



# REFLECTIONS 2024

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**WORDS  
UNLEASHED  
COLORS  
UNVEILED**

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**AGELESS ART & WRITING**

Showcase and Contest  
September 10, 2024

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**SHORT STORY &  
POETRY COLLECTION**

# Reflections 2024

*A Collection of Short Stories & Poems by Seniors of Oregon*

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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# Short Stories

By LeadingAge Oregon  
Community Residents

# Hide and Seek

By Joan Graves

Capital Manor

It is perhaps 7 or 8 pm on a summer evening. The young girl has been called in from playing hide and seek with the neighborhood children. It has been an exciting evening, and she is reluctant to leave her playmates and go to bed. Why must she always be the one to be called in first?

As she watches out of her bedroom window, a boy crosses the street and comes up to her window and calls to her. She has a strange and wonderful feeling as she looks down at him. Later that night she is dreaming of Cinderella and her Prince Charming. The girl is anxious for the next evening when the children will gather once again to play hide and seek.

# Other Dreams

By Mary Jane Williams

Capital Manor

“OK, honey. That’s wonderful news. Keep us posted!” Jo set the phone down and dashed out to the back yard to find her husband. It was a warm April afternoon, so as usual, Art was lying out there on the hammock under the shady trees.

“Art! I have news!” she called.

No response. “Yoo-hoo, Art Payton, are you awake?”

Art’s long legs stretched the length of the hammock, leaving his bare feet to dangle off the side. His thin white hair was tufted like feathers.

Art was in the thrall of dream, on a deck chair on a sleek ocean liner. The waiter was just bringing him a cold beer when Jo appeared above him, trying to tell him something.

Disoriented and disappointed, Art nearly rolled out of the hammock as he pulled himself upright. How did he get here? Where was the waiter with his beer?

He blinked a few times as Jo said, “my dream is coming true”.

“Well, mine isn’t!” Art retorted. “Unless we’ve won a cruise, that is. I was just about to have an icy cold beer delivered to me on the deck of cruise ship.”

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“So sorry,” Jo answered, “that sounds nice, honey. But my dream is coming true!”

Jo’s face was flushed, her blue eyes shining and her short silver hair helter-skelter.

“What’s the excitement?” Art yawned.



"I've had call from Jill. She and Kirk and the kids are coming home in June! They're going to live here!"

"Uh," he started slowly, "they're moving in with us?" He tried to sound happy but what? The whole family? Here in their home? "Aren't they happy living in Atlanta?"

Jo shook her head. "Not *with* us," she said, 'just back in Oregon. Kirk has been promoted, and the company is moving him to the headquarters in Beaverton!"

"Oh!" he exclaimed. So they're moving to Beaverton, that's great!"

"Not necessarily in Beaverton, that's just where Kirk will be working." She smiled happily. "I'm hoping they'll move closer to us. Maybe even in this very neighborhood."

Art rubbed chin and met Jo's eyes. "How so?," he asked, his forehead furrowed.

"You know," Jo said with exasperation, "the Madison's are putting their house on the market this week."

"Hmm," Art mused with a grin, "have you forgotten their last visit here? More than a few days under the same roof with them is cuckoo land! So now you want them to move across the street? What could go wrong?" He chuckled.

"Oh, that was three years ago. Before COVID" Jo laughed. "Why, I'd forgotten all about that. We're different people now, and I'm sure they are too!"

Art shook his head in disbelief. "Let's see how it goes. Just promise me please, give Jill and Kirk time to explore their options. And give us time to see how things go before you start pushing real estate on them."

“That home isn’t going to stay on the market for long,” she moaned. “They’ll only be with us for two nights before they get into that temporary apartment. I will definitely share the idea with them before then.”

“Be careful what you wish for,” Art thought to himself.

On a lovely late June morning, Jo and Art saw a big green SUV pull up in front of their house. This was it! They had arrived.

Across the street, brilliant pink and yellow roses were in full bloom along the front of the lovely white house. A “For Sale” sign was still planted firmly on the perfectly groomed lawn. Jo sighed; she would keep her promise to Art and give it time.

Car doors opened and people spilled out. Art and Jo opened their arms and embraced their petite blond daughter and her very tall husband with the auburn hair.

Two redheaded boys in matching yellow T-shirts and khaki shorts squeezed into the circle of adults. Art got down to eye level with them and tussled their hair. “You guys have grown since the last time we saw you!”

“I know! We were only in kindergarten then,” said Charlie (or was it Scott?) “Now we’re going into third grade.”

“Wow, that’s exciting!” Jo came up beside Art and hugged the other twin.

“Do you still have your swimming pool?” Scott (or Charlie) said to her as he extricated himself from her embrace.

“Gram, did you keep my Legos in the closet where I left them?” asked the other twin.

“Yes and yes!” said Jo.

“Gram and Pop, do you know which one of us is Charlie and which one of us is Scott?” asked the boy with the most freckles and an impish grin.

“Let me guess,” said Art. “I see that one of you has more freckles than the other. I’ll bet you’re Charlie!”

“Yep”, said the boy, wrinkling his freckled nose.

“So you,” Jo took his hand, “must be Scott! And you have a little scar on your forehead!”

“Charlie poked me with a stick when we were sword fighting,” Scott said, kicking his brother in the ankle.

“Ouch!” hollered Charlie. “That hurt!”

“That wasn’t nice, Scott. You should apologize to your brother,” Jo said.

“We let them settle their own differences, Mom,” Jill admonished. “Would you boys like to help your dad get our overnight bags into the house?”

“Nope,” replied Charlie in a matter of fact voice.

“I want to go in the pool NOW” said Scott in a whiny voice.

“I’ll help you, Kirk.” Art rolled his eyes at his wife and walked toward the car.

“Let’s go inside.” Jo said to her daughter.

“I want to go in the pool, though,” said Scotty.

“You’ll need your swimsuit for the pool. Dad and Pop have to bring your stuff in first. We’ll have some lunch; then you can swim,” Jo said.

“Can you agree with Gram’s idea boys?” Jill asked them.

“Charlie sighed, “I guess so.”

“Gram isn’t giving me a choice, Mama,” Scott moaned.

“You’re right, honey, I’m not,” Jo looked straight at him. “Do you remember where your room is, boys?”

“Yes, the one on that side of the stairs,” Charlie pointed, and they both sprinted up. “Hey!” one of them shouted from above, “Legos!” The sound of hundred of plastic blocks rattled like hail on the wood floor above.

And so it began.

The next day, Kirk and Jill went to look at the apartment they’d stay in temporarily, then join a realtor to look at model homes.

The grandparents had offered to take the boys to the zoo. “I’d rather go in the pool,” said Scott. “I want to go to the zoo,” Charlie snarled and stomped his foot.

“We’ll go to the zoo and then come home and swim,” Art said.

“No choices again!” Scotty whined.

At the zoo, Charlie wanted to ride the train; Scott claimed it would make him car-sick. Scott wanted to see the snakes; Charlie said snakes would give him nightmares. By the time they got home, the grandparents were exhausted. The kids were not.

Jill and Kirk came back elated. The apartment would be ready tomorrow. Kirk would report to his new job the next day. They had seen some interesting new housing developments.

Charlie rattled on about his zoo adventures, and Scott said it was “mostly boring, except for the ice cream.”

Jill gasped and asked her parents if the ice cream was made from cow’s milk. “What other kind is there?” Art asked innocently.

Jill shook her head and said, “we do not do dairy”.

Silence ensued.

They managed to have a pleasant dinner together, but all were in bed by 9:00.

Jill told her husband, “my mom and dad don’t respect our parenting style.”

“Right” Kirk replied, but they’re trying. It’s good for our boys to have time with them. We just need to affirm our values.”

“I guess”, Jill replied. “Have you noticed that house for sale across the street?” she asked.

“Yup”, Kirk replied. “I’ve been afraid they might suggest we consider it.”

Jill laughed out loud, “Me too,” she said.

Early the next morning, Art found Jo gazing looking pensively across the street at the white house. She turned to him and said, “Let’s make pancakes for a sendoff breakfast.”

Kirk and Jill loaded up their car, while their boys wolfed down pancakes, no syrup or butter allowed.

Jill and Kirk had coffee. They were in a hurry.

“Thanks Mom and Dad,” Jill said hugging both of them.

Kirk shook Art’s hand, embraced Jo and said, “We’ll keep you posted and see you soon. Love you both!”

“Boys, do you want to thank Gram and Pop for the good time?” Jill asked the boys.

“Nah,” said Scott. “Thank you,” mumbled Charlie.

After they drove off, Art turned to Jo. “You never mentioned the house across the street!” He said with a questioning look.

“Nah,” said Jo. “My new dream-come-true will be a cruise with you.”

“Wow, really?” Art smiled widely.

“Yup!” said Jo.

# It Takes a Village to Raise a Poodle

By Diane Murphy

Friendsview

The retirement center where we live warmly welcomes pets. In our neighborhood that includes our dog, Cody, and our neighbor's poodle, Fido. In the last 20 years or so scientists have learned that companion animals can help their human owners reduce stress and lower blood pressure. Even noted hospitals like Johns Hopkins and The Mayo Clinic provide resident "labs", as in Labrador Retrievers, to comfort patients. However, these health benefits were in short supply recently when our neighbor's poodle, Fido, wandered off. Let me explain.

Fido tends to obey most of the rules in our neighborhood of duplexes. He is always leashed, however his owner is not always on the other end of his leash. Fido likes to pick up his leash in his mouth and run off to see our dog, Cody, and other dog friends who live nearby. Such was the case on a recent day. The woman who cleans our home propped open the door in order to carry in her vacuum cleaner and other supplies. We were not home, and our pup was with us, but that did not dissuade Fido from going in to investigate. The door closed behind him; the woman began her tasks, and, unbeknownst to her, Fido was stuck inside. Here is where the lack of stress reduction and rise in blood pressure enter the story.

Fido's human mom was preparing to attend a beloved grandson's graduation. Fido was supposed to be going to a caregiver; however, he was nowhere to be seen. His owner spent 45 anxious minutes combing the neighborhood by foot and in her car with several other neighbors joining the hunt. But eventually she decided she either had to miss the graduation or prayerfully entrust Fido's "village" with the hope that he would be found.

In the meantime, the woman who cleans finished the office, the bathroom, and was in the kitchen where she heard a scratching sound she thought was coming from behind the pantry door. She thought, "There is a rat in the pantry. I am not going to open that door!" Then she realized the sound was actually coming from just a few feet away where Fido was eating Cody's

food. She knew we had a dog so she assumed this poodle must be ours. She made sure she didn't let him out in our absence despite his pleading.

Fortunately another neighbor hearing the news decided to see if Fido might have headed our way. And, behold, there he was with his little paws pressed against the glass screen door begging to be found.

It should be noted that Fido's stress and blood pressure were probably as elevated as his owner's until she was informed he was safely back in his own home and they were reunited later in the day.



# Moving In

By Pam Glenn

Holladay Park Plaza

*Hi!* You must be Janice! You found us! With two elevators out of commission, it's hard to know when you'll get a ride. Welcome to the Tenth Floor! I'm Carole — with an e — in apartment ten-oh-four, on extension 437. I'm Ten's council representative.

Janet? Come meet Janice, from Omaha, just moving into Edith's old apartment. Janice, this is Janet. She lives in ten-twelve, right across the hall from you. I'll introduce you to any other neighbors we run into now, and then more formally at our floor meeting on Thursday; and at the resident association meeting next Tuesday. Or Nadine will, if I have to be away when my daughter up in Longview has her baby. Or Janet can — introduce you — if Nadine's allergies are acting up. Which they do this time of year, until the pollen count drops to a tolerable level.

I sure could use another cup of coffee! Would you like something to drink? Or eat? It's almost 11:30, so the Café will be serving lunch — from now until 2:00. They have good soups, sandwiches, salads. Specials. In fact, I often eat my main meal at noon in the Café, then pick up a to-go order of soup later from the dining room for a light supper.

Since we're on Ten, though, let's take a quick look at the neighborhood, give you a general idea what's where. We have 12 apartments for a total of 13 residents (two men, eleven women). Some of us use canes and walkers, but no motorized vehicles these days. Then there are two cats. The tabby is Jack. Very sweet, really, but aloof. Rarely leaves his apartment. Purrs like an electric fan. None of us have seen the other one, Fritz, since she moved in. We think she must enter and leave the building from her balcony by drone. No dogs living on Ten at the moment.

Those green exit signs point to staircases at either end of the floor. The north stairwell is next to the trash-and-recycling room, right here, where you'll also find the doors to the freight elevator, which residents are not supposed to use unless they're moving in or out. We put paper and plastic for recycling in that big green roller bin; returnable soda and beer bottles in the small blue wastebasket; wine bottles and other glass jars that meet certain requirements, which are posted on the wall there, in the big blue garbage can; and plastic-bagged trash, including wet garbage, down the chute.

In the middle of the east side, right here next to the elevators, is the laundry room. The boxes with our apartment numbers are for storing soap, Shout, Bounce, whatever ... steam irons. That's a community ironing board by the wall. And the signup sheet next to it, where you can reserve a weekly time slot if you want to. A lot of people wing it at first. You can always change your mind later on.

We hold a monthly meeting in the floor lounge. The council rep provides an agenda; brings news and matters of business from the previous council meeting; leads discussion of issues that require a vote or decision; and delivers any resident questions, problems or decisions to the next council meeting, where matters of general concern may be further discussed, or kicked upstairs to disappear into the corporate shredder.

Ah! Great to get an elevator so quickly!

And we're back to One. The mailroom is right across the main lobby from the elevators. With Post Office boxes along *that* side, which your apartment door key unlocks; and open cubbies, across from them, for in-house mail. Amazon delivers packages to that huge grey bank of boxes on the back wall, which are opened by electronic code. You can pick up copies of the month's activities menu, including fitness and other classes, activities and events from the rack in the mailroom, along with the week's dinner menus, and current resident rosters by first and last names.

All the way at the other end of the main lobby are the library, the art room, a wood shop, and fitness facilities, including a very nice pool. The garden outside the library is a peaceful place to catch up with yourself. I'll leave you to explore all that on your own: I'm having lunch with a friend at noon, and a meeting at 1:00 that will probably last 90 minutes, after which my wheels fall right off.

So, welcome again, Janice! We're delighted to have you join us. Just be sure to give yourself time to settle in. Nobody knows how the heck they're going to learn 250 new names and connect them to the right faces. And yet, we all do, how ever long it takes. Nobody will mind telling you their name for the tenth time, or the fifteenth. And don't hesitate to ask questions: People are happy to help.

## **Looking for love in Portland, OR** (a Californian's take on moving late in life)

By Judith Lothrop

## Holladay Park Plaza

It's a city I had no idea of, but the weather appealed--so much wetter than home. It seemed like the central west coast was setting itself on fire, and my skin actually cried out for rain. I'd been a widow for less than a year, but I was awful lonesome for the family already here.

So what did I find? A community where people have not forgotten how to play. Yeah the world is going to hell in a hand basket, and I (we all) do what we can to slow that process. But can't we get in a few giggles along the way?

I'm sitting with my friends in the lounge of this 15-storey, senior tower in very urban Portland. With our coffee cups and newspapers as props, we are shootin' the breeze, and a game arises: Write your epitaph in 10 words or less. (And here my father corrects me: "Fewer. 10 words or fewer." But sorry, Pops, this is not about English.) So back to the epitaph question at hand. Mull, mull. The retired tour guide goes first: *He knew where the bathrooms were*. (Count: 6 words--pretty good). Now the retired physicist: *He made useful things*. (Count: 4—impressive). My turn: *Shoulda danced more*. We can debate whether that's 3 words or 4, but the statement took hold and told me to get serious. I'm 75, and any epitaph with "shoulda" in it is a signal for immediate, imperative correction.

Now regrets are strange things. In mid-life you may regret a great deal of your life that was not enlightened, but when you inherit the crown "senior," you've got a generous supply of forgiveness to dispense. Of course you did dumb things when you were \_\_\_\_\_. Fill in the blank with just about any age: 10? 20? 30? 40? After all, you were only \_\_\_\_\_.

But after a certain age, the only regrets worth paying attention to are the ones you can do something about. So yeah—when I was 7, I chose piano lessons over ballet. Big mistake—a *real doozey*, knowing what we know now about exercise and mood. But who says you can't take ballet when you're old and creaky? So that's what I did. I signed up for private lessons for maybe a year. I looked ridiculous. I saw my mother in the mirror (spooky). I did not achieve much; on a good day I had about 8 seconds of recital material. But I gained an entirely new view of core and how to carry myself. In fact, it is all about the glutes, folks. Your balance will stay with you if you focus on that pair of bunched, butt-like feet that compose your derriere, but the minute you put that into words, you'll lose it. Words and muscles are 2 different focus points. Ditch the words. (What? I'm college educated, and you're telling me to ditch the words?!?!)

So now I take a barre class twice a week, and yes, Mom's still there in the mirrors. I also take "aqua fit," which is a great place to channel your inner Misty Copeland (first Black principal dancer for American Ballet Theater). She's got muscles and boobs, and she can dance, so why the heck not???

Scene change: Now we're in the Bistro finishing up lunch. I am sitting with my 80++ year old friend who has forgotten to put in her hearing aids, and I am just out of the pool, so there is water in my ears. Neither of us can hear clearly, but we are laughing—a lot. And then we let out a group hoot (God knows over what), and the other people around us are turning to stare. I guess we have no idea how loud we are. Or maybe they want in on the joke. But really—can you think of a situation where loud mutual laughter is wrong? We are tearing our guts out laughing at ourselves, and it is heavenly.

Now we're in the elevator. It's dinner pick-up time so it's crowded. I am the last one in, so I sense some kind of newbie vibe. Everyone is staring. "That's a lovely jacket," says a sinuous voice from the back of the crowd. We are packed in, so I can't tell from where a hand snakes out, but it lights on my shoulder and starts fingering the corduroy. "Ooh, and so soft!" They are playing a game of predation, and I know my part. Wide eyes dart back and forth, scoping out the faces. I pretend to be frightened, as if my jacket might disappear before my floor arrives. But I am only going to Four. First one out, I leap as if getting away from the bad guys. A parting chuckle as the doors close, me and my jacket still intact. And another impromptu game has ended. Or maybe not. They have eleven more floors to go. That's a lot of time to think up a new ploy.

Again--scene change: This time I am examining swimsuits at Goodwill. There is a young couple in the same aisle, and he is holding up some men's bikini Speedos—leopard print no less. The woman explains that he has been invited to a "speedo party." He looks like he is tempted to try them on right there in the aisle. I ask if I should close my eyes, and right away we (complete strangers) are in the game. "Those are thoroughly disgusting!" is my offer, which she tops with "and that's exactly what we are after!" He says, "Really?" Uncertain, yes, but it's unclear to which one of us he is responding. Now all three are attempting to imagine ourselves wearing them for more than 15 minutes. It's impossible; he puts them back.

You gotta love this town. Hard to imagine this kind of inter-stranger banter going on anywhere else. It's like finding yourself on a playground once again—without the threat of puberty on the horizon. What could be groovier?

# Betwixt and Between\*\*

(Neither one thing or another\*\*- Merriam-Webster dictionary)

By Patricia Rumer

Holladay Park Plaza

I live in two places in my heart. The then me lives in a wonderful house with garden patio where I am the *reina* of my life. In that place I am whole and happy albeit aging, no longer able to do all that I wish. There I am who I've always been – involved in the world, walking in the neighborhood and park, planning garden projects and with the help of friends entertaining on the garden patio.

The now me lives in a high-rise retirement community with a great view and instant companionship, indoor pool and fitness classes. The then me had health problems which made living alone no longer viable. I am glad to be here but part of me is still at home there, not here. I go back to visit my then home – to literally smell the roses but it's not the same. I no longer live there but I don't yet feel that I live here. I feel like a visitor. I smile, make new friends, join in various activities, and walk in a new neighborhood. I am trying but I mourn the loss of the old me and am not sure who the new me will be.

Am I in the caterpillar stage waiting for a butterfly to emerge with new colors? It takes time to feel at home in a new community. And it is a community! It's just strange, not what I am used to. Change is a constant I know. I ask myself, what is this space I inhabit betwixt and between. What was the then like? I sit on my small balcony at the house, the then me. I smell the fresh morning air; the sun is warm and the birds are chirping. There are faint sounds of traffic a block away. I look at the huge blue fir tree that towers over the bamboo swaying in the wind. A gentle breeze moves the large sail covering the deck. The white clematis moves slowly. Birds swoop by my balcony post. A red umbrella provides relief from the sun.

This patio garden was a sanctuary for me for 27 years. It's familiar. It's what I had always wanted after almost twenty years in Manhattan – open windows, having coffee outside in the morning, reading a book in the sun and always, smelling the roses and herbs.

Since moving here, to this high-retirement community on the fourteenth floor, I have been struck by the quiet. It is communal living but inside one's apartment the now me feels more isolated. If I want friends, I open the door, ride the elevator and voila, there are people. One can choose to be with people or to be on your own. It's different than being alone in my house. There I chose my art work, carpeting or wood floors, temperature control and even what I wanted to cook to eat.

One of the challenges of living communally is how to maintain one's agency – to be in charge of one's life. But living in community is reassuring. If I need help, it's a phone call to the front desk or to a friend for conversation. Life is easy: food is prepared, sheets and towels are laundered, the apartment is cleaned and classes and interest groups abound. I love the pool and hot tub. It's also a small village with gossip, people unhappy with the choice of carpet or an elevator that's out of service or just the normal frustrations of life. The aging process seems to be - letting go, giving up a car, walking when it's not raining and doing more organized group activities to stay active and healthy.

I see my new life as an adventure. I like people and am interested in the why's, how's and what's in my now high-rise home. And yet part of me lingers in my garden at my then home smelling the roses and eating fresh marionberries.

And so, I wait for the day there is no then me or now me, I am just me but in a different way. I am waiting to see what that me will be.

# Unnatural Love

By Charlotte Cox

Willamette View

I sweated in the November sun as I walked uphill from the Tiburtina station toward the via Luigi Pulci, where Sergio waited for me at his “office”—the corner bar, or café. He was trying to reproduce his life in Buenos Aires, I thought, where he and his friends used to hang out in a café all day and write love letters for each other. Beatrice, a Roman woman Sergio had once loved, regarded that habit as disgustingly juvenile. Even more, Sergio told me, she would correct the grammar in his love letters and give them back to him. His Italian was fluent but not perfect.

Sergio and I kissed each other on the cheek. “I’m starving,” I said. We ordered coffee and sweet rolls and took them to a table by the window. The espresso machine had just come on after a district power outage. I showed him a children’s story I had just written. On my last visit to Rome, Sergio had declared, “Love between parents and children is unnatural.” Children are foreign objects that come between a couple. The only legitimate love is between peers. We argued about it one evening at an outdoor restaurant in the Campo de’ Fiori.

Now, I was there to see the cat Sergio had written me about the year before. “It’s incredible, I’ve got half a cat,” his letter had said. As far as I knew, Sergio had never had any kind of pet before. But then he had taken in one of the thousands of cats that live on the streets and in the ruins of Rome. What he meant by “half a cat” was that the cat spent part of his time in Sergio’s apartment and part of his time outside. “He comes and goes in all freedom,” said Sergio.

To myself, I called Sergio’s cat Mezzogatto (“half cat”) and imagined him as tough and smart—his fur dark and scruffy, his body heavy in the hindquarters, one ear torn perhaps. Independent, a veteran of the streets—the sort of cat who would share the room with you but wouldn’t dream of curling up on your lap.

Sergio was slight and wiry, his dark hair long and graying, his hands sensitive and full of energy. He’d never married, and he never even stayed in one place very long. He directed three



early music groups in Rome and traveled to give workshops and guest-conduct. When I got to Rome, Sergio told me the cat's name wasn't really Mezzogatto, it was Bello. My friend Maureen, who lives in Rome, said, "Oh, Italians call all cats Bello." It means beautiful.

"Where's Bello?" I said. We were standing on the corner outside the café. Sergio walked a few paces up the side street and whistled, and a small gray cat appeared from under one of the parked cars. Sergio smiled at him. "Ciao, Bello," I said. Bello jumped on the car's hood and stood looking suspiciously at me. "He likes the sun," said Sergio. Bello went to Sergio to have his ears scratched. I spoke to Bello again, and this time he came toward me. "I didn't expect him to be this friendly," I said. Sergio smiled like a proud parent.

By this time Bello was rubbing my legs and purring loudly. "What a sweetheart," I said, running my hand over his fur. It was light gray with black tiger stripes on the legs, white around the face and chest, and though the hair felt like it needed a good washing, Bello didn't look dirty. He had green eyes and a pert pink nose. I smiled at Sergio. "He really is beautiful," I said. The soft look on Sergio's face surprised me. I bet Bello sleeps on Sergio's bed with him, I thought.

Sergio pointed to a triangular garden on the corner, next to an apartment building and enclosed by a wrought-iron fence. "That's where the cats live," he said. The garden wasn't in the sun, but it had a tree and was protected by the fence. Sergio pointed out the small bowls of food on the sidewalk. "The woman feeds the cats every morning, at seven o'clock." He had told me about the neighborhood woman who took care of all the cats who lived on the street—he called her the cat lady, of course. In the summer, when Sergio went home to South America, as he did every year, the cat lady took care of Bello and wrote Sergio regularly, giving reports on the cat's condition. "She even sent me a fax," Sergio said.

But this winter Bello no longer shared Sergio's apartment. The cat lady had told Sergio it was too hard for Bello to live part of the time in a house, then to be back on the street when Sergio left town. "It's confusing for him," she said. So Bello was living outside again.

Sergio asked if I wanted to see his apartment, and we walked down the short street to a modern building. The neighborhood consisted of gray concrete towers rising above the

sprawling railyard at the bottom of the hill. Sergio's building, like those around it, was flat and cold and impersonal, a far cry from the beautiful ochre and terra cotta structures of old Rome. Old Rome is expensive.

Sergio let us into the marble-floored entryway and led the way upstairs. He had one room and a kitchen plus a small balcony, where a pair of socks hung on a line. "I wash my clothes in the bathtub," Sergio said. A double bed took up most of the room, and Sergio's music scores spilled out of the shelves in the small hallway. A steamer trunk took up one corner of the kitchen. It belonged to his girlfriend, who lived in Buenos Aires. He showed me one of her paintings. I didn't like it, but Sergio seemed proud of it. "She writes music too, awful modern stuff," he told me.

That summer, Sergio went back to Buenos Aires as usual, and I heard that his girlfriend was scheduled to visit him in Rome the next winter. Maureen wrote after the girlfriend's visit to say that she had played oboe and recorder in one of Sergio's concerts and was not good. Sergio was a superb flautist. In the seventies, he earned a living by playing the flute on Paris street corners. An influential man heard him play and arranged for lessons with Jean-Pierre Rampal. But not everyone appreciated him. "*Sal juif*," they said, and chased him, Sergio told me.

Sergio's family had emigrated to Argentina to escape persecution in Russia. But being Jewish was still dangerous. One time in Buenos Aires, Sergio told me, he and his sister, a gynecologist, happened to be in a restaurant during a police raid. The police took the other patrons away in one van, Sergio and his sister, alone, in another. "For God's sake, keep quiet," his sister said to him. A lawyer friend of the family pulled strings and they were released. Sergio sailed for Europe soon afterward.

Back home in Oregon, I finally sent Sergio copies of the photos I'd taken of him with Bello, who'd posed nicely on the car hood. Sergio wrote to thank me, saying the pictures would be a "tender souvenir of sweet Bello." A few weeks before, Bello had been killed by a car. So much for the cat lady's theory, I thought, angry.

A couple of years went by, during which Sergio and I lost touch. Then I got a Christmas card from Maureen saying that Sergio and his girlfriend were expecting a baby. Sergio had moved out of his Rome apartment, according to the card, and gone back to Argentina for good. Sergio told me the last time I saw him that his girlfriend loved animals, that in fact she was the one who had adopted Bello, and that since knowing her, he'd come to appreciate the bond between people and their pets. Still, thinking back to our old argument in the Campo de' Fiori, I was more than a little taken aback by Sergio's impending fatherhood. I waited a few months, then emailed Maureen. Any news from Buenos Aires? What about the baby?

"They had a boy, named Demetrios," she said. "And Sergio is gaga about him."

# Boys and Dolls

By Peter Gibb

Willamette View

Grandpa tosses his napkin on the table, "It's time you grew up, young man."

I turn to Mom. "Please. I won't ever ask for anything else again. Never ever. I promise."

"Listen to your mother." Grandpa's eyes narrow. "She said, 'No'. She means no."

The dining room blinds are down as usual. Grandpa commands from the head of the table. At the far end of the table, Nana removes her pince-nez glasses, revealing small, red splotches on either side of her nose. Nana's calm spreads across the table like honey on hot toast. It's breakfast time. Mom, my sister Virginia, and I sit on one side of the table, Mom in the middle. Virginia is eight, two years older and two inches taller than me. On the opposite side of the table, up against the wall, stands Uncle Willie, very dead, very serious, his life-size, full-body portrait, staring disapprovingly at me, proof that the dead do talk.

I plead my case again. "Mom, please. I have to have Ernie. I can't wait."

Mom is spreading marmalade on Virginia's toast. She turns towards me. "Your birthday will be here soon enough. We'll see."

"How long before my birthday?" I have to know. Ernie isn't just any stuffed doll. Ernie is my best hope for a friend. He lives in the window of Rudy's General Store on Sheridan Street. He has freckles, like me, blue corduroy coveralls, and a red baseball hat, that he wears backward. I imagine him on my pillow, waiting for me, up in my bedroom on the fourth floor, where I sleep. Everyone else in the family sleeps on the third floor. I sleep alone on the fourth floor. That's where the servants slept in the old days. There aren't any servants now. The only window in my room opens onto the shaft, the open tower of sooty brick walls, four stories high, dark, wires dangling around rusted pipes. No one goes in there. No one would want to, but it's all I see from my bedroom window. If Ernie slept with me, I wouldn't mind the shaft. We'd be together and everything would be okay.

Grandpa shakes his head. "Dolls are not for boys. Not in this family." Grandpa's jaw tightens. "Boys don't play with dolls."

I glance at Grandpa. He is busy chewing, and looking at his plate. I look at Mom. She is wiping up the milk that Virginia spilled. Nana takes us all in. She doesn't speak. But she watches.

I tug at Mom's sleeve. Words tumble out of my mouth. "Ernie wouldn't come to the table. Honest. Honest, he wouldn't. Grandpa would never even see him. Cross my heart, hope to die. Ernie would live on the fourth floor, just me and him. No one else would even see him."

Mom turns towards me. "Don't say that."

"Say what?"

"Hope to die."

"Why?"

Mom turns away. "It's ... not polite."

"Then let me have Ernie."

Mom turns her back. "Your birthday is coming. We'll see."

I tug at her dress. "How long before my birthday?"

"This is April. May, then June. Your birthday is —"

"Never," I interrupt. "You mean never. That's what you mean, don't you?"

Every day, Virginia and I walk to school together, two blocks, left on Sheridan St., past Rudy's. Every day, as soon as we turn the corner, I check to be sure Ernie is still there, in the window. Ernie will wait for me, I'm sure. Then one day, I turn the corner and Ernie is gone. I press my head against the glass. "Virginia," I moan. "He's gone."

Virginia is half a block ahead of me. "Come on, we'll be late for school."

All day at school, I think about Ernie. Where is he? Has someone bought him? No one could love him as much as I do. Is he lying under a box somewhere? I run to Rudy's after school. A tall man is working on the display in the window. I look all around, and then I spot him, Ernie, lying face down in the corner, in the middle of jars and boxes and rags. Virginia pulls my sleeve. "Come on, we have to get home." That night in bed, I have a long talk with my pillow, pretending it's Ernie. "What are you going to be when you grow up?" I ask.

"A baseball player," he says

"Me too. I'm a pitcher," I say

"I'm a catcher," he tells me.

I pray at night before getting in bed. "Please, God. If I say my prayers every night forever, then will you give me Ernie?" God is busy.

I climb the stairs from the first floor to the fourth, back down and up again. 88 stairs. I pray harder. I never mention Ernie at the table again. What if Grandpa heard? I know it. Ernie is never coming home. He's going to live forever on the floor in the window, between the dishware and the peanut butter. But the next day, when Virginia and I are heading home, walking past Rudy's, I find the words I've wanted to say for so long. "Come into the store with me?" Virginia leads me in.

I act like a real customer. The clerk comes over. "Looking for something?"

"I want to see Ernie?"

"Ernie?"

"The doll in the window." I point.

"Oh." She walks over to the window and picks up Ernie. "\$6.50. You want to buy him? \$6.50?"

"No. I ... I just want to talk to him."

"\$6.50, then you can talk to him all you want." She puts Ernie back, and returns to cleaning the counter.

In the dining room again, dinner this time, I trade seats with Virginia. Now I sit between Mom and Nana.

"You look sad, Peter," Nana says. She looks at me, through her -nez, through watery eyes, as if I mattered.

I nod. That's the end of it. Dinner is over. I go upstairs to the fourth floor, get in bed, and think about Ernie, how wonderful it would be to have such a friend. Eventually, I fall asleep.

Saturday arrives. No school. The whole family is at breakfast when I get downstairs. Everyone in place, my egg staring up at me. I pull out my chair and slip into my place. "I don't like this cheese," Virginia complains. I nod at Uncle Willy, then sit.

What is ...? Something, something large on my chair, covered by loose paper. I look. Wonder. Hope. Know. Don't Know. Don't Dare. Could it be? Yes. Yes. Yes. I swoop him up, Ernie, who had only ever sat in a store window. I rip the paper off, toss it on the floor, rub my hand across his face. *Ernie, you found me.* I squeeze him tight all over. I feel the tears well up, then down my cheeks. Who cares if boys aren't supposed to cry either, because this is just the best moment of my life, and nothing else matters in the world, because Ernie is here, here, sitting in my chair, next to me, at the breakfast table, and all is well.

"Ernie, how did you do it?" I whisper in his ear. Mom must have changed her mind and gone to Rudy's. I look over at Mom, but she holds her hand up, like a policeman: Stop. She points at Nana. I turn. I don't know what to say. Ernie is there on my lap. Nana is quiet. I try to speak but my words are stuck somewhere between me and Uncle Willy and Grandpa. Nana takes off her pince-nez, and lays them on the table. Her watery eyes look right at me. Her voice is soft and clear. "When you're young, when you want something that much, you should have it."

I look at Nana's nose, at the two red splotches where her pince-nez have squeezed her skin. I lift Ernie's hand. He waves at Nana. I show him how.

After breakfast, I dash upstairs to the fourth floor with Ernie. He takes his place on my pillow. We play and talk, talk and play, about the shaft and what it's like sleeping on the fourth floor, and why Grandpa is grumpy but Nana is nice. We talk about everything, and the weeks become

months. Then one day, Ernie falls down behind the bed. I guess he's happy enough there. I move on to other toys and other activities.

I forget about Ernie. But I remember Nana. I'll never forget Nana.



# Unplanned Obsolescence

By Dennis Gilliam

Willamette View

Mustering the will to discuss this unsettles me. 50 years and counting after the fact, few know of the feelings I carry, and this leaves me reluctant to discuss it, especially since my life experiences have never encountered a tragic loss like the death of a child or a best friend in Viet Nam. This creates a quandary for me to explain.

The printed word has taught, informed and civilized the world for hundreds of years. Moveable type, cast from hot metal, typeset by hand or machine, and assembled by skilled typographers created our books, menus, magazines, contracts, advertising—and most printed pieces worldwide.

As a 20-year-old looking for a trade before finishing college and marrying, printing and typesetting seemed like a viable career option. Typesetting was a time-honored and indispensable trade.

When Gutenberg typeset the “Bible” with moveable type in the late 1400’s, scribes were outraged. Reading “Gutenberg: How One Man Remade the World with Words” by John Man I learned that prior to handset type “Bisticci employed 45 scribes producing 200 books”. Then, every scribe was threatened by Gutenberg. “In the 1460’s scribes pretended to despise the new invention, but by 1478 he (Bisticci) was out of business. Scribes actually copied printed typefaces—now evolving away from their scribal roots—in a vain attempt to hold back the flood, to no avail.” As craftsmen, they disappeared.

This gift to the world—type and typesetting—was to be my trade as a journeyman typographer. I joined the International Typographical Union as an apprentice in 1961. My printing plant employer, Abbott, Kerns & Bell, was a premier typography, printing and bindery plant in Portland, Oregon. The union negotiated fair wages and benefits. Fellow typographers raved about the union printer’s retirement community in Colorado. What was not to like?

I married Marie at 20. We bought a small house. With my printing apprenticeship and Marie's position at Commonwealth Industries, we made our life together. My pay from Marine Corps Reserves provided extra dollars. Life was good.

Over time I learned the fundamentals, nuances and quirks of my new trade. Hand setting type in my composing stick became second nature and routine. I learned to appreciate and occasionally use wood type. Melting metal and pouring pigs with ears—ingots hung over the Intertype smelting pot—was the nasty part, always dumped on the apprentice. Me. Proofreading sharpened my English, spelling and punctuation skills. Working with every notable graphic designer in the Northwest on innumerable printing projects gave me a 'master's degree' in marketing and communications. I thrived, grew and loved my job.

Marie and I visited socially with other apprentices, making new friends. The day I cut off the tip of a thumb in a metal saw left a plastic surgery scar I still carry with me. This was my new career and an important part of my life.

Toward the end of my six-year apprenticeship, things changed. Drastically. For the worse. I was a trained typographer proficient on the Monotype keyboard. With uniquely punched paper, Monotype would cast individual characters with hot metal into a line of type to produce railroad tariffs, books and other printed pieces. Mastering this process was a marvel to me.

Then it happened—like moveable type replacing scribes. Along came the computer. Soon after came the personal computer. In the hands of well-trained secretaries, a few businesses began to set type from available fonts that mimicked metal cast type. It was laughable. Amateurish mish mashaed confusion. And they were calling it typography. As skilled typographers we knew better.

Then our best customers began setting their own type. Those traitors, after how we had serviced them for all these years. We set their annual reports, prospectus filings, magazines and promotional literature.

We felt sorry for ourselves.

A year later we began setting type with computers. But we were skilled and set type the correct way. Proper letter spacing, kerning and drop caps, meticulous proofreading. We knew

what we were doing. 'They' were clueless and messed up, so we said, and we were still important. They improved quickly even as they continued to employ us to set their 'important type.'

After another year later no one ordered hot metal Intertype, Monotype or handset type. Why should they? Our customers could now produce their own acceptable typesetting on personal computers.

Then I remembered the scribes of Gutenberg's era. This pushback and ridicule was our vain attempt to hold back the flood, to no avail.

50-gallon barrels soon arrived at our shop. Along with others I spent weeks dumping type cases filled with beautiful foundry-cast type. Times Roman, Goudy, Caslon, Helvetica, Hadriana Stonecut, Optima and hundreds of other type fonts. Each of their unique characteristics imbedded in my mind forever.

By dumping, I mean turning filled California job cases of type upside down and dropping beautifully complete fonts with figures, punctuation and ligatures on the concrete floor. Then we shoveled the dumped type into the 50-gallon barrels to ship to the smelter to be melted into ingots.

If ever in human history there has been such a momentous end of an era that spanned multiple centuries--this was it. But no one knew or cared about the demise of hot metal cast moveable type. Not then and not ever. Why not? With a new computer in hand allowing them to set their own type, who gave a rat's ass about an antiquated technology?

To this day it still pains me.

I stayed with my trade as a typographer and shop foreman for a few more years doing complex computer typesetting. Then I moved to printing sales. Two years later a new business opportunity to partner in food manufacturing opened to me. I took it, leaving behind a huge and complex Japanese chemical catalog I had just sold, for which I never received a nickel. I said farewell to my trade of 29 years.

Typesetting and people skills served me well. I immediately designed and printed a mail order catalog. Then I selected and managed an advertising agency. For the next 29 years as a partner in Bob's Red Mill, in what we together grew into a multi-national company, I thrived, and was ready to comfortably retire at age 75.

Even in retirement, the thought of being one who implemented the end of the moveable type era has never left me. After changing careers and experiencing financial success, the pain is still there. I cannot get over it. Nor do I wish to.

It is a pain I gladly hold onto. Because with the pain I know I was the last of the last of an illustrious and talented (I'm not sure if I qualify) line of hot metal moveable type printers like Benjamin Franklin and Elvin Green spanning over 500 years.

That makes me proud.

# Connie

by Joel Meresman

Willamette View

“Mary, have I told you about Connie?”

“Yes, Dr. Connor, many times, but you can tell me again.”

“I loved her more than I loved anybody. I’m ashamed to say, more than my wife.”

“You shouldn’t say that, Dr. Connor. Your wife is a wonderful person.”

“But it’s true. I know I can tell you and you would keep the secret. I wouldn’t want to hurt her. Mary, I have trusted you more than any other caregiver I’ve had.”

Then, speaking slowly, often pausing between sentences, Dr. Connor continued, “You see, I met Connie in graduate school. A mutual friend set up a blind date for me with Connie. He thought we would be perfect for each other. I was skeptical. Yes, I was lonely since my divorce, but I wasn’t interested in meeting some random woman. I wasn’t desperate, you know. Reluctantly, I agreed to meet her. Several days later I went to her house to pick her up for our date. I rang the front doorbell and waited quite a while until a woman opened the door. She was tall and slender with straight, raven black hair down to her waist, and kind of dressed like a hippy. I thought, oh my god, I can’t believe how beautiful this woman is. She had blue eyes and wore just the right amount of mascara to look really sexy, but not cheap. When I talked to her she smiled and looked right into my eyes as if she were looking into my soul.

We went to a local bar and sat in a booth and talked for hours. She was also in the graduate philosophy program and we talked about the meaning of love, and our failed marriages. She also was recently divorced and felt sad looking back at how her marriage had failed. After that evening we started seeing each other frequently. Over the months before I graduated we hiked, skied, rode bicycles, slow danced to our favorite blues album, and talked endlessly. While I told her I didn’t believe in the concept of romantic love—that it was a relic of the renaissance—I was aware that I was a liar— that I was in fact falling in love with her.

Some six months later, in the summer, I finished my PhD and was hired as an assistant professor at a university in Australia. She was still in graduate school and had assumed I would complete a post doc at our university and not leave. I told her about the Australian job, and that I

accepted it. When I told her that a long distance relationship was unrealistic and we should feel free to date other people she started crying.”

A long pause followed and tears filled his eyes. In a soft, quivering voice he struggled to continue: “She told me that she felt foolish, embarrassed that she thought this relationship could last, or be more than it was. I felt awful but went to Australia without her. I somehow lost her and never saw her again.”

“Don’t cry, Dr. Conner. Your wife will be here soon and you don’t want her to see you so sad.”

“Now Mary I told you not to say a word about this to Ce Ce.”

Just then Ce Ce arrived. She was a pleasant looking woman, who was heavy set and had short, gray hair. She was smartly dressed in a business suit.

“Honey, how are you feeling this morning?”

Mary answered for him. “He’s having a hard time this morning. He seems unhappy and is talking about an old college girlfriend he had.”

Dr. Conner loudly responded with anger in his voice, “Mary, I asked you not to mention that to Ce Ce.”

While seemingly ignoring his protestation Ce Ce asked Mary, “Did you give him his Aricept this morning? He seems a little confused.”

“He has been crying and sad all morning talking about that college girlfriend.”

Almost screaming Dr. Conner responded, “Why couldn’t you just shut up, Mary. I asked you not to say anything to Ce Ce about her!”

“But Dr. Conner, your wife needs to know how you are doing.”

With an awkward smile of recognition, Ce Ce responded “Oh, that again.”

“You know about her then?” Mary asked.

“Oh yes, indeed.” Then, finally making eye contact with her husband, and with an empathic smile, Ce Ce said, “you didn’t lose Connie.”

“I didn’t?” Dr. Conner responded, looking puzzled. Starting to cry again, Dr. Conner continued, “But I went to Australia without her and never saw her again.”

“Not so.”

“But I did go to Australia without her.”

“Yes, you did go to Australia without her, but you did see her again. You wrote a letter to her when you were in Australia saying that you loved her and couldn’t live without her and that you were taking a position as an assistant professor at a university in the states the following year.”

“I don’t remember that. How do you know that?”

Ce Ce sat down next to her husband and cradled his head on her breasts, and continued, “You came back to the states and invited her to live with you. After a year had gone by you married her and she changed her name from Connie Adams to Connie Conner. Her friends started calling her Ce Ce, instead of Connie, and soon so did her family.”

“I’m confused, I didn’t marry Connie, I married you instead.”

“Honey I am Connie.”

Dr. Conner looked puzzled but didn’t say anything more to his wife, and after a while fell asleep.

Ce Ce told Mary that she had to get back to the university to teach her afternoon class, but would return the next day to see her husband.

The following day, while Dr. Conner was having breakfast, he turned to his caregiver, “Mary, have I told you about Connie?”

“Yes, Dr. Conner, many times, but you can tell me again.”

# To Be Chosen is the Best

By Bibi Momsen

Willamette View

I went to the Las Cruces, NM animal shelter to get a small grey kitten to accompany my black cat, Munchkin. As I passed one cage, a little calico paw came out, accompanied by a “meow.” I continued on my search for a small grey kitten, but every time I passed that cage, the little paw came out, with another “meow.” OK, I had been chosen. I named her Cinnamon.

A few months later, something was wrong. Cinnamon had licked all the fur off her stomach and legs. The vet said, “I have tried everything I know. Would you like to try a pet psychic?” I was ready to try anything, although I was skeptical. One day, Paige Richards arrived at my door, and the two cats climbed down from the cat tower to meet her.

“They never do that for anyone,” I exclaimed.

“I told them I was coming,” she replied. Okay...

After some quiet communication, Paige explained that Cinnamon was worried that I was thinking about getting a dog. Cinnamon did not like dogs because their claws went “click, click” on the floors and they chased cats. I had NOT done anything about getting a dog, but I had been THINKING about it...

We agreed that Cinnamon would have the chance to look over a possible dog. She stopped licking her fur off.

Some days later, a dog, not one I was thinking of adopting, came just to see if it was sociable around cats. Cinnamon climbed off the cat tree and walked around the dog several times before I realized she was inspecting the dog, as we had agreed. With gestures, I said, “No, no, Cinnamon, this is a big doggie. We will get a little doggie.” She turned around and remounted the cat tree.

Well, I did find a dog, but had to go overnight to Texas to pick her up, so Paige explained to Cinnamon that, under the circumstances, she could not approve of the dog in advance. Cinnamon agreed.

Ebony arrived and yes, her paws went “click, click” on the floors, and she chased the cats.



I sat Cinnamon down in front of me, and with words and gestures I explained, “You need to say “HISS, HISS “and then make clawing motions at the dog.” I had barely turned around when I heard “HISS, HISS” and saw clawing motions from Cinnamon to Ebony. No more problem.

When we moved to Corvallis, OR, in my little Honda Fit, I had a dog and two cats, each in their own crate. The first day of the trip, Cinnamon meowed constantly. Help, Paige! After some discussion, Paige said Cinnamon was “talking” to me to keep me awake while I was driving. When Paige explained that that was not necessary, Cinnamon stopped trying to keep me awake.

After some years in Corvallis, Cinnamon developed pancreatitis, and could not be saved. I was devastated, as I had really enjoyed her.

The next night, and for several nights thereafter, Munchkin would yowl in the middle of the night. Help, Paige! Paige explained that Cinnamon was coming back to visit, and she would explain to Cinnamon that it needed to be a quiet visit. No more night problems.

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Paige has now been with me for 22 years, helping me mostly with cats. I once asked her if she could explain how she does this (she does not even need to be with the animal to communicate). She says children are born with the ability, but lose it as they grow older. In her case, it was just enhanced. Thinking back, I could see that in my own family: years ago, when we were living at the boys’ boarding school where my husband taught, my toddlers would suddenly attach themselves to a boy, each holding a hand and not leaving his side for several days; then suddenly they would have nothing to do with him again. In each case, this boy was in some sort of trouble. He needed someone on his side, and my daughters knew it; as soon as he was back in good grace, they did not need to pay any more attention to him.

It is too bad that so many of us lose that communication ability as we grow up! I have just been glad to have Paige on my side to help me.

# You're Never Too Old to Learn

Donna Moores

Willamette View

We're in our mid-seventies. Have been retired and on the road in our motorcoach for 8 years. Suddenly there's a medical scare and a hard look at our finances. Add to that a pushy daughter – too much like her mother. Can you see where this is going?

Time to start looking into a retirement home. We have no permanent residence and our kids are scattered around the country like buckshot. Three are in the same time zone on the west coast so that's where we start. Now begins the online search and the visits, getting lost in the weeds of finances, organizational structure, resident involvement, floor plans, meal plans, long term insurance plans. We build a spreadsheet and feel like high school kids trying to decide on the right college. We're excited about opening a new chapter in our lives.

Here we are. Finally made it. After months of exploring, studying, and obsessing, we find ourselves in our new home, a retirement home.

We congratulate one another on getting into the best of the bunch. Friendly, energetic people who were welcoming during our visits here. Beautiful river view from our newly renovated apartment. No grass to mow or meals to prepare. Libraries, art, pickleball and movies. This is the life...

I was sure we were ready for this move and knew exactly what to expect. But somehow, I'm surprised to see that these people are old, REALLY old. There are walkers, scooters and canes everywhere we look. Hearing aids, everywhere. Plus a few very noticeable cochlear implants. Old-lady carts being pushed by old ladies? Yep, everywhere. Jigsaw puzzles? Large print books? Orthopedic shoes? Yes, yes, and YES!

Oh no! What have we gotten ourselves into!?

We're able to ambulate without devices, don't own an old lady cart, no orthopedic shoes. Heck, I still wear flipflops. But we're here. This must mean we are old too. At the end of the line. In the old folks home.... "THE HOME".

Maybe when others see us, they'll think we're new staff members. Make sure to hide that limp from a bum knee that probably needs to be replaced. Pretend you remember everyone's name or at least the faces. When you walk down the wrong hallway to find the dining room, play it off like that's exactly where you intended to go.

I'm having dreams and intrusive thoughts of dying. No longer able to be in denial about time passing, my life growing shorter. Which of us will go first? Are our wills and trusts in order? Who will write my obit? Where do I want to be buried? ENOUGH!

Since we are social people at heart, it's inevitable that we do get involved. We are invited to dine with others. We have casual conversations with people in the lunch line. I join a weekly card game. My husband begins singing in the chorus. We find some other people of our own vintage and begin making friends. I guess we're integrating, but my discomfort remains. The death dreams continue.

Gradually the "old folks" become real people. They're curious about our back stories and we are amazed by theirs. That guy over there with the cane and orthopedic shoes is a world-renowned physician who still goes to work 3 days a week. I learn that you might be riding in a scooter but can still soundly beat me at cards. The woman who is 102 years old gets in more steps a day with her walker than I do without one.

We discover that these neighbors have incredible talents and accomplishments – art, music, technology, academia, public service. They grow gorgeous roses. Some travel around the world. Others make gourmet meals, served with well-curated wines. Apartments are beautifully decorated with a life-time of mementos and memories. A widow falls in love with a widower and new love blossoms in our midst.

Eventually I come to the realization that the biggest burden I brought along when I moved into "the home" was my agism. Sure, there are some pretty opinionated people and folks who grate on my nerves – this is real life, isn't it? There is sadness when one of our own passes (or

graduates, as some say). Or when there is obvious deterioration of memory or physical ability. But there is also joy, beauty, wisdom, hoots of laughter, and my very favorite, feistiness.

I have been witness to wives devoting themselves entirely to the care of their husbands with profound memory loss. Then I have celebrated seeing them flourish as smiling, involved members of our community once the grief of their husband's passing has waned.

I offered condolences and a hug to one woman whose best friend had just died. My hug was accepted with a gracious smile and "That was just what she wanted. It's a good thing."

Fast-forward to today. I sit in the dining room and close my eyes to hear the hum and bustle of life around me, punctuated by bursts of laughter. I can't walk down the hallway without stopping for a conversation, a smidge of news, some friendly teasing. I realize I'm so fortunate to be in this community, now filled with friends, and to be able to learn from their example. My denial about aging and death is slowly shifting to an inevitable fact of life. It is more real and, interestingly, less frightening. I understand that my elders are leading the way and showing me how to live these ultimate years with humor, grace, acceptance of frailties and the courage to struggle against them.

I no longer live in "the home". I AM home.

# To A Missionary Friend

Deanna Sundstrom

Willamette View

His name is Fr. Hung Ngyuen and he immigrated with his family from Viet Nam. I met him when he was assigned as pastor to my parish of St. Francis in Friday Harbor, Washington some 20 years ago. His English was most clear and he preached to our congregation without notes each Sunday. We parishioners witnessed the miracle of God's word when he stood before us at Mass.

When he was assigned to another parish in Seattle, I did not see him again. But I did have a slip of paper that someone had given me. It read "Fr. Hung- office number and cell number". I carried that slip of paper in my address book in my purse.

What is prompting me to relate his story? Because I believe in people having meaningful significance to each other in our lives. I had often looked at that slip of paper, thinking I should discard it. But it was still in my purse when I recently met another Vietnamese priest who was assigned to my parish in Milwaukie, Oregon. And I thought he might know Father Hung.

So I picked up my cell phone and called the cell phone number for Father Hung. I got a recorded message but I left my name and cell number and my email address, figuring that would be that. The very next morning I opened up my laptop and here was Fr. Hung's name on the first entry. He asked if this was the correct email address for the person who had called on his cell phone the night before. He said he was doing missionary work in Laos now. And he attached a symbol to his email. As I touched the symbol, a beautiful rose unfolded before my eyes. I literally felt goosebumps moving up and down my spine.

Long story short, Fr. Hung and I have been emailing back and forth for ten months now. He often attaches images of his mission - structures, people-senior citizens, teenagers and little children. He asks for prayers for himself and the forgotten poor in mission land. He sends me his blessings and tells me he is remembering me in his prayers.

He has become for me “my rock”. I am dumbfounded when I think of him being thousands of miles from me and yet I feel that he is seated next to me when I am emailing and praying for his ministry. His mission in Laos is named for Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

I have to acknowledge another entity in my story because I believe it is a spiritual power that reunited Fr. Hung and me. There is a reference in Scriptures and Holy Writings to a Spirit, a Holy Spirit, the third person of the Blessed Trinity.

On September 25th, Father told me that one month later, on October 25th, he and others would begin a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, an 11 day trip. He said “please let me know if you and your loved ones have any prayer requests. I will offer those requests to the Lord and pray for you whole heartedly.”

Weeks went by after his Sept. 25th email and then there were no more emails from him. He had said his pilgrimage would be to the Holy Land, to Israel. Surely that trip would have been canceled when Hamas attacked Israel. But why was Fr. Hung not emailing me? Every day I would search my laptop for his name.

Finally, on November 18th, two months after his last email, I emailed him, “Fr. Hung, I pray for your continual ministry. I pray for you to be well. I am praying to the Holy Spirit for us to be able to email again. I am waiting, trusting and hoping that that can happen.”

Two days later, on November 20th, the words appeared on my laptop. “Happy Thanksgiving to you and your loved ones!” And an image was attached - a Vietnamese meal of rice and vegetables displayed. My heart was filled with joy to have heard from him.

I want to close my story with a quote from General Colin Powell who ended his autobiography *It Worked for Me* with these words: “A life is about its events; it’s about challenges met and overcome - or not; it’s about successes and failures. But more than all of these put together, it’s about how we touch and are touched by the people we meet. It’s all about the people.”

Dear Fr. Hung, Thank you for touching my life.



# A Fight to the Top

Patricia Watne

Willamette Vie

Last fall I said out loud what had been on my mind for the last six months. “I want to climb Picket Post again.” The first time up this mountain, a few miles east of Phoenix, was twenty years ago with my brother. Now I would be climbing in his memory.

Picket Post Mountain stands out from the surrounding desert, like nature’s version of a medieval fortress. It is only two miles to the top. The first mile is a gentle slope up. The second mile is steep, up 2,000 feet. It has sheer walls all around, except for a gash with water trickling down. The tumbled down rock in this area presents the passageway to the top. It is composed of boulders, some of which I could easily climb up and over and most much higher, requiring feet, hands, and some climbing techniques to scramble over.

My long-time friends, John and his wife, Mary, are also my hiking partners. They and I would be spending a winter break in Sedona. Since we would be flying into Phoenix, it seemed like an opportunity to climb Picket Post before heading north to the red rock country for hiking.

When thinking about what it would take to get up and down this mountain, I knew I needed a plan. Twenty years had passed. I will just leave it by saying my body is not the same. It would take more than my determination to get to the top. I had to ask for help. Yikes! Did I just say that?

I asked my two grandchildren, Cameron and Erika, if they would help me to the top. Being twenty-seven and twenty-four, they both agreed without knowing anything about the mountain, like the elevation and distance. I was jealous of their optimism with their own abilities and carefree manner. How I miss those days!

Both Cameron and Erika are trained in search and rescue. Cameron is a wilderness EMT, a licensed physical therapist, and an experienced rock climber. Erika hikes regularly, including up and down the walls of the Grand Canyon. She is three inches shorter than I. Still she has pulled me up Cathedral Rock in Sedona by bracing herself and extending a foot for me to grab to pull



myself up. The other member of my climbing team was John, who is tall and strong. He often lends me a hand while hiking on our usual Thursdays when I face a tall step up or down. What I would add to this mix was determination. I felt secure with my plan to make it to the top of Picket Post. Amazingly, no one said, "I don't think this is a good idea."

Two months were left to get in better shape. I was inflexible with my training schedule. Nothing would keep me from spending time in the fitness center. I lifted weights and did my own stress test on the elliptical machine, running my heart rate up three times my resting pulse. My neighbors sharing the fitness center thought I was showing off. They didn't realize fear was pushing me to go faster.

John confided that he had joined a gym. I was delighted to hear that, believing everyone should spend time working out. But I was surprised. After all, he hikes up 2,000 feet going to the top of Hamilton Mountain, one of our regular hikes. Maybe he sensed this mountain would be different.

I called both Erika and Cameron two weeks before our climb date.

Erika lived in Flagstaff, Arizona. She had read online the descriptions of Picket Post by recent climbers. She sounded calm and ready.

Cameron lives in Denver. When I talked to him, he said, "What's the name of that mountain?"

"It would be good if you read about Picket Post beforehand," I said.

"I've got it." Silence. He was reading the website.

"So route-finding sounds like the challenge," he said.

"I don't remember that being so difficult when I climbed it before, I said, "but that was twenty years ago. My memory is getting stuck by cactus."

"Yeah?"

"I will be carrying a light pack. You and Erika will need to carry all my emergency gear."

"No problem. I'll bring my large climbing pack. You can dump everything in it."

"Okay. You have your airline ticket? Time off from work and everything?"

"I'm good," he said.

Erika picked up Cameron at the Phoenix Airport. John, Mary, and I had already checked into a motel east, close to the mountain. With Mary abstaining from this adventure, the rest of us gathered the night before the climb to decide what time to meet for breakfast.

"How long will it take you to get to the top?" Cameron asked me.

"I don't know. Maybe four hours." I really had no idea. I picked that number out of the air.

"Okay. Let's meet at 7:00 for breakfast." Cameron had established himself as the leader for this adventure, which is his natural position in a group.

We drove to the trailhead and started climbing by eight. I was pumped and kept up with the others. Until the trail started getting steep. At that point I slowed, but still moved forward. Soon we were facing large boulders and steep walls we would be scaling. John and I exchanged glances, waiting for our leaders to show the way. Cameron and Erika checked which cairns, small towers of rocks, led to a way up. Time-consuming back tracking was part of the routine.

I used my hiking poles to keep my balance. Often Erika would say, "Would you like me to hold your hiking poles, Grammy?" I needed my hands free to hoist myself up a large boulder. Repeatedly I searched for a handhold only to find a cactus in my way. Cactus searched me out.

Sometimes I needed to jam my foot in a crack in order to step up, a maneuver my foot neuropathy did not like. Other times I could hold onto a rock with one hand and use my hiking pole to push myself up with the other. Maintaining my balance took as much energy as climbing did. At times my body swayed like tall grass in a wind. Scaring myself, I forced myself to stand tall and strong, hoping the others didn't see me. They didn't say anything.

Thinking back to this climb, it must have been painful for my grandchildren to watch how slowly I moved up. There was a point when Erika lovingly said, "We don't have to make it to the top. We can stop here. Rest. Eat. And turn around."

In a harsh voice, I said, "Don't even think about that! We are going to the top." Erika was losing hope. "Let's rest for a moment," I said. Erika applied more sunscreen to bare arms,

sharing with John. Cam and I wore long sleeves. Passing around packets of caffeinated energy gel gave us all a boost.

We topped out after four and three-quarters hours, scanning the top for a lunch spot. As per the name of this mountain, Picket Post, an old mail box stood nailed to a post at the top, holding a notebook. Cameron sat on a metal bench to record our climb. I insisted he list my age.

The sky turned overcast and the wind whipped up. Clouds moved across and it started to sprinkle. Growing concerned, I stood to get organized for the down climb. I put on a blue plastic poncho. I didn't need a mirror. The looks on my teams' faces told me my outfit was not becoming. John and Erika remained in their t-shirts, assuming the sprinkles would stop. Cameron put on his orange rain coat. His brow became even more furrowed. It would take as long or longer to get down. Wet, slick rock would compound the challenge.

When adding knee braces to my ankle brace for the trip down, a vision of seeing other folks wearing multiple braces popped into my head. How judgmental I had been to think they should have given up hiking. Now here I stood. Braced for the tough part of this day. My hiking partners stared at my outfit, but kept silent.

Turning around and going down backwards over a high boulder, a maneuver I had learned from my brother, saved my knees. I struggled knowing where to place my feet since the rock was so steep, I couldn't see the ground. Cameron, John, or Erika guided my feet to a safe perch. When I needed to cross slick rock angling down, Cameron would hold my foot in place so it wouldn't slip. "I've got you, Grammy." His words gave me confidence to quickly move across the slick rock, only to face another difficulty. It was a slow process.

Route finding was more difficult going down. More care was needed since gravity made descent even more challenging. I would rest while Erika and Cameron checked out different trails. When there were no good options, we slid on our butts to the bottom of large rocks. John perfected crab walking, face up, looking at the sky, holding his hips up and crawling on his hands and feet. I admired his technique but continued to go down backwards or slide on my butt. Miraculously my pants survived.

Hours passed as our down climb dragged on. Eventually the trail leveled out. The last mile felt like two. We admired the size and age of the tall saguaro growing on the flat land.

Looking out in the low sun, the hillside glowed green. White, yellow, and orange wildflowers added color. Never had the desert looked so lovely.

Determination had won the day. I accomplished my goal of celebrating my 79<sup>th</sup> year by climbing Picket Post. Rich memories will fill my rocking chair days.

Why is seeking challenges at this point in my life important? I want folks to not stereotype me based on how I look. And moving toward the edge of my physical ability helps me feel alive. Fear was never a part of my journey, just a feeling of accomplishment as I arrived at the parking lot, ending a long day.

I am deeply grateful to my climbing team, Cameron, Erika, and John. Remembering their loving care brings tears to my eyes.

# Poetry

By LeadingAge Oregon  
Community Residents

# Baby Fat

by Darla Barlow

Capital Manor

I'm still getting rid of my baby fat

The bumper between me and risk

The layer that got me educated, housed and fed, contented

Wed

The cushion that kept me from testing the waters, trying my might, expressing my opinions

Creating

There's less of it now

I'm closer to caring, daring, and baring my soul

Being in your face

At 76

Aware as I am of what's left of my baby fat

I won't miss it one whit

When it's all gone

# Old Man Out II

By David Greysmith

Capital Manor

I am an old man out  
On the town  
Down  
—what's the word—  
Drawn out  
Among the strung out  
On account  
Of  
Of  
Of

My good fortune  
To be  
To see  
To hear  
To touch  
To feel  
To reciprocate  
To taste  
To  
To  
To not be  
Possibly not to be,  
At least, not to be  
Beset with  
Pronoun doubts  
Nor pronoun certainties

To be living

Comfortable

Among yesteryear's articles

And conjunctions

Recalled and

Retold but

But

Affectionately

Among

Among

The prepositions

That connect

Us.



# Where I'm From

By Jan Taylor  
Capital Manor

I'm from blue collar workers  
Laundresses and railroad men  
Owners of print shops  
Hard work an expectation  
Shirking a sin

I'm from German stock who  
Divided their family during war  
Looking for a saner way  
And from gentler Dutch and English heritage  
All practical and industrious

I'm from hot tempered men  
Erupting in a second  
And women who make peace  
Often to their detriment  
Cooling family waters

I'm from good cooks  
Practical, meat and potatoes  
Delicious pies, cinnamon rolls  
Yet adventurous at times  
Remembering Mom's Chinese period

I'm from the Pacific Northwest  
Waters of the Puget Sound  
Fresh caught clams and oysters  
Dungeness crab freshly cooked  
Picking out tender meat around the table

I'm from Oregon's mountain-top passes  
Hiking the Pacific Crest Trail  
Feeling most at home in a tent, sleeping bag, campfires  
Sitting solitary on a rock by a lake  
Communing with myself and something more

I'm from believing in and honoring God  
Prescribed by the Methodists and Presbyterians  
Practical teachings as basis for  
Expansive more mystical experiences  
In my maturity

I'm from being moved often as a child  
Town to town to follow Dad's work  
Little sense of belonging anywhere  
Leaving friends once made  
Rarely seen again

I'm from innate sensitivity  
My essential nature, it seems  
Slights feel like knives  
Mistakes, sorrows like crusted scar tissue  
Healing while sore

I'm from parents who loved me  
Yet almost never used the words  
They supported and encouraged  
And even though I knew its truth  
I longed to hear it from their lips

I'm from people gone too soon and too quickly

Lost to me in a minute  
No chance to speak a last word  
Leaving me longing for their presence  
Embracing the memories that remain

I'm from good friends and teachers who  
Grew my base by their wise presence  
Questions, readings and challenges,  
The expansiveness they provided  
The promise they saw in me

I'm from being able to move on  
Seeing a new direction after a set back  
Determination to create something better  
One step at a time  
Taking deep breaths as often as I can

# A Rural Melody

By Brian Williams

Capital Manor

Deep in this land drawn taught  
and without folds,  
a town is gone.

Only the Farmers Co-Op grain elevator  
and the United Methodist Church  
remain and provide shade.

Commerce stands taller than religion  
but both are empty,  
abandoned by the Great Northern Railway,  
then by the faithful.

Farmers used to meet in both places  
talking to God  
and comparing crop yields.

Over time, families moved away,  
finding a closer connection to the land  
than to each other.

Black creosoted telephone poles  
beside county roads link distant farms  
and carry drooping conversations  
of the offered price for Hard Red Winter wheat,  
the Farm Credit Bank's new loan terms,  
and what Buel Smith must have paid

for his new John Deere combine.

Black Magpies circle overhead,  
flutter, then settle on black wires,  
like notes on a music staff.

A grain truck rumbles past  
and changes the tune.

# Privilege

By James McGoodwin

Terwilliger Plaza

I reside, modestly well-off, in

Privileged

America

Where

I

Rely on having,

Expect to have:

Stuff, and special treatment.

While many people

(whom I seldom think of)

Don't have, can't rely on

Having

And don't expect to have

-

Much stuff-or even a minimal stack.

And I am totally undeserving

# Hummer

By Bette Bauer

Mennonite Village

Early evening

on a hot summer's day,

I visit my raised bed garden.

Agastaches in full bloom.

In two seasons here,

I have never witnessed a hummer

visiting the 'hummingbird mint.'

Then, I hear the announcement —

the 'hmmmm' of rapid wing beat.

I freeze, only moving my eyes.

Even a blink

can startle them away.

And there it is, ten inches from my face —

a female Rufous, beak buried

in a lavender and orange tubular blossom.

My eyes meet the hummer's eye,

for seconds,

as it navigates the blossoms,  
from one to another  
down the side of the plant stem.  
I blink finally, and it's gone!

But the blessing remains —  
the intimacy of presence.



## On English Wine....

By Michael Colling

Mennonite Village

Great Britain's luck and Gaia's gift  
Is a feature called the Gulf Stream Drift Which affects the climate  
quite a lot Not too cold and not too hot from warmer waters, heading  
east the risk of ice storms much decreased And tornadoes almost never.

So, barley oats and winter wheat  
Which wither in excessive heat  
Will reliably turn a decent profit  
Enough for farmers to live off it  
Potatoes, peas, and Brussels sprouts  
Need not endure all-frequent droughts  
And dry up hardly ever.

But grapes are quite another case  
Considering what they have to face  
More challenges than they truly oughta Not much sun and too much water  
Inspid wine in a hostile clime Seems such a waste of space and time  
To no avail endeavor.

So plough them up, those soggy vines  
And let the French make proper wines  
Plant cabbages and kale instead  
They'll do just fine it must be said  
Carrots too would be a breeze  
Chacun a son expertise!

## Autumn Ramblings

*A Poem in honor of Sue Shumway who inspired me to create*

by Carol Sissel

Mennonite Village

A dog barks somewhere down the street... Not angry,

not protective, Simply

noise that says,

“I’m lonely. I’m

bored.”

I wonder...

Did he have breakfast?

Never underestimate breakfast.

An airplane roars across the sky It sounds

closer than it is...

How many travelers are inside?

Where are they going?

Did they all eat breakfast?

Never underestimate breakfast.

Birds chirp in the trees, small

birds,

probably seed eaters.

Boulevard peers through the window making guttural sounds, imitating bird

chirps.

I wonder... in his feline way

is he trying to draw them in while he waits for “THE”

moment

that will never come

because of the glass between him and the prey?

Poor Boulevard.

He doesn't like the new cat food.

Vet says he's overweight and needs this new formula.

This morning he turned up his nose at it.

I reminded him, "Never underestimate breakfast." "I could care less", was the look he threw at me.

Lately, I have been eating and enjoying a bran muffin every morning with coffee.

Bran muffins are good for the soul and other body innards.

Bran muffins keep the world spinning on its axis.

The leaves in the Sweetgum tree rattle... No, not rattle

— chatter in the wind.

I can hear their conversation from my chair, even

though the window is closed.

Leaves normally whisper, but right now they are shouting, "Hear us!

Tomorrow we'll be gone."

The furnace kicks in,

putting a smell like toasted dust into the air.

As winter marches on,

and the heater is used day after day, the scent

will disappear...

or I will become used to it.

The refrigerator hums,

and once in a while, thuds and clunks... a sound I

will never get used to.

Does it mean I will get up some morning  
to discover warm cheese and spoiled milk?

I should call the repairman.

If he comes, I will offer him breakfast.

Or at least a bran muffin.

Children laugh and tell stories

as they walk past my house on their way to school.

I love that sound,

five days a week except on holidays.

I will carve hopscotch on the sidewalk with chalk tomorrow.

Pink, blue and green chalk. I have

yellow, but its faint.

Children appreciate bold colors.

I wonder if the children have all had their breakfast? Never  
underestimate breakfast.

## Diagnosis

By Sandy Rokoff-Lizut  
Mennonite Village

My husband's neurologist wears  
his vintage Disney "Fantasia" necktie today,  
on which a wizard-hatted Mickey energetically  
swirls a path of tiny stars across a background of dark silk.

With my eyes riveted on the image, I hear my mate of thirty two  
years ask THE question. At the sound the doctor's carefully  
composed, soft-sounding response,  
my world shifts, as one by one, sparkling

stars spattered across the bruise-colored backdrop  
of the doctor's Micky Mouse necktie  
begin to fade.

# Mom's Hands

By Chirley Hilts  
Mennonite Village

Fingers fluting pie crust edges, a design to feast upon; fingers doing hidden hemstitch, putting pink ribbons on the shoulders of my first formal gown; fingers cleaning, powdering, diapering my firstborn child and showing me the way to work with safety pins.

When my two kids were born, Mom flew from S.F. to New Jersey and bought us a crib and rocking chair.

Since then, years have passed, both are grandmothers, neither admitting geriatric status. Neighbors now, our fingers deal cards and make for bridge, dial each other to check in, chat about family, mutual friends, maybe taking a cruise on the Mississippi or a tour of Europe, Oregon's weather predictions or coming for dinner.

But lately, fingers reach for pills, loosen shoelaces to ease swollen feet and ankles, lay idle more. Still, in the fall, they are peeling, slicing, dehydrating, stewing, canning to keep her kids supplied with apples.

Fixing, sorting, mending, smoothing, comforting.... Those are the fingers I remember from childhood.

Mother went to bed last, got up first, fingers busy fixing breakfast (each grapefruit section carefully cut from the membrane), hot oatmeal, pancakes, or eggs.

Mom's fingers expressed generosity, a sense of order and beauty, expertise in doing many tasks- embroidery, carpentry, farming, office work, entertaining and more. Most of all they showed devotion to God and family.

# Request

By Judith Jensen  
Mennonite Village

From this shallow pit of sleeplessness,  
I call to you O Lord

Take me to your dark deep cave,  
Where life begins anew

Just because I forgot you  
with the sun

Is no reason not to let  
me try again

# Untitled

By Dorothy Louis  
Mennonite Village

I don't understand much about the universe.

cannot even imagine how immense

how endless it is

The earth on which we live is part of it.

a very tiny spec like a grain of sand

smaller than a single leaf on a tree

in a forest of trees

But not the center of the universe

as the Eagles sing

Although, some do think it is.



# Passing by a Garden on the Isle of Iona

Marlene Kropf

Mennonite Village

O Imperfectly Weeded Garden:

tangled clumps of grass and dandelions and herbs  
amidst pink and white yarrow, yellow-green ladies' mantle and an orange lily,  
faded Siberian iris, white daisies, rosy Sweet William,  
an unopened pale pink peony bud and tiny blue flowerets hugging the ground:

At home you are a rebuke to my sloth, but here you are a wide-open welcome;  
come, fill my world with surprising beauty,  
with a spacious embrace of all that lives.

# Some Sense of Nonsense

By Lynnette Roberts

Mennonite Village

Sometimes thoughts run in my head  
But I can't really make sense of them.  
It is sort of like when my hearing aides  
Are turned down; I hear the words,  
Yet can't quite distinguish them.

Sometimes feelings float around inside,  
Getting all jumbled up like a jigsaw puzzle.  
The pieces are all right there in front of me  
But I can't really manipulate them  
To a place in my heart that fits well.

Sometimes my memory is out of focus,  
Lost in voids of uncertainty and emptiness  
With flashes of truth and clarity in between.  
But I can't really clarify the realities  
From the visions of my dreams.

Sometimes a pure joy overwhelms me  
Encasing me in a euphoria of delight,

Like a whiff of jasmine in springtime.  
But I can't really bask in the bouquet of life  
Until I grasp the meaning of peace.

Sometimes I savor trivial bitterness  
That nibbles at the strength of my psyche  
Causing moods of wasteful sulkiness.  
But I can't really jettison the mood  
Without a palatable reshuffle of my ego.

Sometimes these rhythms of my life  
Are out of tune, like piano keys out of sync,  
Messing up the harmony of my existence.  
But I can't really manage these fluctuations  
Without accepting how much nonsense it is –  
to focus just on myself.

# Move Beyond Your Grounded Existence

By Mary Kay August  
Holladay Park Plaza

An elevator takes you where you want to go...  
But not all at once, nor as you expect.  
There are stops along the way, suspensions in time.

An elevator registers your destination (DING); you get off.  
The door closes behind you, stranding you in a new place.  
If you then re-summon an elevator, it will return...eventually.

Re-entering an elevator, you wonder where it has been.  
Has it been el-evating or descend-evating,  
Acting contrary to its name

If you seek a mischievous, manical machine,  
That divides your journey into fractured vertical zones,  
Take an elevator, and move beyond your grounded existence

# The Universe

by Rufus Day  
Holladay Park Plaza

Why is there something rather than nothing at all?  
This question of Leibniz has had me in its thrall!  
Do I care to answer it? If I do, the question is how.  
Do I want to research it? Or do I want the answer now?

Is there something because its origin is magical or miraculous?  
Or is it something understandable, something not quite so fabulous?  
If I want to understand it, how might my knowledge open the door?  
How do I learn more about matter than I ever knew before?

Einstein taught me that matter and energy are interconvertible!  
And in electron-positron pair production, this effect is observable!  
So energy can convert into matter - that seems abundantly clear!  
But that just leaves the question: how does energy appear?

So how might a gigantic source of energy arise out of nothing at all!  
Now I'm back where I started. Is my range of knowledge that small?  
Way back, when I was working on my PhD, I used to dream,  
That the universe was created according to a grad student's scheme!

Somehow quarks and gluons, electrons, photons, and neutrinos were made,  
And muons, taus and bosons, the foundations of matter were laid,  
And the universe expanded and evolved until the present day,  
And here I was, trying to solidify a thesis topic that my advisor found OK.

So now in old age I keep wondering what's the answer to Leibniz's question!  
And I keep on thinking. Does anyone have a suggestion?  
Or should I just wait until time and research favor mankind,  
And finally the answer to Leibniz's question they'll find!

# How Could My Heart Not Break Open

By Esther Elizabeth  
Holladay Park Plaza

Our country, our world, is in the great unraveling  
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

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 into it all, pain and joy, grief and wonder

# Twilight, October

By Robin Gault  
Holladay Park Plaza

This is the hour when we see once more  
darkness rising from the earth,  
bright autumn leaves fading into shadow  
as darker shadows flicker overhead,  
small birds drawn south by a silent call.

Each year there are fewer, and I grieve  
to think that one day they may never return.  
Will our children see this earthly beauty,  
or will it also fade into the dark?

Will they grieve for what was lost?  
Can they miss what they have never known?  
Perhaps one day, under an empty sky  
they will curse us, and hunger  
for what we threw away.

## Perfect Advice

By Karla Klinger  
Holladay Park Plaza

Young Eric,  
An empty silence replaces  
the comfortable silence we often shared.  
I know why you wanted me to be  
home with you, even if we didn't speak.

I miss you.  
There's no one to wake beside,  
or to sort pills for, to help fix brunch,  
to tell what day or time it is,  
or to sit with to watch the disturbing TV news.

As your forgetfulness grew, I spent days  
searching for ways for us to stay together.  
Your two heart attacks provided a solution;  
I slept in your hospital room until you died.  
I could spend what's left of my life encased in sleep.

But there is a widow's budget to project, Social Security  
to request, our Trust fund to set in motion,  
classes to attend, feelings to parse  
and hardest of all, reaching out  
to build a life without you.

I'll do it, though it takes energy and drive  
I don't yet have. A friend said that recovering alcoholics  
are advised to "Fake it till you make it."  
Absorbed in you as I have always been,  
isn't that perfect advice?



# The Kind Poets

By Jo Senters  
Holladay Park Plaza

In my poetry circle  
Accomplished writers  
mentor the fledglings  
With quiet attention and affirming nods  
When we read aloud our poems  
On loss and grief, joy and blessings

Yet I sense gathering unease  
When sharing some of my poems  
As I read on on and on I picture  
A paper airplane gliding high  
Then spiraling down in free fall  
To smash into a sofa or a tree

For example my poem of a particle physicist  
Who fell into a midsummer dream  
And renamed three particles known as quarks  
As Mistletoe, Maybelle and Mollycoddle  
And the new Boson Particle?  
To be known as Mighty Mite

Then there was my poem about the Costco store  
I placed milling shoppers in a particle accelerator  
Beamed them down a collider to form new particles  
And that poem tapping into Einstein's theory of relativity  
Comparing my own aging body to  
The evolution and devolution of a jelly donut

But my mentoring poets were kind  
Offering new paths and possibilities  
Even as inside my head  
I heard the droll voice of Freud saying  
“Sometimes dear poet  
A jelly donut is just a jelly donut.”

## Yet. Still

By Linda Cadzow

Willamette View

Loss is ubiquitous

in this time of life.

Friends, powers, partners, freedoms

All gone or going.

Yet. Still.

Hope cradles me in her arms

and whispers in my ear.

Joy is there for the finding.

Love is there for the giving

Peace is there for the making.

Let them be your companions

on this journey.

# Seven Ages of Me

*Looking Back (with apologies to Wm. Shakespeare)*

*All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players...*

By Bernard della Santina

Willamette View

1. I was first the **Infant**, mewling and puking

(diagnosis: pyloric stenosis) in my mother's arms.

2. Then the **Boy**, *creeping like snail unwillingly to school*

What kind of guy is named Bernard?

Barney is my moniker, yeah! (Except to Mother)

3. And then **Youth** as student, *soldier, lover...* "What? Engaged!"

Mother objects: "Too young, 23, haven't finished school;"

So Father's recruited, "Are you crazy? She's Asian, she's blind."

Two uncles, on cue, from Nat Cole: *They tried to tell me we're too young...*

But we were not too young at all for 63 years.

4. For 63 years as **Householder** (1<sup>st</sup> anniversary 1<sup>st</sup> child 1<sup>st</sup> job)

Everybody's happy and why not?

Two professionals: Financial security assured;

Suburban home: Foundational permanence procured.

Three grandchildren: Family futurity secured;

Nine years later with a Fear:

A fungal web of anthill mindedness infesting my roots.

5. My irrepressible **Grasshopper** denies the *Justice* of  
*fair round belly, eyes severe, and beard (but not) of formal cut*

Turn down tenure,

Sell wooded hillside house,

Escape on Quixotic flight to Europe,

Begin Homeric Odyssey to Greece, a family of five

Not an Argonaut but a VW bug with camping gear and

Cabin crew of three: six, four and two. *And so I play my part.*

6. The *Sixth Age Shifts* from challenging windmills and mastering Impermanence

From Greece, to Home, to Minnesota, to empty nest in France, to Greece,

And finally Home again. Fifty years a householder! Married at 23,

Found our "Ithaca" at 73! What now? Rice bowl to beg with? Fall upward

And seek the Tao? No! (And Bernard, what **Elder's** named Barney?) Ah,

Slip *into the lean and slippered pantaloons* wearing hiking boots.

To **AGE** but free, a home without house, in a camper and a CCRC.

Travel the land but live in space until we are **OLD**, and then....

7. *Last Scene of All, that ends this strange eventful journey*

A narrowing circle converging toward a galactic center,

Falling together at the horizon into ONE *and mere oblivion,*  
*Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.*

**The Goal all along!**

# Lessons From My Father

By Janet Friedman

Willamette View

How to dry the middle of your back,

To hold on while being carried piggy-back,

clean your plate, don't lie.

And how to keep a baseball scorecard,

Drive a manual shift

Pass a train, tie a sailor's knot.

Know the constellations and

The Star Spangled Banner.

You are your brother's keeper.

# The Human Condition

By Sandra W. Felkenes

Willamette View

HANG IN THERE

By hanging in there you are

Braving

Engaging

Wanting

BE IN WANT

By wanting

You seek

You question

You endure

BE AFRAID

By being afraid you invite

Hope

Discovery

Provision

RISK

By risking you find



New Beginnings

New Answers

New Fullness

BE FULL

By feeling full

You Accept

You Forgive

You Love

# Snippet of a Memory

By Elizabeth Knecht

Willamette View

I was five years old.

I think we were on our way to my grandparents' farm.

I'm pretty sure because we never went any other place.

We stop at a crowded diner in some small rural town for lunch.

I remember my mom, little brother and I found seats at the counter.

I don't know where my dad and older brother sat.

I remember my mother being unhappy we could not all sit together.

I remember looking forward to a not homemade lunch.

I remember my mom and my little brother getting their lunch.

I remember getting concerned about my lunch not coming.

I remember thinking I should tell my mom about my no lunch problem.

She was turned away from me, occupied with my brother.

I remember thinking I should maybe tell someone else.

I looked for the waitress, she was busy with other grownup people.

All the grownups were off in that grown up world of important.

I remember looking around for my dad with no luck.

So, I sat there quietly.

And then it was time to go.

I hadn't gotten my lunch.

I remember my mom being upset at me for not saying something.

I remember the waitress being very apologetic.

I remember my mom saying something like “forget it, it's too late.”

I do not remember, but I'm pretty sure, I didn't have lunch that day.

# Apple Orchard

By Mabel Pool

Willamette View

I saw today the vision in my dream,  
I found it, unexpected, in repose...  
an apple orchard, wild, without a scheme,  
its branches rambling with the vine and rose.  
forgotten on a small abandoned farm  
among the hills in country seldom seen,  
where travelers discover rarest charm  
and ownership is lost, the past serene.

I found it thus, the blossoms sang with Spring-  
their fragrance soft and sweet like peace unknown.  
The brook that caught the petals breezes fling  
reflected quietly the orchard's snow full-blown.  
An ancient bridge lay dreaming in the shade,  
Its modest wood strewn thick with pink and white.  
It seemed as though it still would offer aid  
And was familiar with the nymphs of night.

A calmness born of age reigns there,  
Acquainted with the sound of tinkling bells  
belonging to some sheep so strangely near  
piloted through wooded hills and dells.  
They came just as I hoped as in my dream  
To seek the morning shade beneath the trees,  
Content to share the orchard, still supreme.

The shepherd and his flock filled in the scene  
with natural harmony and quiet grace-  
accepting from the land her verdant green-  
unquestionably the guardians of this place.

# Awakening

By Joline Shroyer

Willamette View

Dusky morning twilight  
Cloaks the river and the land,  
Through the gloom, trees rise gray-shrouded,  
Touched by its ghostly hand,  
Over sleeping town and woodland  
Rests an air of quiet tension,  
A sense of patient waiting,  
As of Time held in suspension;  
All is so silent; All so still . . .

Then, gently stealing over the hill  
Stream golden beams of radiant light,  
Clearing shadows of the Night;  
The silence is lifted, the stillness is gone  
As birdsong welcomes the breaking Dawn,  
And the morning mist is melting away,  
Unveiling the glow of the waking Day.

## Bike Poem

Kay Sweeney  
Willamette View

*Getting out takes time*

*Rain or shine is fine*

*So many smiles*

*For many miles*

*I like to pedal*

*To test my mettle*

# To Don

by Dorothea Cogdill Zarosinski  
Willamette View

A beautiful lifetime

We have shared

We raised our family

That knew we cared

How blessed we were

For so many years

We danced thru life

With very few tears

I need to be with you

A pair for 80 years

I am anxious to join you

In your heavenly land

So please my sweat hart

Take my hand