remember being in a bar with you and my friend Laura, and we were talking about Bozos. She had a ‘No Bozos’ bumper sticker, the red circle with a clown face in the center and a red bar across it. We all three laughed; you were no Bozo, you were the real thing. Ha! Well, ok, you weren’t. You were something else. But the point is I was kind of locking you in, because I had a feeling. It was mostly unconscious, but seeing it coming actually made it worse when you broke up with me. It was my big tragedy for a year.”

“You’ve thought about this quite a bit, haven’t you?” Charles said.

“Seems like you have, too, a lot more than I imagined. Of course for a long time I saw you as a heartless Bozo who never looked back, who I wanted to kill,” she said. “But then... replacement therapy took the sting away.”

Charles said, “Replacement therapy? Oh! Yes. Good. Me too, but figuring out the stuff I just told you, about your not trying to fool me, made me feel worse. So I still wanted to run when I saw you, and the look on your face suggested it was a good idea.”

They both smiled. She said, “You were brave to come over, and I was brave to act sassy, when really I was shocked. Let’s go see George—he’ll be shocked too.”

Helen Hollyer | Cascade Manor

The Kindness of a Stranger

Smack! My cheek stung from the midwife's vigorous slap. "Be quiet!" she commanded. "You're making too much noise. Three other women in this room are having babies. Dutch women aren't cowards like you Americans," she hissed.

From beyond the white curtains surrounding the delivery table, I could hear other women's soft moans and gentle murmurs of reassurance from their husbands.

I could feel my flesh tearing as the baby's head pushed relentlessly out of my body. Despite my terror at giving birth for the first time, alone, without anesthesia, without a doctor and in a foreign country, fear of being struck again kept me silent.

"Where's your husband?" asked the midwife. She continued, "He should be here to mop your brow and comfort you."

"I think he went out for a cheeseburger," I responded weakly.

The ripping pain intensified. I realized with a shock that the crimson fluid dyeing the midwife's arms up to her elbows was my blood. There was a final gush of liquid as the baby slid out of me.

Spirals of indigo and scarlet pulsated in the umbilical cord, a living helix of tissue and blood still connecting me to this tiny person. A separate being had emerged from my body, a new life had come into existence.

A moment before I had been conscious only of myself, of my fear and pain. Now a profound sense of awe swept over me. Then grief diluted my joy as I realized that neither my husband nor any man would ever be able to experience the miracle of birth in this way.

A second midwife began kneading my abdomen to expel the afterbirth, while the first asked, "And what are we naming the baby?"

"I'm near-sighted, so I can't see well enough to tell its gender," I responded, "Is it a boy or a girl?"

"It's a girl," she said.

"Her name will be Margaret," I said.

“And how are we spelling that?” the persistent midwife asked.

I forced myself to breathe slowly, concentrated on the correct order of the letters and carefully recited: “M-a-r-g-a-r-e-t.”

The gruff midwife wrapped Margaret in a cloth shortly before my husband, enveloped in a white smock, made his belated appearance in the delivery room at the State School for Midwives in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

“Hold the baby,” the first midwife barked, and thrust Margaret into his arms. She continued, “Here, take this buttered bread with sugar sprinkles and feed your wife. She’s been working hard.”

After the bloodied sheets had been removed, I was transferred to a gurney and wheeled into a spacious maternity ward lined on two sides by beds with cradles attached to the footboards.

Each of the ten beds and cradles was occupied except the bed at the very end; it was to be my home for the next ten days. Margaret was placed in the attached cradle.

Sunlight was streaming through the clerestory windows of the room when I awoke the next morning. I tried to converse with the new mother in the bed next to me, but she smilingly indicated that she didn’t speak English.

I soon discovered that, except for the ward attendants, none of the women spoke English, including the other foreigner, a beautiful, honey-skinned Indonesian woman in a bed diagonally across the room.

I speculated that she was probably married to one of the Dutch rubber planters who had returned to the Netherlands after Indonesia gained its independence. Occasionally she would glance over to me and smile in apparent empathy with me, the other stranger.

Throughout each day, the guttural syllables of Dutch were often punctuated with low-pitched laughter. I remained mute.

My husband missed visiting hours the first day. When he came the second day, I drew his attention to the banks of flowers surrounding every bed but mine.

“Peter, would you please bring me a bouquet tomorrow? You know the Dutch bring flowers to each other at every opportunity. I can’t stand the pitying looks the other women keep giving me.”

“All right,” he said grudgingly.

When Peter showed up empty-handed the next day, it was obvious that he had forgotten my request.

After he left, I closed my eyes and turned my head toward the wall so the other women wouldn't see the tears leak from under my eyelids. I drifted into the numbness of sleep.

When I awoke, my bed was surrounded with flowers.

I looked around the room. All the floral displays were unchanged save one. The accumulation at the bed occupied by the lovely Indonesian had diminished by about half – the half that now surrounded my bed.

Walt Lundberg | Willamette View

The Thank You Letter

Dear Friend,

What a kind thought you expressed in baking and sending us that loaf of nut bread. I'd like to think that my weakness for that sort of thing had something to do with it, and to say it was thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed is a rank understatement.

While it was done by a master of the art of baking, the ingredients of friendship and goodness combined with the more ordinary materials of which such delicacies are usually concocted, imparted to, is a flavor unattainable by the most expert blending of any materials alone.

It is now gone but you may rest assured that neither the cake nor its maker will be forgotten.

Maybe someday we can get even...

Respectfully,

Walt Lundberg

Joel Meresman | Willamette View

Jack!

The kids are always making a big deal about our anniversary. So our daughter organized a party for our 40th. Well, I'm not one for big parties, but I promised her that I would look for old pictures of Gwen and myself when we first met.

We have this mess of an attic and I can probably find some pictures buried somewhere there. I go into our attached garage, open the trap door on the ceiling, and pull down the ladder. As I start climbing the rickety ladder, Gwen starts yelling from the living room, "George, I wish you wouldn't do that. It's dangerous and your balance isn't very good. After all, you are now a septuagenarian." Why does she always throw it in my face?

I yell back at her, "Dear, if I don't go in the attic we won't have any pictures of our early years together for the party."

"You be careful. I don't have time to take you to the emergency room if you break your neck."

I hadn't been in the attic for several years and I had forgotten what a mess it is. Old magazines, college term papers, baby books, and other "treasures," according to my wife, are haphazardly thrown about. It's unbelievably dusty and dirty and messy up here. I pick up a box that looks promising of holding random old pictures. I brush aside some rodent droppings. I spend the next hour hopelessly looking for pictures with little luck.

I come across what looks like a diary book. It has a cloth cover with a flower pattern. I can't imagine what this is about. I open the first page, which is dated June 3, 1975, and written in Gwen's hand. I think back. That was a year before I met Gwen. I thumb through the book. The thick diary is written on both sides. It starts out, "I think that if I were in love I would be stronger in facing the challenges I feel often consume me." Hmm, what was that about, I wonder. I thumb through the diary and stop at a page when I see the word, "Jack." I think back to our college days in graduate school together. I recall a party for new graduate students that first year. Gwen, who I hardly knew, was curled up on the floor in the corner of the room with her boyfriend, Jack. He was a second year medical student. I don't remember much about how he looked, as I never saw him again. But I do remember that he had longish blonde hair and a beard, and was strikingly good looking.

In her neat cursive she wrote, "Jack came over last night and told me how good our meeting last week had been for him. How responsive I was—how neat to feel sexual again." That got my attention and page by page I look for the word, "Jack." A few pages later I read, "It is easy to fall in love with a very active, full of energy person, who is also a romantic philosopher like Jack." I skim further down through the diary and come across a section that makes my heart start racing. "When Jack kisses me it's like nothing else exists except the moment. Having intercourse with Jack really feels like making love."

With intense focus I spend the next two hours reading the diary. It ends one month before I met Gwen. Darn! I think, what would she say about me? "George, are you still up there? Have you found a lot of pictures?"

"None dear."

"Then what on earth have you been doing for the last couple of hours?"

"I don't want to yell, so I'm coming down from the attic."

I step down from the ladder and walk into the house. "Gwen, I found a diary you wrote when you were in college. Did you write more than one?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I came across one and wondered if there were more?"

"Did you read my diary? That was personal and private, you know."

"I took a brief look."

"You should have asked permission."

"Sorry. But were there any others?"

"No, that was it. It was a difficult time in my life and I needed to write and analyze things."

"What ever happened between you and Jack?" In the pause before she replies, I recall that at the second student party, at the end of the term, Gwen showed up alone. Rumor had it that Jack had started an affair with a nursing student and had dumped Gwen.

"Well, Jack turned out to be a two timer and a bastard, and we separated."

"But you were really in love with him, weren't you?"

“George, why are you asking me all these questions? That was almost a half a century ago.”

I enquire further, “But you really loved him, right?”

“He was so good looking. It was easy to fall for him.” She must have seen the look on my face. “But honey, you were good looking too.” She realized that her comment had not helped. She added, “I mean, you are still good looking.”

Later that night when I am getting ready for bed I go into the bathroom and look in the mirror. What do I see: a shiny bald head, jowls and a pot belly. I look down at my spindly legs; all that muscle tissue had melted away as I aged. This is what Gwen sees when she thinks of me. And when she thinks of Jack, she sees a very good looking 28 year old man.

Then I hear Gwen. “Honey, come to bed and snuggle with me.” As I get in bed, she says, “I loved you the first moment I met you, and I love you just as much now.” After a long pause, “Honey, I hope you remembered to take your Viagra.”

Elliot McIntire | Rose Villa

Taylor Road

It would be easy to miss the turnoff to Taylor Road. The highway is wide and people tend to drive pretty fast, and there are no signs giving warning. The road itself is narrow; the pavement only a little wider than one lane and it is clearly no longer maintained. Weeds grow along both sides and are beginning to spread onto the potholed surface of the road itself. There is a rusty mailbox on a leaning post at the corner, but it is easy to miss.

The mailbox is neglected because no one lives in the one house on Taylor Road anymore. But for those of us who grew up in the area, Taylor Road is magical. Just past the abandoned house a few hundred yards from the highway the road plunges into a dense forest of oaks and maples, and then emerges onto a broad meadow before it drops down to the river. In spring the meadow is a riot of wild flowers, and the banks of the river are lined with willows and a few towering oaks. Even in the dry season there are deep pools just crying out to be swum in.

In winter the pools in the river sometimes freeze over, but the ice is too thin to skate on. Often in early winter the fog lies heavily along the river valley, and if the temperature drops sharply the fog droplets freeze on all the bare branches of the trees, turning the forest into a crystalline fairyland. It is a magic place at all times of the year.

The road is close enough to town that, as boys, we could ride there on our bikes, and later, when we began to drive, it was the favorite gathering place for me and my friends. Most Saturday afternoons in summer you would find several of us there, just hanging out, swimming, messing around, or just talking, far from the constraints of school, jobs, and family.

Today there are few teenagers in the area, and Taylor Road is usually deserted, but when I am in the area I always take a little extra time to drive down the rutted road for some quiet time and a chance for contemplation. If we are lucky in our lives (or work to create it) we should all have a Taylor Road. A place, either physical or mental, where we can leave the cares and worries of the day and find an inner peace. For me, Taylor Road is such a sacred place.

There is a particular tree along the far bank of the river that I focus on when I am there. It was of modest size when I first visited Taylor Road, but over the decades it has grown, and now towers over the riverbank. I don't know what kind of tree it is. It is unlike any of the trees around it, and the bark of its trunk has deep grooves that makes it distinctive. Its neighboring oaks give

off a sense of strength and solemnness while the willows are lively and almost frivolous, but my special tree stands aloof. It is not like the others. It feels serious, but with a sense of the absurd, as if it enjoys its very existence.

I have never tried to find out what kind of tree it is, nor how it came to be there. Perhaps it was planted by an early settler. But to know those things about it would somehow diminish its' uniqueness, so I make no effort to find out. It just exists, as my own personal shrine, my own temple in the woods.

Bibi Momsen | Willamette View

How Could I Have Lost ...

As the 747 flew east in the darkness over the Atlantic Ocean in 1986, I started to panic. I walked back and forth, up and down the aisles, over and over again, counting and re-counting, but there were still 6 members of my group of 30 missing. As a responsible Elderhostel (now Road Scholar) leader, I had checked each person in at JFK airport in New York; I had counted to make sure they were all in the airport lounge awaiting boarding; I assumed they were all on the plane... But where were they? It was a long night, worrying how I had failed at the start of my three-week leading a group to Denmark and Norway.

As we went through baggage claim and then customs in Copenhagen, I suddenly realized they were once again all accounted for! The flight had been sold out, and the six had been selected to move to the first class cabin on the upper level. Whew!

Next was a transfer from the international arrival terminal to the national terminal for our trip across Denmark to Billund. We had twenty-five minutes to catch that flight. A shuttle bus ran between the terminals, but it pulled out as we gathered at the stop; the next one was in half an hour. We would miss our flight. I talked and cajoled, and the extremely helpful attendant requested a bus just for us. We almost filled the smaller plane. I wondered if they might have held the plane for such a large group. In any case, we were off to our Danish folk high school (folkehøjskole), where we would spend two weeks before continuing on to a second one in Norway for an additional week.

In Billund, we were met by the principal of Brandbjerg Højskole, Svend Slipsager, who spent the trip from the airport querying me about my qualifications as a leader of this trip. I told him I had been in Denmark on the Scandinavian Seminar program in 1958-9. "My first home stay was on Hans Lund's farm." He looked astonished. Hans Lund was a famous Danish historian, and had been the principal of the oldest folkehøjskole in the world, Rødding in south Jutland. I added, "and I went to Rødding Højskole as a student." His eyebrows could not have risen any higher. I had the background to understand exactly what he was trying to bring to the Elderhostel group: the experience of the folkehøjskole movement. Right then, he enlisted me as a member of his teaching staff.

The folkehøjskole movement began in the 1900s in Denmark to educate farm workers, especially those living close to the German border who might forget their Danish culture. A non-formal residential school, it offered learning opportunities for students mostly between the ages of 18 and 21. The stay was 5 winter months, when the farms were idle. You ate, studied, and interacted with the teachers who lived on the school grounds. You studied the Danish language, history, art, civics, and literature, all presented in a most dramatic fashion. There were no academic requirements for admittance, and there were no exams. (The movement has changed considerably since this trip.)

The participants in our stay included an equal number of retired Danes (and my second Danish home stay “mother,” Grete Tarnak) who mostly spoke English and were eager to interact with the Americans. The lectures were in English or Danish; the latter attended by the few Americans fluent in Danish because of family connections. The lectures and field trips covered many aspects of Danish culture. The teachers, living at the school, were available all day long, including meals, for conversations on any subject in which the Americans might be interested. We were featured in articles in the local newspapers.

I was the liaison between the Americans and Svend. First controversy: the Americans demanded decaf coffee instead of the strong Danish variety; after much grumbling about the cost, instant decaf became available. The Danes liked to smoke their cigarettes and cigarillos with their after-dinner coffee; the Americans managed to have all smoking moved to the living room.

Svend’s wife, Ingrid, provided the piano accompaniment for sing-a-longs. Proud to show her American musical understanding, gained when she and Svend spent a year in the United States, I had to explain that these older Americans would prefer music from the 1930’s and 1940’s over rock and roll.

One group took a field trip where Svend drove the school’s bus, and I followed in his car with the overflow. As he drove, I could see him pointing, sometimes to the left, sometimes to the right. I tried to use my knowledge of Denmark to explain what he was probably discussing. When we reached our destination, I asked him to explain what we had seen so I could make sure I could amplify my comments on the way home. He replied, airily, “Oh, we are going home a different way!”

Another day, when Svend was called out of a lecture he was giving to a small group of Americans, as he left the room, he said to me, "You just go on and explain the rest..."

A problem with being included in the teaching staff came the evening the teachers were sitting around, chatting, and sharing a drink of what was half liquor and half water. As a non-drinker, I felt myself rapidly losing my ability to communicate in Danish, and beat a hasty retreat to sleep off the effects.

An Elderhostel leader has to weather any unforeseen event, including illness, hospitalization, or death of a participant. A knock on my door came at 4:30 a.m. "My husband is having trouble breathing." I called the local doctor, who obligingly came to the school when I explained we were unable to bring the patient to her. Luckily, it turned out to be an easily solved medical problem. Other than two cases of walking pneumonia and a sprained ankle, that was the worst experience with which I had to deal.

After our two week immersion into Danish culture, we left by bus and then ferry for our third week's program, in Norway.

What a difference! There were no Norwegian participants. The lecturers came, gave their lectures, and then left. Our guide did not know the area we were in. I spent the week fearful of falls on dimly lit stairs and corridors as opposed to the brightly lit corridors at Brandbjerg. We had good field trips, to a salmon farm and across the mountains to a lovely fjord, and an evening of Hardanger fiddle music. One evening, the Norwegian school principal invited us to dinner at his house. But it was not the folkehøjskole immersion we had experienced at Brandbjerg.

A final bus trip to Oslo, and I sent the group members to the airport for their flights home. I relaxed for a day of my own sightseeing, visiting the Kon-Tiki and the Vespa exhibitions, both fascinating.

The Elderhostlers filled out a form about their experience, and almost every one said that it had been the best Elderhostel trip they had been on. Kudos mostly to Svend and his expertise immersing us in the folkehøjskole experience! I stayed in touch with several of the participants for many years. It had been a fantastic experience for me, and I was glad that the Elderhostlers felt the same way.

Gordon Nagai | Cascade Manor

The Day the Universe Tilted

“It is told there is a man in Padua who has created a most wondrous scientific instrument,” said the old traveler.

“It is so,” said his traveling companion matter-of-factly, “but it was not in Padua – it was Venice.”

“Hmmm, so it was,” replied the old traveler, remembering.

The mid-day sun beat down on the two travelers as they made their way along the dusty road. The air was heavy and oppressive, giving no respite to the weary travelers.

“It is told the man has made the eye to see what is far distant as it were before him,” said the old traveler, looking to his companion for confirmation.

“I have heard the same,” came the reply.

“Is it to be believed?” asked the old traveler.

His companion turned his eyes heavenward, and with a shrug of his shoulders, said, “He who told me swears by his mother’s grave that it is so.”

“Then I, too, will say it is so,” said the old traveler, a smile on the corners of his lips.

Darkness shrouded one side of the giant mirror as it hurtled silently through space, its antennae spread as wings spanning twenty meters tip to tip, capturing the solar rays on its singular journey. The space mirror’s course was intended to carry it above the planet’s sun-lit surface at an altitude of 20,000 kilometers into synchronous orbit over the polar regions, giving maximum view to the planet’s magnificent rings.

The immense mirror was programmed to capture the phases of the planet’s rings, waxing and waning from a full-on panorama through the sliver of the on-edge view, twice in the span of a single orbit. Mankind from time immemorial has been drawn to the transformation of celestial bodies that, like the moon, pass through ordered phases, beginning in primordial darkness rising through ever increasing increments to the fullness of the reflected lightness, and through the cycle of its decline into darkness. It heralds birth and life, then death and once again rebirth – it

touches an ancient longing deep within. The celestial eyes of the night wink, a flirtatious gesture from the heavens, and man is always smitten – It has always been thus.

The old traveler bent over his evening meal as his companion tended the fire. “You travel to Venice, my friend?” queried the old man.

“Yes, I am to visit with the master scientist himself,” answered the other.

“Oh?” responded the elder traveler, a curious twinkle in his eyes.

“Yes – I travel at the behest of the Archduke of the Hapsburg Court. This scientific instrument is of great interest to his generals,” he concluded.

“Ah,” nodded the elder traveler, sadness in his eyes.

“You take exception to my mission,” queried the younger man, caution in his voice.

“No, not to your mission,” said the elder traveler, a sad smile on his lips, “for it falls within the margins of the business of those who make wars. It is just that our generals look to scientists for weapons for the waging of wars and take little note of the price extracted by such ventures.”

“Hmmm,” sighed the younger, “It is always thus, I am afraid.”

“Yes,” the elder nodded. The two sat in silence, the stars above listening.

Signals beamed across millions of miles of space maintained the Galileo spacecraft aligned along the axis of the signal beamed from mission control, as the mirror approached the planet. The onboard computer had long since locked the space traveler on two other solar system markers, the Sun and Neptune. Computer readouts at mission control confirmed that the mirror was focused full-face toward the approaching ringed planet. Dr. Julian Goodman, co-director of the Galileo exploration of the sixth planet, watched as the computer image of the approaching planet began to take shape onscreen. A rousing cheer rose from the technicians and scientists as the picture of light and dark cleared and there appeared an amazing sight.

“Can you work the resolution on that, Stefanie?” asked Dr. Goodman across the banks of computers.

“Of course,” said Stefanie. Dr. Stefanie Purehardt is Galileo Surveyor co-director and project coordinator, and the nominal genius behind the project. The image onscreen was of a bright

crescent, with a diagonal a mixture of light and shadow bisecting its face – the rings seen from on edge.

“Stefanie, fix that orientation,” uttered Dr. Goodman.

“No problem,” replied Stefanie, and as she tapped a series of codes on the keyboard, the image onscreen rotated until the rings appeared as a horizontal line across the planet’s partial face.

“Thank you,” said Dr. Goodman.

“Why’d you do that, Dr. Goodman?” asked a young man seated at console #47.

“It’s always a little distracting to view something not on a north-south or east-west axis,” he answered. “Artistically, I personally prefer the diagonal, something off-center,” he continued, “but for our purposes here, technically we should keep things on a proper grid.”

“What does he mean, artistically?” asked the young man quietly of Stefanie.

“Dr. Goodman views what we’re looking at as a kind of artwork of the universe,” replied Stefanie to the young man over her shoulder. “He sometimes just likes to look at the images, not as a composite of digital impulses, but as an expression of some truth that is out there.”

“Oh.”

“The truth is that we are steady and unmoving at the center of the universe,” said the young traveler matter-of-factly. “This scientist speaks of a universe where the earth moves about the sun,” he added with a derisive chuckle.

“This man has spoken thus, I believe,” said the elder man.

“As a scientist, he must be exceptional to have discovered an aid for seeing long distances – but, in matters of Holy Writ, he is clearly out of his depth,” said the younger.

“Perhaps,” replied the elder traveler.

“These words of his have caused quite a stir in the Holy City!” added the younger man growing more intense. “He should restrict his explorations to the tides and the workings of clocks.”

“Ah, he should be so wise,” responded the elder traveler thoughtfully. “It is reported the Cardinal Tomaso Nellusone called upon him at his home asking that he recant his statement,” said the elder man softly. “He is stubborn and bull-headed, this man – he refused.”

“He is that, and foolhardy!” said the younger man.

“Yes,” nodded the elder. “Cardinal Jamasini Bertoni has called a tribunal at the Medici Court for the end of this month,” said the elder traveler.

“The Pontiff Jassui Gaeyuordini and the whole of the Holy City will watch these proceedings with much interest,” said the younger traveler.

“Indeed, they will,” responded the elder.

Preliminary review of images received from the Galileo Surveyor probe from Saturn produced images promising significant materials for study and analysis in the coming months. Dr. Purehardt credited the quality of the images to the dedicated work of the technical crew, the state-of-the-art hardware for the endeavor, and a dollop of pure and simple luck. She kept a small figurine of a leprechaun seated on a tree stump tipping his hat on the top of her console as homage to this latter element of the project – one mustn’t take anything for granted with NASA projects. Dr. Purehardt watched the image onscreen and the crew watched in wonder at the unfolding events millions of miles distant. Dr. Goodman looked over to Dr. Purehardt and winked his approval. Dr. Purehardt smiled and returned to the monitor screen.

The day was drawing to a close as the two travelers prepared themselves for the evening’s respite. The sun set across the wide valley and seemed momentarily to pause at the lip of the mountains to the west before slipping beyond the darkened ridge. The two men sat and watched in silence as twilight drew around them.

“I suppose this scientist will plead innocence,” said the younger traveler.

“I do not know,” replied the elder – “He is very stubborn, and I know not whether he will consider the implications of his position.”

“You do not believe he is correct in stating that the sun is the center of our universe?” asked the young man, a wry smile crossing his lips.

“Oh, I believe he is stating his beliefs on the matter,” responded the elder traveler quietly, avoiding answering the young man directly.

“He makes a persuasive argument for his views,” he added. The elder traveler sighed, and looked to the distant heavens. “Do you see that light in the heavens just above the hills to the north? Beyond those hills lies the Holy City – that light, my friend, portends something momentous in our times.”

The young man followed the elder’s pointing finger to the tiny light in the sky.

“How do you know this?” queried the young man.

“It is in the stars, my young friend – it is in the stars,” indicated the elder, his voice but a whisper.

And just for a moment the young man thought he felt the earth move.

Carl Petterson | Rose Villa

Magnus and His Supportive Spirit

Magnus was dead tired and hadn't eaten since yesterday. He hadn't fared very well in the United States since he left his Norwegian village two days north of Oslo in 1891. These last few weeks continued his poor efforts amount to something in America.

Magnus had worked for a few weeks for a logging company out of Forest Grove. He thought that, as an earlier immigrant, Carlson would treat his workers better, but Carlson was only interested in making money, not the safety of his workers. While he had survived those weeks of dangerous work, after leaving he had only a few dollars to tide him over until he could find another job. His English skills were better than two years ago when he arrived in New York, but he still had trouble picking out the right words. Why did these people have to speak so fast.

The road passed from the farming area into the woods. He was coming to a fork in the road. A wagon track went left and the single path went right. He took the right path and walked for hours until he found himself in heavy timber. He had little food inside his bedroll. He found a little clearing in the forest, pulled some windfall branches together to make a fire to warm himself. After consuming his meager rations, he rolled out his bedroll and pulled it around him. Even though he was still hungry he was quite tired and soon fell sound asleep.

When Magnus awoke it was nighttime and he felt someone was nearby. He looked up from his bed. Where smoke from the dying fire moved across the clearing, he saw someone. When the light wind shifted the smoke in another direction the person disappeared. "Who is there", he yelled." "I am here" said a voice, more in his mind than spoken. "I am a spirit of a tribe who once lived here long ago, a tribe that has been dead for many lifetimes. I was a shaman with great powers. After I died my powers allowed me to stay in these forests where I can protect the animals and people that need help."

Magnus found this very confusing. He asked, "why did you visit me?" The answer in his mind replied, "you are having trouble. As a spirit who wanders in this forest, I look after and protect its creatures. Your spirit called out to me for help. You didn't even know this because talk between spirits is unique. I will help you because you are in trouble and I will help you find what you need. When you awaken in the morning, I will provide you food. Now rest and I will guide you to the great river that flows to the ocean tomorrow. It is a long trip." Magnus thought he was referring

to the Columbia River. He hoped he could find some work there. With these thoughts he drifted back to sleep.

When he awoke in the morning there was a freshly killed deer at the edge of his clearing. Magnus was grateful as he skinned the deer, carved off some meat and cooked it over the rebuilt fire. For the first time he felt his hunger disappear. He mentally thanked the shaman spirit. The experience with this spirit was much like the ancient Norwegian legends with which he was familiar from his childhood. After his meal the spirit appeared and said they needed to begin the trip to the river.

As Magnus was guided through the ancient forest by the shaman spirit, he was shown to some food along the way. He also found water to drink. The food was unfamiliar to him, but it gave him the energy to keep going at a fast pace. He asked the spirit, "what can I call you?" "Grizzly," replied the spirit. "That was the animal that came to me during my spirit quest when I went from being a youth to a man. Even now I am a brother to the grizzly bears in these forests." Magnus had been told about these fierce bears and was glad the spirit grizzly could protect him from them.

When they reached the shores of the Columbia River about dark, the spirit showed him a protected spot where he could rest and sleep overnight. In the morning the spirit sent him upriver to a salmon cannery that was built over the water on wooden pilings. The spirit told Magnus: "the white men are destroying our salmon and my people are hungry because they can no longer live along the river where they can catch fish in the old ways. As a trick I am going to have my grizzly brother fill himself with salmon in the white man's building. You may be one of them but they treated you badly so I will support you against them."

At that moment a huge grizzly bear came out of the woods and walked up the ramp leading to the cannery door. Magnus could hear the spirit laughing as panic enveloped the cannery crew. "We forest people loved to play tricks on each other and these people who devastated our lives deserve this." Cannery workers flew out of the building before the bear filled his belly with cooked fish. When the bear had eaten his fill, he calmly returned to the forest. The bear thought that cannery gorging was so much easier than fishing in the river that he might return another time.

Magnus, out of curiosity, walked into the cannery as the crew was settling down from the ruckus. He had worked on his uncle's steam-powered sawmill in Norway as a mechanic and examined the equipment with an experienced eye. As the boiler man was restoring the

production line Magnus noticed the canning line was only in partial operation. The pumps feeding the boiler were not running right. Steam was coming out of gaps in the pumps and was not driving the pumps correctly. Without enough water feeding them the boilers weren't making as much steam as the entire cannery required. He told the foreman he could fix the problem if he could borrow a few tools. The foreman knew his equipment wasn't working right but didn't know what the problem was. He eagerly told Magnus to come back after the cannery shut down for the night.

That night Magnus repaired the boiler pumps, so they operated at full capacity during the next day. Magnus could see other places where simple repairs could keep the equipment running without interruption and told the foreman about them. The foreman was so pleased that the cannery could can more fish than before that he offered Magnus a job as plant mechanic, with a weekly salary. As the foreman offered him the job Magnus could hear the spirit laughing and telling him that he had looked out for him before, and there was no reason to stop now. The spirit said Magnus would be helped when he needed it any other time. Magnus thought the spirit's help surpassed logical understanding but was exceedingly grateful and hoped he could reciprocate this kindness to others.

Fred Rauch | Willamette View

Off to Alaska

It was spring quarter in 1956 of my senior year at Oregon State College when Ed Rolph, a Chi Phi brother, presented an interesting proposal. That was the idea of a summer job in construction on Kodiak Island. He had connections with a local church in Kodiak which could provide temporary housing until we were employed.

The primary construction project was the White Alice Communication system by the United States Air Force as part of the Cold War. One site was on Pillar mountain on Kodiak Island which operated from 1957 to 1979.

Our group left Corvallis shortly after graduation in June of 1956 with seven (7) individuals in three (3) cars. We were prepared for camping along the way. I was in the car driven by Richard Patching who was in my class at Rainier Union High School and Pete Larson the brother of his girlfriend. Our leader, Ed Rolph was in the second car with his girlfriend, Lodis, and the third car was driven by Ken Shultz and his friend.

We traveled up through Washington and picked up the Alcan Highway in Canada. At that time it was all gravel, often in washboard condition if it had not been graded recently. Some memorable events were a large swarm of mosquitoes while camping near a lake in Canada and a broken axle on one of the cars along the way. Fortunately several of the party were mechanics and had their tool boxes. One car went ahead to the nearest town, found the needed parts and back to make the repairs. In the meantime the rest of us pulled off the road and set up camp.

We traveled past Anchorage and down the Kenai Peninsula to Homer where we left the cars and took a plane to Kodiak. Kodiak is the largest community on Kodiak Island off the coast of Alaska, south west of Anchorage. The island was inhabited by the native Alutiiq people for over 7000 years. It was settled by subjects of the Russian crown in the 18th century and became the capital of Russian Alaska. At the time of our arrival Kodiak was very rustic. One of the more interesting buildings was an old Russian Orthodox Church with no seating for the worshipers.

Our temporary housing was waiting for us and within a short time we were employed. My first assignment was to work on the crew clearing a lane for a power line to the mountain. Then it was about a week to finish digging the footings for the tower to be constructed on the mountain. This was a pick and shovel job in the shale rock, usually with a cloud cover.

After that they provided housing in one of the barracks. This included three meals per day, served family style, usually platters piled high with several choices of meats. There was a rec room and a commissary for purchase of miscellaneous needs. Most of the crew would gamble and drink beer during their free time. We would work ten hour days, six days per week with time and a half for over 40 hours. Since there was limited free time and since I did not participate in the gambling I was able to save a nice nest egg and pay off a small student loan.

The next assignment was to fill several trenches where wire had been laid. This was accomplished with a power wagon over plywood that had been laid over the tundra. The final assignment was to assist the backhoe operator that was putting in new culverts on the road from Kodiak to the Navy base. He would dig the trench and then I would get down and smooth it out. I would then attach a cable to a section of the metal pipe and it would be placed in the trench. I would then attach a collar to connect the sections and cover it with tar. He would then backfill the trench with sand and I would compact it. This continued until the end of the project.

The rest of the our crew had to return for school in August and since I had graduated I could stay on. I remained until the snow started to fly and the project was due to close the following week. I flew back to Portland and remember getting off the plane and being very comfortable in shirt sleeve while everyone else was bundled up with heavy coats.

Gladys Richter | Parkview Christian Retirement

A Day in the Life of Proverbial Pete

Pete awoke at four o'clock in the morning and prepared himself for the day. He then quietly made his way to his back yard, tiptoeing around Pepper, his Labrador retriever. He knew it was best to let sleeping dogs lie.

Pete was intent on watching mother robin getting breakfast for her nestlings. "Aha," he quietly whispered, "the early bird catches the worm." He returned to the kitchen where Patches, his calico cat, was asleep in her sleeping bag. It was time to let the cat out of the bag.

Patriotic Pete decided this was the day to help the war effort. Collecting ball point pens had been his hobby since he was ten years old. Now it was time to donate the pens to a worthy cause. He made his way to the local Army recruiting center and presented the pens to the officer in charge. The officer didn't quite know how to respond until Pete bravely exclaimed, "The pen is mightier than the sword."

In further conversation, the officer challenged Pete to join the Army and fight the enemy. This, however, made no sense to Pete because he had heard, "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer," and "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." So, he made his way across the street, feeling satisfied that his donated pens would serve a worthy purpose.

Pete turned left when he reached the intersection of Zig and Zag, and then he turned left again. He knew that one good turn deserves another. He came to the office of the local insurance agent and indicated he was interested in securing fire insurance for his house. The agent listed the types of policies available, but Pete left, being discouraged. He knew that honesty is the best policy, and honesty was not included on the list.

The Spend and Save grocery store was located nearby. As Pete entered the store, he asked the greeter for three baskets because he wished to buy eggs and remembered not to put all your eggs in one basket. At the dairy section, Pete comforted a young lad who had dropped his carton of milk. The boy heard Pete quietly whispering, "Don't cry over spilt milk."

The last item on Pete's grocery list was spice. He asked for help, explaining that he could not find variety. The attendant asked Pete to explain what he had in mind. He gingerly responded

“You know, variety is the spice of life.” It was time for Pete to check out his groceries. He chose to stand in the longest checkout line because good things come to those who wait.

As Pete, with his grocery bag in tow, neared home, he waved to his friendly neighbor, Sam. Sam invited him over for lunch, but Pete politely declined the invitation and said to himself, “There is no such thing as a free lunch.” After several minutes, Pete regretted his response because he knew that the best things in life are free.

Pete decided to make an omelet for his lunch and steep some tea. He knew that you can’t make an omelet without breaking a few eggs. He also knew that a watched pot never boils, so he left the kitchen for fifteen minutes after placing the filled teakettle on the front burner. Upon his return, he steeped his tea and decided to take it with a grain of salt!

After lunch, Pete went to the local junk yard. He was looking for metal links to repair his bicycle chain. He found three well worn, rusty links and went home satisfied, saying to himself, “A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.”

Pete was an honest man as well as frugal. He saved his pennies throughout the year. Now he was in a quandary. He wondered how to report his earnings to the IRS because a penny saved is a penny earned. It was now late in the day so he decided to call his tax advisor tomorrow, even though he had been taught to never put off till tomorrow what you can do today.

After Pete ate his evening meal and tended to Calico and Pepper, he sat in his overstuffed chair and loudly exclaimed, “There’s no place like home.” He retired to bed at eight o’clock because early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.

Jean Rouslin | Capital Manor

The Strange Adventure of Amigo the Cat

“It makes a cat furious,” Amigo grumbled to himself. He’d been yowling outside, wanting to be let into the house. The fur on his back was blowing in the wind, and he was swinging his tail ever so slowly from left to right to express his displeasure.

The fact that it was three o’clock in the morning meant nothing to Amigo, that when looking through the window he could see Katie, the mistress of the house turn over in her bed ignoring him, he became just plain grouchy.

He had come home very late—in fact many hours after he would have had his evening meal. Now he wanted to get let into the warm house, to curl up into the comfort of his favorite chair. But the dark house door remained closed to him. He began to wonder why he was so cruelly rejected. “I know I’m not always the ‘friend’ my name would have you believe,” he fretted. “I know I become affectionate just around dinner time. Just the same, I think I should be appreciated.” He went on, “Haven’t I put a stop to the annoying squeaks and scratching in the kitchen walls?” Amigo was a natural born hunter. He had had many mouse scratching conquests. Of course, he had inherited his hunting skill from his ancestors, for which he was very proud.

What he didn’t admit to himself, though, was that he was also a scaredy cat, and could be easily frightened and jump at the sight of a falling leaf or the sound of a creaking branch. When you talked to him about this, he’d be embarrassed and immediately begin to wash himself with his rough little red tongue, acting as if he didn’t know what you were talking about.

Now, out in the cold night and with no hope of getting inside the house, Amigo considered how he would spend his time before daybreak. Since he was a loner who didn’t even associate with his own kind, he would somehow have to entertain himself. He would have to explore new territory that was not rightfully his. He felt safe now under the cover of darkness. He sniffed the cold air, stretched out his hind legs, and braced himself for a new adventure.

At least he wasn’t hungry. He had licked his plate clean of fish stew earlier in the evening, before he had gone out, so hunger was no problem. He looked over his shoulder to check out the situation; then he looked up in the sky. The half-moon had caught his attention when it suddenly appeared from behind a speeding cloud. The wind was high, so that little collections of dry leaves were being whipped up and scattered about, while even more fell from the swaying trees.

Amigo listened and watched; his whiskers quivered. The tufts of fur that stuck out of his little pointed ears fluttered. He was beginning to feel somewhat nervous with all the commotion the wind was making. Nevertheless, after a while, he slowly ventured around the corner and down the street, bravely making his way through back yards, open fields, and acres of little forests. As he slinked along, the dark, silky stripes on his grey coat shown in the moonlight.

The houses in the neighborhoods were very quiet. Even the dogs were asleep. It wasn't long before Amigo found himself in a forest of many trees. The forest floor was covered with pine needles, and as he traveled along, some of those needles stuck in between his toes. Meowch!" he cried, shaking his paws one at a time and putting them down more carefully. "This is a strange place," he thought as he smelled sniffed the scent of pine in the air. There was another scent too, one that was familiar to him. Huddled underground, beneath the forest floor, were little nests of mice. Their hearts must be beating furiously as they could sense the footsteps of their enemy, the cat. Amigo sniffed and turned away. "Never mind," he assured them, "I'm not in the mood for mice." The fact was, it had been a long night, and he was very tired. "What I really need," he said to himself, "is a place to rest."

Close to a tall tree, he found a cozy cushion of dry leaves. He circled around it three times, then he bedded himself down into it and covered his eyes with one furry paw. Soon he was fast asleep.

While he slept the wind had quieted. Now the forest was very still. But even in the stillness, there was a sense of something happening: there seemed to be a slow and muffled movement.

Then—one by one, from behind the many trees, cats of every description—yellow cats, striped cats, black, grey, spotted cats—appeared and formed a circle around the sleeping Amigo. Their eyes shown like gold coins in the dark. Their faces were very serious. Their whiskers poked out of their cheeks like starched fans.

Then a striped yellow cat, who was the largest of all of them, spoke. "What shall we do with him?" he said sarcastically in a high-pitched voice. "He's no friend of ours," he continued. "He goes about with his nose in the air, either avoiding us or hissing at us. What's more, he's intruding on our territory." A grey, striped cat with deep wrinkles on his forehead said thoughtfully, "It's true, he has no manners, but perhaps it's not his fault. It may be that he's just had poor training." "That's no excuse," said one of the others. "He's old enough to know better and should be taught a good lesson." Then the cats turned to each other and began to argue and fuss and disagree as to what should be done with poor Amigo. Some had really cruel plans for him, like cutting off his

whiskers. Others were not quite so heartless but felt that at least he should be spoken to about his superior attitude.

They continued to wrangle and disagree. They got into such tempers about the matter that their fur began to fly and spin into a huge whirlwind that consisted of] all the colors of the rainbow. Soon the cats themselves began to rotate as fast as the speed of light. Before long, they disappeared into the sunlight that was filtering through the trees. Amigo trembled violently, opened one eye, then the other eye, and without daring to raise his head, waited to see what would happen next.

The birds in the trees were just beginning to waken. One by one their chirpings and chattering broke the silence. He saw that he was in the same place where he had lain down. He got to his feet and fearfully warily looked all around. He seemed to be looking for something. "What has happened to all the flying fur?" he wondered. Then, as if he didn't want to know the answer, he fled from the forest, running as fast as he could back to his own territory and his own house.

Amigo thought by now, since it was daylight, that Katie would be in the kitchen, and would let him in through the back door. Suddenly the back door flew open. "So there you are," she exclaimed. "Wherever have you been?" Amigo arched his back, yawned with contentment, and rushed affectionately against Katie's legs. For that he got a saucer of milk. Now he felt happy and safe.

William Sarnoff | Cascade Manor

My Life's Secret

The summer I was five, our nation was suffering from severe malnutrition of its economy as well as its soul. We were in a dark time; The Great Depression. The family's cabinet making shop had closed up, shunting two generations of skilled woodworkers aside with no support system. The shuttered empty storefronts loomed over everything with the severe geometry of hollowed out buildings. That gaping cityscape remained gloomy for several more dank years, until the war clouds forming over Europe nudged American industry into war preparations. Despite being at a very early age, I had soaked up my surroundings and stored them in the marrow of my mind.

We were living on the verge of a world where threads were all the time blowing away. The rock in our family was my Grandma, a short woman with a head topped with a frozen confection of curls. She would say, "You push against every wall, stand up after every disappointment, and until your last moment, you shouldn't accept anything but make things better. Although then in her 80's, her days were spent volunteering at the local Marks Nathan Orphanage Home where she was always assured a modest lunch.

My father, an artist in woodworking, reluctantly replaced his cabinet repair tool-kit of fine chisels, clamps, wood fillers, stains and artist brushes for a tool box of hammers, saw, plane and nails. A skilled wood sculptor in prior times, he was now obliged to sally forth early each morning, tool box hoisted on shoulder, and roam the city's alleys, seeking out rotting rear porches, roofs and garages in need of repair. He plied those alleyways seven days a week, seeking any repair job for 25 cents an hour. He was not alone, other craftsmen similarly skilled would be knocking doors and happily accept such meager paying work.

One incident remains forever etched in my memory bank. It was observing my father shouldering a carpenter's tool box to start his day seeking any carpentry repair work and my mother's comment as he strode out. "Don't come home for any lunch, there is only enough bread and butter to feed the kids," followed by her muffled sobbing after my father departed, turning to no one while saying,

“There goes an artist begging for work.”

My father had little time to devote to our family. His best days trolling for handyman work was on weekends, when homeowners were available. I felt it doubly hard because my world was inundated by women – my mom, two sisters and a powerful grandmother. I hardly knew my father, because he was gone from early morning and oftentimes, till late at night.

And, then a miracle happened! It was a midweek day and my father was home. I was tumbling about in our yard when he joined me. It was then he said, “Willie, let's take a walk to the lagoon in Douglas Park”. Entering the park, ancient oaks goateed in moss greeted us. As we continued to the lagoon, a tall elm tree held a congress of blue jays seemingly having an argument. The Park was six short blocks with several busy streets to cross, and he grasped my hand. That's when my world changed. While holding my hand, he looked down, caught my eye and spoke warmly:

“Willie, I want to share a secret with you. But you must promise never to tell anybody, not even Mom or even Grandma or anybody – ever!”

“Sure Pop, sure I can keep a promise,” I solemnly assured him.

“Okay, my secret is that I love you. And, from time to time, I'll remind you that I love you by squeezing your hand three times, once for each word. But you cannot tell anyone, it's a secret only between you and me, so can you keep that secret?”

“Oh sure Pop, I promise I can keep that secret forever and forever too!” I assured him. On rare occasions thereafter, he would surreptitiously squeeze my hand three times, saying nothing, and always with a sly smile. I didn't need more, that alone was my assurance and those scattered squeezes confirmed I was loved. And, as promised, I never ever told anyone. The economy improved, the war came and went and the years rolled on. Similar to many families after the war, my family moved to the west coast, but maintained contact with regular visits back home, until one day my sister phoned to tell me that Pop was failing. It was no surprise to learn he had a stroke and was tethered full time to a wheel chair. He was then 96 and could I plan an early visit?

I arranged an immediate flight to Chicago and my father's convalescent facility. First time ever in that kind of place, I noticed the residents did nothing but

breathe and look and hear and smell the world turning. My father was no different. Like us, some were being visited by their adult pale water colored children. The old sparkle of humor in his eyes were gone. Missing was that old light ready at any moment to ignite a laugh. He could not speak, but he knew me and my voice instantly. "Hi Pop" I called out and he struggled to hold up his hand to reach mine. His touch was forever numbed, his hearing muted, his sight betrayed and blurred.

Holding his hand in mine, I started to tell him of the doings of his grand kids, which he always enjoyed. I saw him nod as he always did so I paused to gather more thoughts to share while still holding his hand in mine.

It was then I felt three separate squeezes, weaker than any I remembered as my father, the wood whisperer, silently left the planet.

Joline Shroyer | Willamette View

Summer Etched in Memory

The family's small farm lay along the Mary's River south of the Oregon town of Philomath, 45 miles inland from the Pacific coast. In the fall of 1941 the father, Gail Shroyer, was working a cut at his brother's logging company, driving the skidder to drag chain-sawed logs to the loading site, when he noticed in the midst of the branches littering the ground that a raccoon nest had been expelled from a hole in the trunk of one fallen tree. On the ground beside the nest were a dead mother raccoon and several dead kits; however, one kit was still alive, its eyes not yet fully opened. Gail took the baby home to his family of four children, where their mother, Doris, already bottle feeding one toddler, took on another, at first using a doll bottle to feed the little raccoon.

That appealing infant with its perked ears, bright eyes, charming facial markings, and button nose quickly became family. The children named him Rex, and he followed them on their ventures around the property, purring when petted or going to sleep on a lap. They tried playing hide-and-seek with him, but it wasn't fair—he always sniffed them out. As Rex grew older, they would take him down to the nearby river, where he enjoyed playing in the water and actually could catch a fish, hooking it out with both little paws, which though lacking opposable thumbs for grasping, were equipped with long slender fingers and long nails.

In 1942 Gail had gotten a summer job with the Lincoln County highway department, so when school ended that June for Jerry, the eldest child at 9, and his 7-year-old sister, the family moved temporarily to a rental home in Waldport, 45 miles away where the Alsea River flows into the Pacific Ocean, forming a large curved bay popular with boaters and fishermen. Their rental was a charming white two-story bungalow just three blocks south of the bay and its narrow bayfront with marina, boat ramps, and a few small businesses--bait and marine supply shop, restaurant/bar, café, a small theater--all situated along one short block. The grocery store was available a few blocks south on east-west Hwy. 34, where the main part of the town extended west a few blocks to Hwy.101, which was lined by tourist-oriented businesses. The small bay community was separate, with its main access road running a few blocks north off Hwy. 34 along the saltwater marsh to dead-end at the bayfront. It nestled between the bay rounding it on the north and east, and the high bay bridge of coastal Hwy. 101 on the west. There could not have

been a safer site for the adventures of the two older children with their 5-year-old brother and Rex.

Every day the children walked to the bay, Rex waddling along with his little round rump up, following them like a dog. When they played in the shallow waters of the bay shore, Rex could hold his breath for several minutes and delighted in swimming underwater to grab the children's legs. At low tide they frequently would clam along the bay shore, as did other people (who were fascinated by Rex). Rex could flip clams open one-after-another instantly with his agile claws and obviously enjoyed doing it, even without eating them; so sometimes the kids rented out his services to others for 50 cents to "pop open" their clams—surely entertainment for the customers. The kids with their raccoon were popular with neighbors and the shopkeepers and an attraction for tourists meeting them.

Freshly impelled into World War II by the December 7, 1941, Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, America was on edge that summer of 1942. With the coast's being vulnerable to enemy submarine attacks, mine fields had been planted in strategic ocean areas along the coast. Late on the night of June 21, 1942, Japanese submarine I-25, which had been part of the Pearl Harbor attack, tailed fishing boats to slip past the protective mines and reach Oregon's coast south of the mouth of the Columbia River. Under orders to attack U.S. land military installations, the sub surfaced and fired 17 explosive shells from its deck gun toward Fort Stevens. However, the fort commander immediately ordered a complete blackout and did not fire back, thus concealing their position in the dark, so that the only real damage was to several telephone cables and a nearby baseball field. An Air Force plane located and bombed the submarine, but it escaped undamaged.

This act of aggression 145 miles north of Waldport was the only WW II enemy bombardment of a U.S. mainland military site, and it put all the west coast on alert. Even though Waldport had no military installation, the town undertook all precautions. At night windows were swathed in blackout drapes and lights were extinguished before opening outside doors, with wardens checking homes to assure that no light emerged--a striking memory for inland people.

The family returned to their Philomath farm for the school year. Raccoons, even with their charm and intelligence (tests prove them almost as smart as monkeys), do not become fully domesticated to make good pets. As Rex neared a year in age, he became more aggressive and had to be chained (he would attack any dog he saw). The family loved him and anxiously sought a good solution. To their relief--and grief at parting--the National Guard welcomed Rex as a mascot.

Japanese submarine I-25 returned on September 9 and again on September 29 of 1942, launching a reconnaissance floatplane to drop bombs near the south Oregon coastal town of Brookings, hoping to start fires in Oregon forests. These “Lookout Air Raids,” as they are known, were also unsuccessful. That submarine was finally sunk by U.S. destroyers in 1943.

Oregon has the unfortunate distinction of being the only US continental site where civilians were killed by WW II enemy action. Starting in November 1944 until April 1945 Japan launched more than 9000 incendiary balloon bombs to ride the Jet Stream 5000 miles across the Pacific, a journey of about 70 hours, again with the intent of starting U.S. forest fires. The balloons were about 70 feet tall with a 33-ft. wide canopy and 40-ft.-long ropes suspending the bombs—which have been found in 26 states as well as in Mexico and Canada. However, the U.S. government censored all balloon reports to prevent Japan from knowing of even partial successes. On May 5, 1945, a young minister from Bly, Oregon, (some 50 miles east of Klamath Falls) and his wife, pregnant with their first child, drove their church youth group to nearby Gearhart Mountain for a picnic. As the minister unloaded supplies, his wife and the kids entered the woods to select a picnic spot when one shouted that they had found a strange object. Before he could call a warning, the bomb exploded, killing five children aged 11 to 14, and his wife and unborn child. About three months later on August 15, Emperor Hirohito notified the Japanese people of Japan’s surrender, and surrender papers were officially signed on September 2, 1945.

Back in Philomath, at age 15, for a statewide school story contest, Jerry wrote about that summer with Rex and received an award from the Oregon governor. After Jerry left home to join the army, his story and award became lost as the family dealt with life changes. However, that summer of 1942, magical in its unique experiences while also fraught with the suspense and anxiety of war, has remained a treasured lifetime memory for the family.

Deanna Sundstorm | Willamette View

The Cataract Saga

“Out with the cataracts” - well, he did not exactly say it that way. But a year ago Dr. Bock had said, “I can’t approve any driving for you at night. You should consider cataract surgery,” as he thrust a business card in front of me. “Call this person for scheduling.”

When I went for my annual eye check-up in June (with cataracts intact) I thought for sure he was going to say “I thought I told you to get the surgery done.” In the back of my mind I had been thinking about it, but with the Omicron variant popping up all around me, I was in no hurry.

Who wants to have surgery anyway?

At my visit this June, Dr. Bock had a totally different demeanor. He said, “Hello and good to see you.” I said I thought it was time to face the cataracts. He said he would put me on the list for the scheduling person to call, and I should expect to hear from her within a few days.

Now, cataract surgery is not that big a deal, I had heard from other people, but it’s all the rigorolet that surrounds them like a pre-op appointment and a 1-day post-op appointment and a 1-week post-op appointment, And then there is the eye-drop after eye-drop after eye-drop routine you get to administer to yourself- for a total of 30 days.

I was going to have my left eye done first, and if all went well, I would have the right eye done two weeks later. I have an Eye Drop Calendar for each eye. And the schedule will overlap, because the first eye drop routine won’t end when the second eye routine has to start. My calendar has a zillion little boxes to check after I get an eye-drop into an eye. And that’s not easy either.

My dear son Philip was my chauffeur.

1st Day Surgery at 7 am.

I must say that the Eye Health people were most professional when I checked in and they began the preparation for the eye surgery- ID band (I was still asked to state my name at least five times and which eye I was having worked on), blood pressure, medication check, and an IV insertion on the back of my hand. I would be receiving medicinal help to reduce my anxiety and

discomfort. I had also been given a surgical mask to wear the entire time I was in the clinic. Dr. Bock had greeted me when I was still in the Nurses Station area and asked if I had any questions. He'd see me soon in the operating room.

If you've ever been in an operating room, you know the room temperature is downright chilly!

Soon after I was wheeled in in a wheelchair and stood up to move to the operating chair, a nurse brought me a warm blanket. It felt wonderful.

The surgery proceeded without a hitch. I'd been told it would take 20 to 30 minutes, and it was right on the dot. When Philip started driving me home, I was instantly aware of street signs and highway directions that stood out so clearly.

Day 2 Surgery at 1 pm- Temperature Outside 100 degrees

For an afternoon surgery I couldn't have any food or drink after 7 am. Even in ordinary times I crave water, and I probably drink close to a quart in the morning. It was a hardship on a triple-digit day to keep from raising bottled water to my lips.

The Nurses' Station was far less quiet that day. Much more chatter was distracting me from doing my yoga relaxation breathing and whispering my mantra, "I love you, O Lord, my Strength." But soon it was all over. And my spirits soared as I was wheeled out of the clinic, after having my vital signs monitored for ten minutes.

Philip said he had waited for me in a nearby Starbucks, sipping a cold coffee. I immediately visualized my favorite Starbucks drink and asked if we could go through the drive-through lane so I could get a very tall Caramel Creme Frappicino.

And so I sipped and looked out at even more vivid color in the landscape, the many shades of green and the twigs on the limbs of trees.

Cataract surgery did even more for me than improving my eyesight. It was a tool for bonding with many Willamette View residents, some who had had the surgery themselves and others who were still facing it.

Lloyd Taylor | Willamette View

The Flow of Nature

My quiet, contemplative walk through the woods is suddenly derailed by the site of a dead branch hanging on to two small shoots growing from the branch of a healthy tree. It is pressing them down, abrading their bark, and blocking them from growing as they should.

I consider the dead branch. I feel anger at it for damaging the new growth. Its life is done, yet here it is impacting other lives for no good purpose.

I pause to just experience the moment, releasing my anger. Surrounded by the sounds, the feel of dry leaves under my feet, the smell of the forest, the sounds of cars barreling down the Interstate like unthinking ants, the intensity of my emotions, the breeze wafting past my face.

As I sit in these sensations, my attention shifts back to the dead branch. Looking more closely, I see moss and lichen growing there. My perception shifts. It's not that the new shoots are being damaged by the dead branch. Rather, it's that they are blocking it from completing its own life cycle- to rejoin the earth, nourish it through decomposition, and provide new life.

I lovingly lift the dead branch, covered with new life, from the shoots, and lay it reverently at the base of the mother tree. The shoots pop up toward the sun. The mother tree extends her appreciation to me for helping her children, living and dead, to freely continue their life paths.

I express my gratitude to the mother tree, and to her mother- the earth, for helping me learn to fully sit with my feelings and broaden my understanding of the circle of life.

Virginia Taylor | Capital Manor

Buying Garden Birds

You know sometimes when you turn on your computer, Yahoo often has an advertisement for these twirly birds, all synced- bobbing along together in a nice breeze, pink and white colors. That kind of movement fascinates me. So, I ordered the pink ones. They came from China, not just made in China, sent from there. Took a long time to get them- they're not from Amazon. I think the birds are meant to be flamingos.

When I finally got the package in the post office box Friday, I knew this was not what I was expecting, or it would not have fit in that box. I took the package home with me with a bit of dread. Totally it weighed about 6 ounces, and I hadn't even opened the thing. At home I began opening the package, knowing it was NOT what I thought-but- it'll be ok, whatever it is. I'm not sending it back.

As I opened one end of the envelope all these clear plastic packages slid out. Each clear plastic envelope contained one pink thing; I could clearly see that. Right then they looked like "roadkill" of what I was expecting. I opened the first clear package, and there was what I'd seen bobbing in the wind in sync on my computer monitor for three months or so, except each one of these had the neck folded back and it really looked strange, but they were pink birds even if their necks were weird. All together their weight of these birds was less or equal to a feather or whisper.

The people in China where I ordered had been prompt to answer emails I've sent to them about timing of getting my order. I was going to ask them how to fix that neck part, however I decided to straighten the necks out myself. I laid the plastic necks all straightened out, under the leg of a heavy table that Dave made, and I left them overnight.

I got the birds necks from under the table leg the next morning around 10am, and was prepared to be thrilled with the straight necks of these gentle pinks. Not so, the necks were still bent, but the crease had lessened. They looked better, so I decided that's how they're going to be.

From the table leg, I took the birds to the sofa, where I sat to stick the delicate little wires that came with the pink birds, a wire that bends far too easily when trying to insert one into each little hole so indicated on the "bird". That took several whiles or more, and a few choice words.

The soil is a little rocky where I chose to put the birds. I was excited to get these little things twirling all together in the breeze that had been blowing the outside shrubs and felt really good. I used a lead to get the wire into the ground without bending it, which mostly didn't work. I did eventually get the three wires in the ground with the FLAMINGOS attached. They now seriously look like flamingos.

ALRIGHT, with the flamingos on a wire in the ground, I was in business. The breeze came up again, I went back in the house to look at the flamingos and OMG- the fun began. It looked like the flamingos were pecking the ground, each other, fighting, playing and other stuff. No two of them were doing the same movement. I have laughed so much looking at them- they still haven't twirled or spun around in sync yet- they sure are fun to watch.

I did figure out that I'd placed the flamingos on a curve, causing the erratic movement.

I'm hoping these are young flamingos, and they're learning how to perform together in the sun, and how exciting it'll be for them when they all start twirling together...next summer.

Ron Ture | Willamette View

How I Succeeded at Hitchhiking

I first hitchhiked out of a sense of adventure. In the mid 1960s I was attending college in Pennsylvania, about a two hour drive from home. I didn't own a car. In order to get back home, I would have had to take two separate buses, and that would have taken much longer than two hours. Plus, it would have cost me more than my meager budget allowed. Somehow I got the idea to hitchhike home. I knew my father would have prohibited me from hitchhiking, so I simply didn't ask. I just did it. My parents were happy to see me, so I didn't get much flak. And my father didn't have to drive four hours to bring me home.

I did it several more times. I got pretty good at it. I always dressed neatly, brought very little luggage along, and always held up a sign that said where I wanted to go. When my trip involved several legs, I had a sign for each leg. I learned where to stand so that drivers could easily pull over. I smiled throughout. Back then it was safe to hitchhike, at least for a guy.

I met a girl from Ohio at a church camp and wanted to visit her and meet her parents. I still didn't have a car. So I hitchhiked there and back. I was getting good at it. Most drivers who picked me up simply wanted someone to talk with. I enjoyed the wide variety of conversations I had. One guy started talking about unsavory things, so I jumped out when he came to a stop.

During the summer between my junior and senior years, I managed to land a two month stint in Ulm, Germany, working as an engineering aide. I arrived in London two weeks earlier, got to Amsterdam, and then started traveling around by thumbing it. Hamburg, Copenhagen, back to Hamburg. There I met another American who also wanted to go to Berlin. We decided we should try to hitchhike through East Germany into Berlin. It worked. A German truck driver took us there and even waited for us while we were being interrogated at the border by those nasty East German border crossing guards. We had similar good luck as we traveled south towards Munich. Then we went our separate ways, never to meet again. I went on to Ulm.

As I was finishing up my two months of work in Ulm, I was making plans for where to go for the ten days I had left before my flight back home from London. Instead of heading west, I decided to head east into Hungary. Why? My four grandparents were all born in Hungary. I was curious to see it for myself. And I knew a cheap way to get there! I hitchhiked to Vienna and

asked at the American consulate if I were allowed to hitchhike into Hungary. They told me, it wasn't advised, but it wasn't prohibited. So I tried.

I succeeded. The Hungarian border guards were much friendlier than the East Germans and gave me a three day visa. My lift left me off in Budapest. My next three days were filled with so many great experiences that I lost track of time. When it was time to hitchhike out of Budapest, I had overstayed my visa. No problem. Again, the Hungarian border guards were gracious when I told them why: I had so much fun that I lost track of time.

Instead of holding up a sign for Vienna or Munich, I held up one saying "London". A family of four picked me up. They were Hungarians who had fled Hungary during the 1956 revolution. This was their first visit back since then. They were on their way back home. To London! My hitchhiking in Europe ended with one very long ride from Budapest to London. Success!

I only hitchhiked a few more times after that. I convinced my newly wed wife to hitchhike with me in England. But that's another story.

Patricia Watne | Willamette View

Mother's Advice

As my friend said, "We were born too late for Rosie the Riveter and too early for Title IX." Still, we had careers and lifestyles vastly different from our mothers. In fact, I'm sure my mother never understood what my career had been. Social Worker was not something her recent immigrant family living on a farm in South Dakota understood. Farmer, small business owner, and banker were part of their lives.

And yet, as different as my life was from my mom's, she had continual advice for me. The first bit of useless advice I remember as a young child was, "Eat your sauerkraut. Starving children in China would be thrilled to have it." You can imagine where I went with that. "Please send it to them." I have never allowed one string of sauerkraut to cross my lips to this day.

Mom based her overriding guiding philosophy on, "What would the neighbors think?" Not standing out or causing gossip infested all our conversations by the time I was a teenager. Of course, all the mothers in our small town held this same belief, and yet gossiping took over most interactions. This lemming-like behavior might have added to my strong inclination toward a rebel attitude. It certainly encouraged me to leave a small town in northeastern Montana a month after I turned 17.

One bit of advice Mom never told me was that I could be anything I wanted to be. She just assumed I would marry, be a homemaker, and live happily ever after. This didn't work for her. She worked outside the home for the majority of the years I was growing up. Still, she assumed it would work for me. It was the ideal role in the late 1950's and '60's.

My mom outdid herself when it came to sex education. She told my older brother, "Keep that thing in your pants." And to me, "Keep your legs closed." I was a young adult before I realized that my parent's marriage in late August and my brother's birthday on April 1 did not add up to nine months. So much for teaching abstinence.

Realizing I could be writing myself in a trap since I am also a mother, I checked with my children to learn what useless advice I had passed on. My daughter reported that I stressed she must always be able to financially support herself and needed to pursue a college degree that would help her achieve this. She graciously stated that this was not useless advice and has

passed it down to her children. My son just smiled, kissed me on my cheek, and went on with his life. I suspect he realized at an early age that listening to his father would be a better choice.

When I started my annual cookie baking for the holidays, one bit of advice from Mom shouted in my head, "Always use real butter." I followed her advice and wished she were by my side, telling me, "Make the cookies smaller, don't skimp on the frosting, and double the recipe. Cookies freeze well. "

Good advice

Mary Jane Williams | Capital Manor

Mrs. Buxton's Afternoon

It had been as usual, a quiet, gray morning for Donna Buxton. With the fog rolling in from the coast, everything seemed encased in a cotton ball of gloom. “Blah,” said Donna looking out the window.

After that, an old friend had cancelled lunch, and her early morning show was preempted by some horrible news about a plane crash.

Then her daughter Celia called and said she'd come by this evening to visit. Sometimes Celia could be so painfully cheery. Donna told her “not tonight”, and she could tell that Celia was hurt.

Worst of all she'd run out of coffee.

To be honest, she was relieved when the friend had cancelled. The woman could talk the needles off a cactus, and Donna had regretted accepting the invitation in the first place.

But the lack of coffee put the nail in the coffin, as her late husband Simon used to say.

That afternoon, determined to dispel her ridiculous self-pity, Donna threw her flip-flops on and headed out to the back yard. The sun was slowly burning through the cool gray, promising a lovely June afternoon.

Donna walked to the herb patch, briefly turning back to admire the wondrous pink feathery blossoms of the mimosa tree behind her.

Unfortunately the beautiful tree distracted her from seeing the hose snaking in front of her along the small graveled pathway. Donna flew out of her flip flops and onto the soft ground.

Seconds later, the air around her was infused by the fragrances of lavender and rosemary. It occurred to her, though, that she was lying next to the lavender and rosemary. This was very disorienting.

Above her, flecks of sunlight peaked through the branches of the mimosa.

Two screeching hawks floated above the tree in lazy circles. She wondered idly if they were hawks or vultures? Somehow it didn't matter.

She could cry for help, she realized, but why? She felt perfectly comfortable, and it was much better than being inside with daytime TV and no coffee. Besides that, she didn't know most of her neighbors very well. They were all new, or so it seemed. The dear old neighbors, her friends had moved to retirement places or closer to their families during the last few years. Nothing was the same.

The squirrel that she had often chased away from her bird feeder sat a few feet away, comically chattering, as if scolding her.

If Simon was still alive, he would scold her, too, if he found her lying here. "What were you thinking? At your age, wearing those flimsy sandals into the garden, you could have broken your neck," he'd have said. But once he'd realized she was okay, he'd ask "what's for dinner?"

One of the things she loved about Simon: he liked her liked her cooking. They had enjoyed their dinners together. They had enjoyed their life together. She could barely remember the sensation of joy.

She didn't cook much for herself now; it just wasn't the same. Such a fuss for one person. Packaged salads, scrambled eggs and toast were her specialties these days.

Now the neighbors' kids' laughter interrupted her thoughts. They were just over the fence, playing some silly game. The boy was Braden, or something like that, and the girl was Mirabelle. Good grief, the names people were burdening their children with these days.

Blinking into the sunlight, it occurred to her, oddly, that her current situation was very similar to her mother's, years ago. After Dad had passed, Mom ate miserable little meals when she was alone. She sat in a chair all day and declined any invitations. She hardly knew any of her neighbors. How strange to think of that now. Disturbing, somehow.

Donna had never had any empathy for her mom in those days. "Mom!", she had said, "You're missing out! Find something fun to do. Life is waiting for you out there."

"I don't have the energy. I'm just too sad to meet new people, and don't talk to me like I'm a teenager."

After responding with some condescending comment in reply, Donna had walked out in a huff. Seething, she complained bitterly to Simon at home that night. "I'm done trying to cheer her up", she had said.

A week later, Mom fell in her driveway. A neighbor saw her fall and was able to get help. With a broken hip, and a broken heart, Donna's mother's health had quickly deteriorated. She was gone a month later. There had been no truce between them.

Donna realized now that she was crying, tears streaming down her face and into her ears. This recollection had come out of the blue, and it had stunned her. She had, for years, been telling herself that she took good care of her mom as she aged. But, paying the bills, short visits and unwanted advice wasn't what Mom had needed.

At this moment, lying alone in her garden, Donna was humbled deeply by the truth that she was not the protagonist of that story. She was devastated to realize that her mother's loneliness and depression were now her own. A just inheritance, perhaps.

She drifted away into a trance until she heard the gate open. A young voice called, "Mrs. Buxton?"

"Over here," she replied, forcing herself to sit up. She knew that she must look a mess.

"Hi, Mrs. Buxton, it's me, Haden," a boy about 12 years old walked cautiously toward her. "My sister Belle and I lost our frisbee over your fence. Would you mind if I tried to find it?" He moved closer. "Are you hurt?", he asked.

"No, honey, but I think it's time for me to go back inside. Can you help me up?", she looked up at him. He was tall for his age, wearing a Portland Timbers shirt, and his long blonde hair was nearly to his shoulders. He smiled.

"Sure," he said cheerfully. He leaned down and put his arms out toward her. She took his hands, and slowly, firmly, steadily he helped Donna stand up.

She was a little wobbly but no worse for wear, to her relief.

"Oh, I see the frisbee over there by the fence!", he said as he hustled away and grabbed the bright yellow disc. "Thank you for letting me get it", he said, "and I hope you're okay." He squinted at her a little as he backed away.

"Thank you, Haden." Donna waved weakly as he ran out and closed the gate behind him.

Limping back into the house, she realized that she'd only been out there for about 30 minutes or so. Her body ached, and she was afraid to look in a mirror. When she did, she was horrified to

see that her face was streaked with mud, and her short, white hair was festooned with mimosa blossoms. Her clothes were filthy. "That poor kid," she thought, "I probably scared him to death."

After her shower, Donna noticed that two messages had been left on her phone. One from Celia saying that she was coming over anyway, just to bring her some coffee and to share some good news.

The other message was from Haden's mother, Claire. "Hi, Donna, this is Claire from next door. Haden told me that you might have had a fall today, and he was worried that you might be hurt. If you're okay, no need to call back, I don't mean to pry."

"Anyway," she went on, "we'd love to have you over for wine and cheese one evening. We hardly know any of our neighbors, and it's a shame. I'll call again tomorrow to see if we can set a time. Talk to you soon."

Donna smiled. She noticed a mimosa blossom on the floor that she must have tracked in. She picked it up and stuck it in her hair.

Betsy Wilson | Mennonite Village

The Buick and the Oldsmobile

My mother was the eldest of six children, the first generation to all finish college and scatter to the four winds. She followed my father from central Illinois to Houston, Texas, where I grew up. Each summer we would return to Grandma Holley's house, first in Normal, then in Canton, for an extended visit. Her siblings and their families would try to intersect with us during that time: Jimmie from Ohio, Donald from Colorado, Lee from the Chicago area. Her sisters had stayed in central Illinois where they both taught school. As an only (and lonely) child this time of interacting with my far-flung relatives was very special.

Summer of 1956, best as I remember, two uncles arrived in Canton driving brand new cars: Jimmie a Buick and Donald an Oldsmobile. They looked pretty much the same to me (the cars, not the uncles), parked out there on the verge in front of Grandma's house, keys in the ignition. (Those were innocent times.) The uncles were wildly different. Jimmie was an engineer, ultra proper, quite conservative. Donald was a college professor, ultra liberal, given to wearing wacky clothes such as purple sox with polka dots. Every one of Grandma's offspring was intelligent and riotously funny. Lee, the youngest son, was perhaps the funniest, but also the great mediator, able to see both sides of a situation.

And situations did arise amongst these extremely verbal siblings! Everything at Grandma's house was fueled by coffee, from breakfast right through to the late-night kaffee klatch. And it was usually then when controversial subjects were explored — such as the relative merits of a Buick versus an Oldsmobile. I counted myself lucky by 1956 to be old enough to sit in the outer ring of these klatches, never to speak but allowed to listen.

Sure enough the boxy-look-alike car debate reached a fever pitch by the third night as each uncle touted the relative merits of his choice and the obvious defects of his brother's. Lee, with a brood of five children to support, was mediating from the position of knowing he would probably never own a new car and finding it a senseless topic to argue. The children were always sent to bed before things got totally out of hand. Grandma could usually stop any mayhem by sending Everyone to bed, or else collapsing in helpless laughter as was her wont.

The next day Jimmie and his family planned to decamp to Aunt Vera's parents' home in Toulon after lunch at the picnic tables in the side yard. Probably should have left after breakfast as the

argument recommenced with fervor. Suddenly Jimmie ordered Vera and the kids to grab their things and pile into the car, and off they drove in a huff and a large cloud of dust. (Grandma lived on a gravel road on the outskirts of Canton.)

After a brief stunned silence, adult conversation resumed and we remaining children went back to whatever mischief we were creating. About an hour passed when we looked up to see Uncle Jimmie and crew rounding the corner and pulling up on the verge. It seems they had driven halfway from Canton to Toulon before someone realized they were not in their brand-new highly superior Buick, but in Uncle Donald's brand-new but inferior Oldsmobile! The vehicle merit argument was forever laid to rest as uncontrolled laughter erupted on all sides.