

Reflections Reflections

A Collection of Writing and Poetry
by Oregon's Elders

2019



published by:

LeadingAge Oregon

7340 SW Hunziker, Suite 104, Tigard, Oregon 97223

503.684.3788

2018

LeadingAge Oregon serves the not-for-profit nursing homes, housing, residential care, home care, assisted living facilities and continuing care retirement communities in Oregon.

Reflections contains original writings submitted to LeadingAge Oregon by residents of member communities.

These authors have vastly varying backgrounds and experiences.

Some have advanced college degrees, while others have limited formal education. Some have had works published in national publications. For others, this represents a “first time” experience.

All are published here in their entirety, as originally submitted by the author.

No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader.

No surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader..

Robert Frost

Table of Contents

Judges's Choice

<i>Hold Me, Shirley Hilts, Mennonite Services Northwest</i>	1
<i>The Warmth of His Hands, Helen Ganopole, Rose Villa</i>	2



2400 Miles and A Surprise Car Sickness Remedy, Louise Clements, Friendsview	4
A Blessing in Disguise, Laurie Merrell, Willamette View	6
A Day at The Manor, Christine Downing, Westmoreland's Union Manor	7
An Eagle Cap Thunderstorm	8
Annie, Dave Wilson, Mennonite Village	9
Autumn in Sullivan's Gulch, Betsy Cameron, Holladay Park Plaza	10
Being Cool, Gil Helvie, Mennonite Services Northwest	11
Columbia Gorge Suites, Ruth Fevec, Village Retirement Center	13
Dandelion Greens Salad, Larry Eby, Mennonite Village	15
Flying Dreams, Jo Heck, Homewoods on The Willamette	16
He Shared With Me A Smile, Steven Pierce, Village Retirement Center	18
I Forgot To Search, Elizabeth Burke, Mary's Woods	19
I Know There Is A God, Tom Wilcox, Rose Villa	21
I Wonder, Mona McKown, Westmoreland's Union Manor	23
It Takes This, Ester Elizabeth, Holladay Park Plaza	25
Just As I Am, Dennis Gilliam, Willamette View	26
Lamentations Of A Housewife, Marie Bullock, Friendsview	29
Learning Braille, Judith Reynolds, Rose Villa	30
Lingo, Clara Alvarado, Rose Schnitzer Tower Apartments	32
My Own Brigadoon, Mary Bothwell, Willamette View	33
Night Camp, Hugh O'Reilly, Mary's Woods	35
Ode To The Weed, Julia Brown, Holladay Park Plaza	37
Opening Moment Of Tuesday Market, Carol Bosworth, Rose Villa	39
Our Noble "Sir", Loris Shroyer, Willamette View	41
Owyhee River, Pat Watne, Willamette View	44
Peaceful, Donald Little, Dallas Retirement Village	47

Table of Contents (con't)



Scammers, Mary Andrews, Willamette View	48
Seeing Rembrandt After Cataract Surgery, Kara Klinger, Holladay Park Plaza	51
Staring Stupidly, Lindsey Daniel, Holladay Park Plaza	53
Sweet Love, Donna Comfort, Friendsview	54
The American Dream?, Greg Hadley, Mary's Woods	55
The Language Of Shells, Mary Kalesse, Friendsview	58
The Little Frog With The Big Sound, Barbara Barber, Kingsley Court	60
The Perfect Christmas Pageant, Paul LaRue, Capital Manor	62
The Pink Coat, Pearl Steinberg, Willamette View	63
The Seasons, Cleve Boehi, Mary's Woods	65
The Woman In The Starfish Grill, Dick Smith, Rose Villa	66
Time, Loris Manookian, Holladay Park Plaza	69
Tolavano Morn, Barbara Nelson, Capital Manor	70
Tortoise Talk, Dan Roberts, Mary's Woods	71
True Colors, Robin Gault, Holladay Park Plaza	73
Two Old Ladies, Loretta Hoagland, Mary's Woods	74
What I Did Last Summer, Patsy Steimer, Willamette View	76

Judges' Choice

Hold Me

Shirley Hilts, Mennonite Services Northwest



I am drifting. . . . Don't you see?
I am slowly drifting away.
The once trustworthy tether
that bound me to earth and you
is coming unraveled, snapping
soundlessly, strand by strand.
Oh, help me. Hold me.

If I go fully adrift, landmarks
of my life--the church where we wed,
ballrooms where we danced, old
childhood haunts--will shrink,
fade and vanish;
all of my words too--names,
song lyrics, your story and mine--
will dissipate and flow into silence.

Already, faces I know have no names;
places I have visited appear, unfamiliar.
My mixed cargo of joys and cares
is slipping from me.
The chilling, changing winds
were not in my forecast.
I am terrified.

Oh, help me! Hold me!

Judges' Choice

The Warmth of His Hands

Helen Muriel Ganopole, Rose Villa Senior Living Community



My father was over forty when I was born, a much wanted child, and to his delight, a daughter. Not used to babies, he blossomed as a dad when I was about five, a chatter box, and could converse with him. He always talked with me as though I was much older, and indeed, it might be said I was “always older” in many ways. He loved to take me on walks, in particular, to visit parishioners, for he was a pastor and had many elderly to pay calls on. I was made aware that the presence of a well behaved child was a pleasure for older people. It was my mission.

Since my father was legally blind, and unable to drive, he was assigned New England village parishes where he could

“walk his parish” fairly easily. These were memorable towns, grassy squares, white houses, and steepled churches. We walked and stopped to visit with people on their front porches, or passing on the sidewalk, and often make detours into shops where we were known.

Why holding my father’s hand was such a cherished memory, I can not say, but it was. To this day, as I approach ninety, I still feel my small hand held in his, my short legs trying hard to keep up with his long steps, and the warmth of our contact. When my father died, I recall thinking of that a lot, even when viewing him in the funeral parlor. I glanced at his folded hands and touched them gently. They seemed a symbol of protection and shelter, love, and deep caring. His hands were smooth, the hands of a scholar, and through these hands, I seemed to feel the man himself. The result was my trust and what I thought was his wisdom and good judgment. Holding his hand was a way to love him. I knew he was a father who wanted the best for me and also expected me to make the best of myself. He could be stern and at times I felt distant, so those hands were important. They were the carrier of his more gentle nature.

Of course I held my children’s hands as mothers do, but not until a time in life when I was grieving, and one of my sons reached for my hand, did I transfer the feeling I once had for my father’s hand to my child. “I am here and I care,” is what I felt. It meant the world. I don’t feel that mothers hold their sons’ hands that often, and this was tender and spoke deeply to me of the past.

No romantic hand holding reminded me of my father, not at all. However, once when in the hospital as an adult, and nearly asleep, somebody held my hand. I do not recall who, but there again, it was my father. I felt it. He had returned to me in another body.

We hold hands in church or in caring circles, and in many other ways, but only in times of need for a special protection have I sensed my father. He would be glad to know that, I am sure. One reads about the “laying on of hands” etc., in which I usually placed little faith, but I can never deny the imprint I feel, even now, of some larger hand holding mine.

I often think of it at night, and it's a comfort. I suspect it will be a gentle feeling that accompanies me when I pass away; my hand held in a larger one. I am counting on it.

We hold hands in church or in caring circles, and in many other ways, but only in times of need for a special protection have I sensed my father. He would be glad to know that, I am sure. One reads about the "laying on of hands" etc., in which I usually placed little faith, but I can never deny the imprint I feel, even now, of some larger hand holding mine.

I often think of it at night, and it's a comfort. I suspect it will be a gentle feeling that accompanies me when I pass away; my hand held in a larger one. I am counting on it.

2400 Miles and A Surprise Car Sickness Remedy

Louise Clements, Friendsview Retirement Community



In 1941 my father's parents, who lived in Iowa, pleaded with him to take his 14-year-old brother Marvin into our home in Oregon. My grandparents were getting older and couldn't persuade Uncle Marvin to go to school. At ages 68 and 50 his beleaguered parents felt ill equipped to deal with a rebellious teenager any longer. My Daddy was a stern but kind man and maybe Uncle Marvin would behave better for the brother he idolized. Since gas was soon to be rationed because of the war overseas my parents decided to go as soon as possible. (World War II would start in December of that year). Daddy borrowed his best friend's car and he, my mother with my 2-year-old brother, LeRoy, sitting in her lap and me in the back seat left for the long trip from Three Mile Lane near McMinnville, Oregon to Iowa.

One of the problems to deal with was my extreme car sickness. The usual three-pound empty coffee can with lid was placed on the floor of the back seat near me. At five years old I was not thrilled with the traveling rules offered by others. "Don't let her read," "Don't let her color in her coloring book," or "Let her ride in the front seat," "Only look at the distant scenery," "Let her sit by the window," "Don't let her sit by the window." I was willing, though, to follow the rules to avoid the miserable retching that left me worn out and embarrassed.

The primary theme of the trip was boredom with nothing to read and not allowed to color. I sat in the back seat alone so I had two windows to look out of and no little brother to distract me. My parents tried to play games with me "Look for a white-haired man, a white horse or a white house" and earn points for each. Trying to find the letters of the alphabet on billboards, reciting nursery rhymes, singing songs. They patiently tried to keep me occupied but it didn't help.

Every service station we stopped at along the way had someone with advice as well as the smell of gasoline that further nauseated me. I got used to people leaning into the window to peer at me offering suggestions. An aproned lady who smelled like chicken soup wiped her hands on her apron and peered at me through her spectacles and proclaimed that my parents should give me wintergreen candies. My mother went into their little store and bought a cellophane bag of pink wintergreen candies. "Oh, goodie" I thought, "candy whenever I want."

At the next gas station, a man in greasy overalls thought saltine crackers would be just the ticket. Again, my mother went into the Mom and Pop grocery/gas station to buy a box of crackers. I nibbled the crackers in between pink wintergreen candies. Farther down the road was a shiny new gas station where a big sign with a picture of a red horse with wings hung from a big post. The attendants, who were dressed in gleaming white uniforms and white hats and walked very fast, said to have me breathe into a paper bag. The backseat was getting a quite a little pile of home remedies for car sickness beside the coloring book, crayons, books and other things I couldn't play with. The result: I watched the scenery hurry by and threw up pink crackers into the paper bag.

On the long trip home my unhappy fourteen-year-old Uncle Marvin rode beside me with tears running down his cheeks. I hadn't seen many older boys up close or even other children because we lived in the country. I was awed by this silent young man who didn't speak a word on the whole trip. I watched him continually out of the corner of my eye. He liked the wintergreen candies but didn't much care for the crackers. I tried to interest him in the coloring books but he didn't care to do that.

In my concern for this tearful new back seat companion I didn't get sick once on the 2,400 mile return trip. I'll betcha that no one had ever thought of that solution before.

A Blessing in Disguise

Laurie Merrell, Willamette View



Orange tennis shoes! Whatever possessed me to buy orange tennis shoes -- with hot pink accents no less? I'm a fairly conservative senior citizen with fairly conservative taste in clothes, but one day I found myself at the shoe counter buying orange tennis shoes. After all, they were amazingly comfortable, the price was right and I could always save them to wear in the exercise rooms. I took them home, put them on and headed for the gym.

Surprisingly, I didn't get the "rolled eyes" from passersby that I expected. I was busy making up excuses for the lapse of judgment that had put these shoes into my shopping bag and onto my feet when I heard a voice saying, "I like your shoes." Could they be talking about MY shoes? I mumbled a quick thank you and continued my walk. Before I knew it there were more people walking by and complimenting me, while still others using walkers or in wheelchairs looked up and provided a veritable barrage of -----"I like your shoes!"

Those that made the biggest impression on me were residents slumped in wheelchairs -- chins on chests, seemingly oblivious to the world around them, staring at the floor. In the past, I had gotten used to greeting them and getting no response. But suddenly I was seeing their smiling faces and hearing those magic words, "I like your shoes." I realized that as they rolled along looking down at long stretches of neutral carpet, they were enjoying the bright spots of orange that my shoes provided.

I know now why I bought orange tennis shoes. I bought them to bring smiles to people I meet and to provide a connection, however brief, in both of our lives. I'm not sure which of us gained more.

A Day at The Manor

Christine Downing, Westmoreland's Union Manor



Today I woke up to the beautiful sunshine
I must get going to do my walk on time.
The grounds are beautiful. Oh, what a beautiful duck!
The yard has been wet. Oops! I'm down in the yuck!

The resident dogs are having a great old time.
They were careful and didn't get caught in the slime.
They have run to chase the birds.
Dogs are getting in more mischief than I can put into words.

Time for lunch, what will I eat?
Tuna it is! Now some mayo, onion, and lettuce on wheat.
As I finish my sandwich I start to nap.
The book I am reading falls off my lap!

I enter the dream sleep or is this an illusion?
What was the dream? There was some confusion.
My dream becomes more clear oh wait a vision!
They will read my poem at the Leading Age luncheon!

An Eagle Cap Thunderstorm

Allan F. Wilson, Village Retirement Center



While our church was worshipping in the band room,
I felt the mood begin to crescendo and rise to a new height.
I was moved not only by the words, but by an all-encompassing Presence of the Lord.
It triggered a memory of a back-packing trip up into the Eagle Cap Wilderness Area.

After driving half a day, then climbing up the steep trail,
We finally found our spot, looking straight up onto that magnificent mountain peak.
We had dinner then cleaned up and began to explore our surroundings.
Dusk set in very quickly and we heard thunder to the north—accompanied with lightning.
I was intrigued by the swift-moving storm as it approached us head on.
Captivated by the undulating clouds which seemed to be growing as they came up the hill,
It began rotating closer and closer, my roommate dove into the tent to stay dry.
A refreshing fragrance pushed out front of the storm, along with a calmness.
As it rose towards us the thunder and lightning increased as the clouds began to thicken.
We had settled on a little knoll and as the storm came it split around us,
And moved more slowly as it encompassed us in an unexplainable silence.
My tent mate called out, “You better get in here before you get soaked.”
I was sitting there amid this dynamo of power—yet I felt safe.
My thought was, He isn’t coming to destroy, but to comfort and soothe!
I don’t know how long I sat in His comfort before
I finally realized the storm was increasing and I should probably go to bed.
As I snuck into the tent I began hearing huge droplets bouncing off our home in the woods.
Sleep was not to come as my buddy and I pondered the magnificent power of our Creator,
Accompanied by His ever-caring presence of love and tenderness.
We could never have planned such a mind-blowing, spirit-lifting devotional if we tried.

About once a month thereafter, Marci, an older church lady, would grab me and say,
“Tell me that story again, Allan.
It takes me to the Throne-room of the Almighty each time you tell it.”
I tried to duplicate my tale each time, with a promise I would put it in my book.
Marci died very unexpectedly. Here one breath and gone the next.
I never told her that each time I shared that story I could see by her expression and eyes,
That she was entering that glorious Throne-room, and she was taking me with her!
Thank you, Marci for being such an encourager.

Annie

Dave Wilson, Mennonite Village



The couple walked the stony trail in silence, their steps sending pebbles chattering ahead, apologizing for the footing. The granite landscape glared hard and unforgiving.

Descending a steep slope, they saw a man below laboring upward hauling a child's wagon. A woman walking behind tended a passenger. When the couples met across a boggy spot, the rider disembarked to let the wagon pass without sinking. The woman urged, "OK, Annie, we have to walk across the water," and the two waded over to rejoin the wagon.

"So," said the down-coming man, "Annie gets to ride."

"Yes," said the up-going woman. "She has arthritis. We're going on a camping trip with a hike that's too long for her, so this is a test ride." Leading Annie over, she added, "She also is blind."

Settling to one knee, the down-coming man looked into two infinite pools of faded blue, and said, "Hello Annie." Tail wagging, Annie sat, accepting his hand across her large head and down her silky back while her unseeing eyes tapped his empathy for old dogs.

Still an attractive Irish setter mix, Annie was indeed an old dog; but as this couple's only child, she wouldn't be left home alone—even if it meant hauling her over a mountain in a Radio Flyer.

Her nose having learned what it could, Annie was helped back onto her blanket in the wagon. The up-going party began again their long, lurching ascent of the hill, and the down-coming couple traversed the bog.

The couple crunched on in silence until a small waterfall beckoned. After a moment he said quietly, "I don't know which is the truer love: Annie's to tolerate that awful ride or the love of the people to pull her." They watched water slide down the rock face.

"I think that true love," she said at last, "is when you have both."

Autumn in Sullivan's Gulch

Betsy Marsh Cameron, Holladay Park Plaza



I look out my window at
laughter!

It's the same amazing view, looking east
from the 13th floor, that I
never dreamt to see,
with faint Mt. Hood,
pale wrapped against paler sky, a Lego toy hospital on
the horizon,
and a naked red crane, pointing to
it,

But, this October day,
I see laughter
under floating birds,
as these hometown trees begin
undressing.

Those slender yellow skirts have fluttered
down,
but red tipped maples are shyly
quivering , and the orange-red
Japanese maples
just stand
and glow, as if hands on their
hips,
they laughingly refuse
to change!

Being Cool

Gil Helvie, Mennonite Services Northwest



Will someone please kindly explain
Just what it means to be cool?
Is it a trip to the ice cream store
Or maybe a dip in the pool?

Maybe it's lounging in the shade
Of a spreading maple tree
Somehow I don't think that's what they mean.
Doesn't seem that way to me

The guy in the pants that has a crotch
Hanging down between his knees
Rings in his ears, nose, navel and lips
What would happen if he should sneeze?

“Hey, the dude's no fool, he's really cool”
Is what his compatriots proclaim
“Being a kook, beats cracking the books,
Or working to make a name”

“Just look at me, I'm footloose and free
With never a forward glance
I ain't no fool; I'm really cool
Just look at me pants”

I just have to stop and ask myself
What if he dated my daughter?
I'd show that fool what is really cool
In a six foot pool of water

But maybe that's not the way to be
Maybe I should join the gang
Grow my gray hair to a pony tail
And trim the front into bangs

Bell bottom pants, and a bright plaid shirt
And learn to say, "man, what's cool"
You s'pose my kids would be proud of me?
They'd say, "grow up you old fool"

Guess I'll never be politically correct
Nor follow the postmodern school
I think I'll go on being myself
Hey, you know, that sounds real cool

Columbia Gorge Suite

Ruth Fevec, Village Retirement Center



I

Consorting by the Columbia Gorge,
There's a history open wide.
Only a fraction can be traced,
As onward now we glide.

It's a lonesome stretch of highway
And dangers sometimes lurk.
Old faces lift their wind-burned brows
Where the few phones seldom work.

It's a long, cold way to Portland,
When you're stranded by the road.
Heavy trucks all hustle by you,
Well, they get paid by the load.

II

Down beside the highway lying,
With her long and broken legs,
Is a battered gray-blue Heron.
Now who warms her nest of eggs?

Strange old rock formations haunt me
Of a deluge long passed by,
Showered volcano's fierce eruptions
And the Indians' sad low cry.

III

Now the mighty wide Columbia
Has its water from dams spill.
Seems 'twas only yesterday that
Hordes of salmon made you thrill.

Made you thrill to feel the jumping
Indian boys from rock to rock,
Where the boats, with water pumping
Are now moved from lock to lock.

Time and tide still wait for no man.
Crumbling ledges – they may lean.
Roll on still my wide Columbia
Reflecting each new changing scene.

Dandelion Greens Salad

Larry Eby, Mennonite Village



They grew in the reflected warmth of the old church
Green, succulent, protected from tramping boots, hooves and
wheels.

Mother looked for them in early spring
before summer's heat darkened and bittered the leaves
or the blossoms sprouted.
She liked those early tender leaves.

After careful washing at the pitcher pump,
sorting the leaves,
she prepared the sauce.

Flour, cornstarch, vinegar and water
mixed and carefully heated with added pepper and salt
then hard-boiled egg coarsely chopped and mixed.

A feast for royalty but not for young boys.
I didn't much like that dandelion green mix but
the smile on mother's face as she ate belied the bitterness
that my taste buds sensed.
To me the secret was in the sauce.

Flying Dreams

Jo Heck, Homewoods on The Willamette



I began having flying dreams as a little girl. The first one had me standing at the head of the stairs to the basement and realizing that I could fly. I flew down the stairs and around the basement ceiling. I remember being worried about being burned by the exposed water pipes (a practical Virgo even then!) but it was fun!

The next few years my dreams usually started with me feeling left out (not chosen for a team, being teased on the playground, picked on and/or made fun of) and so escaping by flying. Again, I remember avoiding telephone wires (being afraid of being electrocuted) but otherwise enjoying the freedom of escape.

When I was ten we went by ship to Europe, where my dad was being transferred. We docked in Southampton before landing in Bremerhaven. We took a cab ride around Southampton and I was sitting on my dad's lap. I looked up at one of the factory buildings and realized that I'd flown over it in my dream; I gasped out loud! My dad asked me what was wrong but I didn't want anyone to know that I could fly, so I answered, "I thought I recognized that man walking on the sidewalk."

When I got comfortable with who I was as a human being (now a divorced mother of three), the "escape" dreams pretty much stopped. I was surprised to have one after many years. In the dream I was at a Unitarian Church Camp and got that familiar left-out feeling from the past (pretty unusual, because I absolutely love hanging out with Unitarians). So I packed some supplies in a backpack and flew off. After two or three days I decided I needed to get back to the camp, but when I landed I was on the wrong side of a barrier (either a tall wall or trees too close together). A pleasant-looking man was standing there. He introduced himself as Anthony Stewart and asked me if I'd been gone long; I answered a few days. Usually, I never wanted anyone to know I could fly; for some reason, I trusted this stranger. He next asked me how I could be gone that long with only a daypack. I replied, "If I needed anything I just reached in my daypack." "Where are you going next", he inquired. I pointed over the barrier. "Do you need any help getting there?" I said, "No, thanks, I can fly."

In real life (back on earth) I went to visit my best friend hospitalized with Crohn's Disease; she had a yearly flare-up and was in danger of losing a third foot of her colon. The massive dosage of prednisone was causing to be severely depressed and even suicidal. I told her my dream. When I described meeting Anthony Stewart, her mouth flew open; she wanted to know how he spelled his name ("S-t-e-w-a-r-t"). She then asked me if I remembered the dream house she'd designed last year when she was in the hospital; I did. She had never told anyone that she'd designed a "dream lover"; his name was Anthony Stewart and I had just described him. I went home puzzled; she realized that Anthony Stewart was probably NOT a dream lover but a spirit guide sent to help HER because clearly I didn't need his help.

She was convinced the hospital was going to kill her, so she packed her belongings in the wastebasket liner, sneaked down the back stairs and hid at a friend's. She tried a whole bunch of alternative methods and herbs and CURED HERSELF of Crohn's disease! She and I both credit Anthony Stewart for saving her life.

The last flying dream I remember was of me as a grandmother. I lived in a big Victorian house. I had a little 4-yr.-old grandson with me. I looked at him and told him I wanted to show him something. I took him up to the master bedroom on the 3rd floor. There was a big chandelier above the bed. I said "Ethan, come fly with me." He joined me flying around the chandelier and was giggling with delight at the joy of flying. However, we saw smoke coming out of a window in an apartment across from us. So we responsibly came down and called the fire department, the firemen were able to put out the fire. The interesting thing about this dream is that the little dark-haired grandson named Ethan wasn't born yet (I have 2 fair-haired older grandsons). This Christmas I was at my son's house and had a conversation with Ethan (who's now 11) and I told him about the dream I'd had and confirmed that he also can fly in his. He flies for similar reasons that I did in grade school – feeling uncomfortable and different and as an escape. We are making plans to pick a date (probably the next time I visit) to see if we can fly together in a dream on the same night.

Stay tuned...

He Shared With Me A Smile

Steven E. Pierce, Village Retirement Center



sat an elderly man on a worn park bench
proudly shared with me a warm smile
he glanced at my old Army uniform
said, please talk to me for a while
want to shake your hand young man
just my thanks for doing your job
so very proud to know you soldier
for protecting our land so free
saw the pride swell his aging chest
several tears fell from faded eyes
for I too was once a young soldier
like you I had to face the test
I have heard the strength in your step
I know you are among the best

I'm now the old man on the worn park bench
I'll share with you a warm aging smile

I Forgot To Search

Elizabeth Burke, Mary's Woods



I forgot to search
outside my window
this morning.

I missed the fidgety flight
of a bird separated
from her flock and
I didn't see that
one brilliant red leaf
flutter to the ground
before clouds burst
and pinned it
to the pavement.

I imagined I heard
thunder in the distance,
but the storm was real.
I became captive to
its sheer beauty as
sheets of rain
curtained my outlook
on the world.

One small bird,
withstanding,
drank rainwater
gushing in the gutter
alongside the roof.

Bravery can be found
in the most unlikely
places—one only
needs to look.

I Know There Is A God

Tom Wilcox, Rose Villa Senior Living Community



How do I know there is a God?
Because He truly answers me.
And though His voice is small not loud,
His still small voice has set me free.

To me the knowledge of His will,
One day came clearly to my mind.
And with His Spirit I did fill,
And so today I am not blind.

He is my God, my creator,
His life He has given for me.
What can I do to His honor?
Keeping His commandments is key.

Many of these we know by heart,
Not to covet, steal, or murder,
Should be an easy place to start,
But some are very much harder.

Keep the Sabbath a holy day,
And do not take His name in vain.
To have no idols we should pray.
To put Him first is what is main.

So often in our day we hear,
"Oh my God," shouted out so loud.
Sundays are time for games and beer,
Instead of church many have vowed.

So what would Jesus have us do?
He said to us, "Love your neighbor."
How to this can we now be true?
Helping needy we should labor.

The poor are always with us here.
How to help them is a problem,
But the need to do so is clear.
And if we try His answers come.

We are all brothers and sisters
Of Father in heaven above.
We are to be His ministers,
And need to do His work with love.

I Wonder

Mona “Happy” McKown, Westmoreland’s Union Manor



I wonder Sometimes, When I hear
Somebody fuss and scold,
If everything was perfect
In their precious “days of old”.

Was dinner always right on time
And everything just right...
And did mom serve them apple pie
At supper every night?

Was no one ever in the way
Who made them stand and wait.
Did people always step aside
When they came through the gate?

I wonder why when father time
Comes sneaking up behind
That strange ideas creep in and seem
To clutter up our mind.

I wonder why those by-gone years
Seem better than the now...
The sweet and long past “good times”
Are all our dreams allow.

I wonder, now that we have time
To really stop and see...
Could we just help to make our world
What we'd like it to be?

I wonder if a smile or two...
Perhaps a helping hand...
Would ease another's load a bit.
I wonder if we can.

It Takes This

Ester Elizabeth, Holladay Park Plaza



When my friend John was dying
He said he was surprised

At how much courage it takes

To die

To be sick

For others to watch him be sick

It takes courage, he said To

let go

One thing at a time

Of everything

To let go of

What you think you know

Who you thought you

were What the next day

The next moment holds

It takes courage

To open your

heart And your hands

And say

I'm at your service

And your mercy

Just As I Am!

Dennis Gilliam, Willamette View



It's not that I don't care. Good Lord, I'm a third generation Church of Christ--a teacher, an elder. This has been my life-long spiritual path, my church home. I met my wife and we were married in this church. But just as I watched this judgmental machine suck the joy, zest for life and quality family time from my Dad year after year, there's no denying that the same convoluted and frenzied scenario has a firm grip on me. I see myself as a small black and white rabbit, just before being snatched by a large snake, who, once entrapped, either kicks and breaks loose (what chance?) or shows as an exterior lump on the way down the reptilian gullet to digestion. A disgust, many years in the making, has generated a malady of the soul that is coming over me. I can no longer tolerate this; it's time to cut and run.

But, I'm a pillar of the church. Many of our friends are here. And they might think . . .

Reducing Sister Linscott to tears one Sunday in Sunday School as that dear lady tried so hard to teach me God's word, when all I did was cut up and create chaos, was not nice. My self-prescribed penance was to learn and sear the memory verse of that day on my mind forever. Want me to quote the verse?

They took up a special collection one Sunday and bought Sister Woods, the preacher's wife, a new coat. This really jerked my Mom and me and she fumed indignantly "I need a new coat as much as she does." Sister Woods won, and I still don't like Sister Woods. But, after 70 years, who cares?

Brother and Sister Gano made me laugh. They reminded me of the nursery rhyme Mom often read to me about "Jack Spratt and His Wife." "Jack Spratt could eat no fat, His wife could eat no lean; and so, between them both, They left the platter clean." As I saw the Gano's, he was bean-pole thin and she pumpkin-shaped round with a huge wart on her nose.

Sister Mowrey loved my brothers and me. A horrific car accident caused her to lose one eye. With one real eye and one painted glass eyeball, she kept right on loving me. And I loved her.

When I was a second grader at Columbia Bible School, Brother Brown spanked me hard for kissing a girl. It was easily worth it. I'd do it again.

Brother Davis caused a ruckus just short of a church split by insisting we all use only the King James translation of the "Bible," because all other translations were not God's true words.

Half listening to preachers' drone on since I was old enough to pee, I knew dancing was evil. I asked Mom to write me a note excusing me from dance instruction during PE class, so I would not have to sin. She did as I asked.

Being bored out of my mind during every sermon, I regularly passed word scramble notes to a friend sitting by me. One day my chosen word to scramble was "this." Cleverly and unwittingly I scrambled it as s-h-i-t. Wouldn't you know? Dad intercepted this note.

All we did was go to church three times weekly, while my friends stayed home and played. Sunday was the worst—twice to church in one day. This was not fun; I hated it. The part I did love was singing. Hymns with four-part harmony were beautiful, because no scriptural-ly incorrect piano or organ was used. Ever.

My voice was tenor. "Heaven holds all for me." Can we stop for a burger on the way home? "Hold o'er my being absolute sway." I want a bike, so I can get a paper route. "Years I spent in vanity and pride." Really? I was seven years old. "I come to the garden alone, and He tells me I am his own." This was Mom's and my favorite.

As an electrician, Dad sometimes got laid off. Then, we couldn't make the house payment. I hoped they wouldn't drop anything in the collection plate, because we needed money more than the Lord did that week.

Gallo Wine—a wompin' huge gallon jug—and I saw Brother Magnani buy it at the local grocery. The preacher said we should never touch a drop. If he can buy this wine, why can't we?

There it was scrawled crudely for all to behold on the wall of the Ardenwald streetcar station. "The pioneers, the pioneers, those sons of bitches; they wipe their ass with broken glass and yell because it itches." Who would write things like that? Why did I laugh 'til I split a gut?

Tract racks were important, because there were many truths that needed reinforcing beyond sermonizing. At least twenty different tracts were presented as small printed pamphlets in a wooden rack in the church foyer. These tracts taught me that Presbyterians were going to hell because they believed 'once saved, always saved.' Would you like me to show you chapter and verse why this belief is not Biblical?

After all these years in this church, singing about divine love, praying for guidance, baptizing by immersion, sending missionaries around the world, and engaging in intense personal Bible study, why do I have this deep, overriding and intuitive sense that no one really likes each other? Yet, we all profess to love one another.

In my mind's eye I can see and hear my Dad, as song director, leading the small congregation in verse three of "Just As I Am!" "Just as I am! tho' tossed a-bout With many a conflict, many a doubt, With fears with-in and foes with-out, O Lamb of God, I come! I come!"

So here I am. My daughter has just come out lesbian, and the church machine I know quite well, will quickly shred and discard her. I don't care if I am a third-generation solid member of this church. We have scarcely a dozen dear friends here I care about. The rest of my Brothers and Sisters in Christ can take some of their dogma and shove it. I'm standing with my daughter until I die.

Just As I Am!

Lamentations Of A Housewife

Marie Bullock, Friendsview Retirement Community



Machines are nasty.

Machines aren't nice.

If you're thinking of buying one, take my advice.

You'll have no peace, so you'd better think twice.

With stereos, computers, TVs, and cars,

They all look like they came straight from Mars.

Washers, dryers, and blenders are cousins.

They just keep on rolling in by the dozens.

VCRs belong in an electronic zoo.

Sewing machines and phonographs are Greek to me too!

Tape recorders and telephones, will they never stop coming?

Food choppers and dish washers just keep right on humming.

Sometimes I wish for the pioneer days.

When you cooked over a fireplace and not in a microwave.

There are times when I'd like for one reason or more

To bundle them up and throw them out the door.

But I know in the end right away I'd repent

And say to myself they were all heaven sent.

Learning Braille

Judith Reynolds, Rose Villa Senior Living Community



On an icy day in November we, pupils, all bundled up, scramble into the cloakroom, to hang up our coats. We go into the classroom and see Miss Germain, our very, very plump teacher, drawing on the blackboard. Her black dress is wrapped tightly around her. You can see she is wearing a corset. Her hair is curled and she has polished, red fingernails.

She is drawing a colored chalk picture on the blackboard of a large, brightly colored Thanksgiving Turkey with a red coxcomb, brown wings and grey feet under a blue sky. Finishing the turkey, she beams at it, then at us. The turkey is beautiful. We like Miss Germain a lot.

Now the door opens to let in a new girl who is led into the classroom and given a seat. We become curious as she takes out a book as big as a record album and opens it up to blank pages. We are told her name is “Anne.” She does not look around. We are told she is blind and shall be a pupil in our class with the rest of us. Her head does not move as she says, “Hello” without expression. Together, the class greets her back, “Hello, Anne”

Class begins. The teacher starts telling us about the history of the first settlement of people in our country in a forest three hundred years ago.

We look at the teacher and we watch Anne open her big book. She holds a small wooden ball with a thick needle sticking out of it and makes small bunches of pinholes in the paper. She was learning how to make words in a different kind of way called “Braille.”

If you don’t have eyes to see, you can still feel what it’s like to touch something. To know what she has punctured, she must turn the paper over and feel the patterns of the groups of pinholes on the other side. These are words in “Braille.”

It must be very hard to learn.

She lets us try puncturing little groups of holes ourselves. We love making words in Braille.

We attend a big red brick school with huge windows blackboards and desks in each room. It is connected to another smaller building that was once a pickle factory. The basements are connected to each other by an underground passageway. I am chosen to guide Anne through the passage way to join the woman waiting outside the pickle factory who would drive her back to where she lived.

Chilly, damp, musty and dark, it was a mysterious tunnel. Anne trails her fingers against the damp stone walls and holds her other hand in mine.

I see how seriously and deliberately Anne feels for the floor with each step.

We stay silent. “How is life for her?” I want to ask her so many questions. I wonder if she has friends? What is dreaming like for her? I have seen if I squeeze her hand she does smile. I wish I knew how to write in Braille.

We reach the stone stairway, our way out. We climb carefully and slowly up the stone stairs. A woman in a winter coat is waiting for us. She rushes for Anne and holds her for a moment. “Could she be Anne’s mother?” She is guided carefully into the car seat. Doors shut.

We wave goodbye. As the car turns I see “GUILD FOR THE JEWISH BLIND” printed in fancy letters on the door. Now I want to know more.

“See you tomorrow!” I shout.

I’m not sure that was the correct thing to say to her. I hope she’ll understand.

Lingo

Clara Alvarado, Rose Schnitzer Tower Apartments



What is important here?
The others don't understand our Crow Lingo
Below us they stand amassing data

For what?
Our gatherings in the dark treetops
They call it a hoarse cawing

It's Crow Lingo
Our shouting
Everything is disappearing!
The insects we snack on!
A bite of the pollinators bees, butterflies and
humming birds!

But the others are only offended by our profusion
of droppings around the Park blocks

We are a congress, a confederation lamenting
the First People who understood our Crow Lingo
We were once the sacred bird of the Spirit Dance

Now the others send laser training raptors to
stop our loud rambunctious gatherings
scattering us into the dark sky without warning!

My Own Brigadoon

Mary Bothwell, Willamette View



My uncle George Spring and his brother Boyd, lumber brokers, brought their families from Michigan to the wilds of Idaho in the early twentieth century and founded a little lumber town called Meadow Creek. My memories of summer vacations spent in Meadow Creek are some of the strongest of my childhood. I would follow my grandmother around like a pet. In the early morning we would walk up the road to a farmhouse for the milk. In the evening she would wrap me in her brown afghan while she told me a story or sang to me.

During the day the dining room was the focal point of activity. The big oval table took up most of the room, and for everyday use it was covered with oilcloth. On the long side of the room a counter covered in a colorful cretonne skirt hid a great supply of old newspapers, magazines and catalogs waiting to be cut up for paper doll families. During the day the kerosene lamps rested on the counter, either waiting to have their chimneys cleaned or to be lit at sundown, one for each bedroom and the kitchen, a huge double mantled hissing one to be hung over the dining table.

A permanent fixture on the dining table was the cut glass spoon holder, which held a bouquet of spoons. One took a spoon as it was needed. Another permanent fixture was the teapot. I have never again seen such a huge teapot. I would never have lifted it. For the most part it was filled at each meal, with my grandpa pouring. The table was usually full with my grandparents, the hired man, in the summer the five of us, my mother, my sister and I, my aunt and my boy cousin, and anyone else who happened “to be passing through.”

I loved breakfast at this table. Since everyone but the children did a lot of physical work, this meal was substantial. Pie left over from the night before, oatmeal porridge that had been cooking on the back of the stove all night, fried potatoes, eggs and bacon. But the best of all for me was the toast. With no electricity, Grandma made toast from homemade bread on a wire toaster laid on the big black kitchen range, and its charred edges covered with home churned butter left me with the love of slightly burned toast to this day.

My grandmother filled the huge tea kettle to warm water for our Saturday night bath, although we might have been splashing for half the day in the creek across the road. She warmed water from the pump to wash dishes three times a day.

It was at this pump that one could learn to love to drink plain, cold water. No wonder the French call it “champagne de pompe.” One poured a little water down the pump handle to “prime the pump,” gave a huge drag once or twice on the handle, and clear, pure water poured out into a tin dipper, spilling out into the sink. We drank deeply, cheeks flushed from strenuous play, and the taste the water from the dipper was singular. Does tin really taste that good? To my knowledge the dipper was never sterilized, nor even washed, but everyone drank from it. Perhaps we simply passed the same germs around and around and were saved by each other.

When I am gone, will my grandsons remember summer with me? Today I have a pitcher of filtered water in my refrigerator, I religiously change the filter every six weeks, and I have to remind myself to drink this safe, tasteless water.

Night Camp

Hugh O'Reilly, Mary's Woods



Sunset flows past the nearby dark sentinels
As above crows speed their homeward flight.
The long shadows are totally silent.
There is no water music, no chirp of prey.
We are tied to the ledge awaiting night.

There is little chatter among ourselves.
Each one's thoughts are very personal.
Our wills searched out for beauty this day
As our bodies stretched for vertical reality.
This earth and sky was the canvas.
Now time moves slowly and we revisit pitch moves.

How often we dreamed of a place like this,
Where the crags are sharp and bold
Spilling dawn cold wind on us
That heralds winter's freeze
And bestow its own special grace.

Soon in some a high white slope we may lay.
There with partners and adversaries alike,
None so absolutely right or terribly wrong
Sleeping as one under a single sky.

It will be a grace to be together again.
The rope's brotherhood is so beautiful.
We ask the lead to take the lifeline up,
The second to be our belay.
Watchman, hold fast!

Now suddenly awake, we find total darkness.
Stars shine and the chill penetrates.
We fold our poignant thoughts into happy sleep.
Bivouac, rest now. The team ascends at daybreak.

Ode To The Weed

Julia Brown, Holladay Park Plaza



All hail the weed, the wonderful
weed The weed that serves so
many a need

It lives more than twelve years, it thrives
anywhere Twice a season, it blooms ten days,
needs no care. Its downy seeds hop a ride on
the wind's wing

Take root far and wide, and pop up the next
spring. The weed feeds us and heals us and gives
us much joy It is magic, a pleasure, a treasure, a
toy.

Some say just a sprig in a bridal bouquet
Makes sure the wife's husband never will
stray. Little girls weave weed petals into
their hair

And fill their May Baskets with blossoms to
share. The weed's liontoothed leaves moms serve
as greens Free to pick, they're within everyone's
means.

Healers use leaves, roots, petals for potions and
pills To treat cancer and asthma and many such
ills.

Water strained from boiled petals
dads bottle to age
When icy winds howl, and blinding blizzards
rage, Then bring up from the cellar that
amber wine And savor the taste of warm
summer sunshine.

Three cheers for the handy weed, source of such
pleasure. All hail the dandy weed, that national
treasure!

Opening Moment Of Tuesday Market

Carol Bosworth, Rose Villa Senior Living Community



A crowd slowly gathers
around the two tables under awnings
where mounds of bright vegetables wait
as if on altars.

Products of scattered kitchens
come together too, nestled in rows
like well-dressed children whispering
secrets before the school bell rings.

People cluster restlessly, their eyes
caressing the colors of bell peppers, tomatoes,
eggplant, squash; faces are eager
to get close to the clean crisp skins,
hands picking up some to look closer
and feel the smooth food, as if
hungry tongues were already licking.

The clock ticks down the minutes till opening time;
some people are irritated that the steward's clock
is so much slower than their own and must
be wrong, others tease, turning away
to visit an approaching friend, then come back
quickly to attend the vanishing time.
Someone laughs as tension increases, as
the last incredibly long minutes, the final eons
of moments, the ticking eternal seconds drain away.
Energy builds in the people, personalities flash into fire
and then fall into the last flickers of tension. Then
FIVE--FOUR--THREE--TWO--ONE--ZERO! The whole
community voices the words together
as if singing a hymn.

The waiting is over. All people
move up to meet the luscious,
alluring, beautiful mound of gifts
from the Earth--
and what remains is
the pure celebration
of buying vegetables.

Our Noble “Sir”

Loris Joline Shroyer, Willamette View



One beautiful coastal morning Jerry returned to our Newport vacation cottage from his daily walk smiling, “You need to see something. Come with me a few minutes.” A block away we entered the small, cluttered second-hand book store he liked to browse, managed this day by a rather unkempt-looking woman. There on the floor, charmingly wrestling a string, was a tiny kitten about six weeks old. Jerry asked the woman if the kitten was hers, and she replied yes and that he was part Siamese (our favorite breed). Mostly white as Siamese kittens are, he did show early signs of those markings. She added that he had a similar sister she could bring to the store next morning if we were interested. Although we’d loved all our various over-the-years collection of three dogs and five cats, that special place in both our hearts that defined us as “cat people” was captivated.

The next morning, we were due for the two-hour drive back home to our farm. Mom was with us for the summer, so she and I finished packing while Jerry went to fetch our new family member. When she arrived, slightly larger than her brother and with longer, softer fur, we quickly discovered the poor creature was infested with fleas! I fled with her to the porch, so fleas couldn’t invade our cottage. Mom dusted her with flea powder she used for her little chihuahua, Poco, (I learned later that should not be used on cats) and we left the kitten on the porch while collecting our gear. When I picked up the kitten, hordes of fleas were struggling up out of her fur (gasping for air?). Mom and I picked dozens off her and headed for the truck.

With a little wedging, our small Ford truck could seat three in front. I can see us now: Jerry driving, with Champagne (our Siamese) between him and me; kitten sleeping belly-up, tiny arms outspread, on my lap on a white towel so we could spot the pitiful fleas still crawling out; Poco on Mom’s lap; and Aussie (our shepherd dog) secured behind in the truck bed. That kitten slept so soundly—even with strange dog, cat, and people all around her—that we figured she must be exhausted from flea bites! Mom opened her window part way, so we could throw out fleas as they emerged. We laughed at the vision of our truck tooling down the highway disgorging a steady stream of dead and dying fleas from the passenger window.

That afternoon I rushed the kitten to a checkup at our home veterinary, who discovered and treated her ear mites (that figures . . .), administered a shot, and gave me appropriate flea dust. Her paws seemed rather large, so I had some doubt about her gender. The vet admitted that she could possibly be a male with yet-undescended testicles and that we’d probably know for sure in three more weeks. Gender undetermined, it (no more “she”) was called “Kitty.” Three weeks later, Kitty “became” a confirmed male.

A few days after that confirmation, we were on a weekend country ride, Jerry driving and Kitty lying in my lap, when I said to Jerry, “Well, now that we know Kitty’s a boy, he needs a name.” With Jerry’s being a World War Two history buff, I said, “Why don’t you name him for something from your history study?” He mulled that over briefly, then proposed, “How about ‘Winston’?” I was surprised and dubious, “Wouldn’t that seem a bit pompous for this little bit of fluff?” Jerry turned his eyes from the road to look at me, “Why no! That’s the name of a cat with character!” Bested by logic, I conceded, “Okay, Winston it is!” And so, he came to be—both Winston and a cat with character.

As weeks progressed, Winston’s distinctive Siamese chocolate-colored “points”—ears, legs, tail, and face markings—developed to go with his beautiful deep-blue eyes. He resembled the Himalayan cat breed developed in the mid-1930s from cross-breedings designed to combine the Siamese color pattern with the Persian softer voice and soft, downy fur—it felt luxurious just to pet Winston! When he wanted attention, it was humorous to hear instead of the customary Siamese “Yowl”—a mild little “Mew.” He got along fine with our other pets and amazed onlookers by romping wildly with our seven-year-old female Australian shepherd, who had loved and nuzzled him from the moment we got home. They daily chased through the yard or lay near each other.

At several months old, Winston was a typical “teen-aged” kitten: playful, dashing about, a swirling comet of energy. One Friday night after work we prepared to leave for our usual two nights at the coast, and I went outside to get Winston; but he had other ideas. He dashed up the huge Douglas fir by our house to crouch on a limb about 12 feet up, where he gamboled about and teased us as we tried to coax him down, deliberately dancing beyond Jerry’s reach from the ladder. Time short, we decided to leave food and water in the open garage for when he’d come down. At the coast Saturday night, a gale pounded us, with screaming winds and rain pummeling the house and rattling the windows. We knew the storm would reach home but felt Winston was surely safe—although we were concerned enough to return early Sunday. Arriving home, we were greeted by a stentorian “YOW-UL-L” from the fir tree! Yep, Winston had remained there through two days and many hours of deluge and wind. This time when Jerry climbed the ladder, Winston clambered down into his arms. After that, he occasionally used his Siamese voice—and did eventually learn to back down that tree.

We soon found that Winston got car-sick and couldn’t travel to the coast with us, but since he was very independent, we knew he could be left home. The first time we went without him and then returned home, I eagerly hopped out of the car with open arms, calling out to greet him, whereupon he sauntered over, leaned down, and nipped my ankle! Shocked, I said “Why, Winston!” Jerry raised his eyebrows and said, “Well, I guess he told you!”

Winston was the most self-confident, poised, loving cat we've ever known of. He weighed eighteen pounds, but that feathery fur made him look larger. Out there in the country, we'd had trouble over years with feral tomcats from neighbor barns attacking our female cats (that's why I knew the veterinarian so well). But with Winston around, Champagne never had a problem; and he never suffered a scratch or infection from battle. Occasionally I'd see him fiercely pursuing an interloper—our cat took no sass and no prisoners! When working outside, Jerry was often interrupted by Winston twining through his legs to be picked up for a cuddle; and when we wanted a picture of him, with his serene manner he actually seemed to pose. If Mom pushed her bedroom door shut for a nap, Winston would stroll up to the door, knock it open, and jump up on her bed as if he owned the place—and her (he did). His lordly demeanor and “presence” prompted Mom to dub him “SIR Winston,” which we admitted fit him perfectly.

From about eight years of age Winston developed a unique show of affection. Evenings, Jerry and I would sit peacefully on the couch reading or watching television, with Champagne on Jerry's lap or between us, while Winston lay on my lap, facing away. At some point, he would turn his head toward me, his gaze riveted on my face. He'd turn and heft himself up, place both paws on my shoulders, and purring loudly—passionately rub noses! Jerry would watch and laugh at this undeniable display of love. Winston didn't do this with Jerry, but it became his signature evening performance with me.

Our other cats all lived fifteen-to-nineteen years, but Winston developed cancer and was with us only ten. The veterinary staff told us he was “charming” and their favorite patient.

We felt terribly cheated to lose our Sir Winston so soon, but we recognized our special gift of having had his remarkable, memorable person-ality as a part of our lives.

Owyhee River

Pat Watne, Willamette View



An instant after the raft tipped up on its side, I fell into the frigid river. I heard, “Grab the raft,” and looked around for it. But the fast current swept me into the middle of the river. I swallowed water and struggled to catch my breath. Every few seconds I headed into another rapid, with water breaking over the top of me. I remembered to keep my feet in front of me heading downstream so I could push off rocks as I hurtled toward them. I concentrated on coming up for a breath after hitting another rapid and maintaining my feet first position.

The Owyhee River Gorge had beckoned to me for many years. When I saw that Road Scholar offered this trip, I signed up. We would travel with a geologist to learn more about this isolated, stark environment. The river is located in the extreme southeastern part of Oregon. It cuts through an arid, sparsely populated plateau and is designated as a wild and scenic river, with limited road access. The largest rapids were Class 3. I had experienced larger ones before. I knew this would be an easy float down the river.

The Owyhee can only be rafted in the spring with enough water from snowmelt. I picked the later of two trips offered, hoping for warmer weather. Unfortunately, in late April of that year the area experienced unseasonably cold weather. Snow covered the ground. Even though I slept in a tent and sleeping bag and wore numerous layers of clothes, I experienced a cold, sleepless night. Not a good beginning to the five-day trip. The forecast promised warmer weather. I wondered about that, but I had wanted to see this area for so long that I dismissed my concern about the cold.

The crew loaded the rafts with food and equipment while the leader lectured us in safety instructions. I listened but didn’t take it too seriously. After all, how could a company stay in business if it dumped old people in a cold river?

I dressed in my warmest long underwear, pants, fleece jacket, gloves, stocking hat, rain hat, jacket, and pants, plus two pairs of socks and boots. On top of this, I was cinched tightly into a life jacket. I waddled over to the raft I had been assigned to and climbed in. I questioned why we weren’t given dry suits and helmets but was assured they weren’t necessary. I thought, “These people are professionals. They know what they are doing.”

Our flotilla consisted of three rafts: one with equipment and the pilot in front; the one I rode in, consisting of equipment, five passengers and a pilot in the middle; and one with six paddlers and a pilot bringing up the rear. The morning passed uneventfully, but I was uncomfortably cold. We had not entered the scenic part of the gorge yet. The river ran fast but smooth.

After a stop for lunch, we loaded again. I looked forward to a more scenic section of the gorge. We soon entered an area with high, sheer rock canyon walls down to the water. The equipment raft went through a class 3 rapid effortlessly. Our pilot held back, waiting until the first raft passed through the rapid. Then he stood up, I assumed to scout the river. He instantly lost control of the raft, and fell into the water, tipping up the raft. Three of the passengers on the low side of the raft slid into the water. One person and the pilot came up next to the raft and the other two passengers pulled both of them back in quickly.

Two of us swept down the river in the fast, churning current. I quickly passed the other person in the water, travelling fast out in front. The shock of the extremely cold water, trying not to swallow any more water, and catching my breath consumed me. I had to concentrate hard not to panic. I frantically scanned the river, looking for a place to work myself over to the side and out of the rapids. But there wasn't any place for as far as I could see. Every time I floated around another bend in the river and through more rapids, the canyon walls went straight up. I had to stay in the middle to keep from being smashed into the canyon walls.

The thought crossed my mind that I had said I wanted to die with my boots on. But not in a river. Hypothermia started to affect my thinking and actions. I wanted to save myself, but I was giving up hope of being able to do that. For the first time in my life, I thought I might die.

I continued to drop into rapids, being submerged, coming back up and heading into another rapid. Finally, I heard someone yell, "Grab the paddle." With difficulty I turned my head around to see the paddle raft racing to catch me, a vision I never imagined while I struggled to save myself. I could sense the paddlers pulling hard to a fast cadence of "Pull! Pull!" The pilot screamed, "Keep paddling!" I caught the extended paddle. In the front of the raft, two strong people pulled me in. I had no strength to help. I sat on the floor of the raft and clung to the legs of the two front paddlers to keep from being bounced back into the river as we continued to ride the roller coaster of rapids. I sat eye level to the waves. Freezing water continued washing over me. One of the paddlers I clung to shouted, "She's shaking violently!" I heard the pilot from what seemed to be a great distance yell, "Get in the back of the raft!" but I couldn't move. Uncontrollable shaking had taken over my body. We continued on down the river, the paddlers pulling hard and fast. Finally, the canyon opened up and we reached a small, level spot to beach the rafts.

Two strong people carried me out of the raft. Hands pulled off my wet clothes. I had no concern for modesty. The leader of the crew pulled off her dry clothes and struggled to get them on me. I wasn't able to help. Other crew members unloaded equipment, set up a tent, and heated water. Someone put me into a sleeping bag and placed chemical hot packs on my body core. Another person held my hands, trying to keep me engaged. I was blacking out, suffering from shock and hypothermia. After hours of shaking, I slowly recovered. By evening, still weak, I joined my comrades for dinner.

By happenstance, a patrol boat pulled into our area, checking on permits and monitoring the campsite for violations. The two deputies heard what had happened and offered to take me out of the canyon if I wanted to in the morning. But the way out they offered entailed climbing the hill behind the river. Assured it was only 1,000 feet up, I knew I could hike out. But the deputies needed to be reassured several times. By satellite phone, they arranged for me to be picked up by the local sheriff at the top of the hill. Rocks and loose dirt made the climb out slippery and slow. Both deputies trailed close behind me as I labored up the hillside. I felt thankful to be on my feet and hiking.

I never did enjoy the sights in the Owyhee River Gorge.

Peaceful

Donald C. Little, Dallas Retirement Village



Softly ephemeral

A zephyr to the eye

Alpenglow

Scammers

Mary Andrews, Willamette View



A message appeared on my cell phone: “Fraudulent activity detected on your Bank of America credit card ending in 6089. Please call this number.” I figured it was a scam and deleted it because I was still upset about a call my husband Jim had received two weeks earlier. It was from “Lieutenant Brad Fisher, Multnomah County Sheriff - Badge No. 588.”

“You are about to be arrested and taken to jail for failing to appear for jury duty,” the sheriff said. “You may appeal, but must go to the Multnomah County Courthouse, 1021 SW 4th Street, room 4C where assistant district attorney Paul Clemens will hear your case.”

Jim had been diagnosed with early Alzheimer’s eighteen months earlier, and with pancreatic cancer just two months before that call. The caller frightened him. “I have not received a notice to appear for jury duty,” he said.

“Mail gets lost. Have you ever received mail sent to the wrong address?” the Lieutenant responded.

“Well... yes,” Jim muttered.

“I’m just doing my duty as directed by the Multnomah County Courthouse. I’m not responsible for faulty mail delivery,” the sheriff said.

While this was happening, I was at Willamette View, checking on the apartment that we would be moving into in less than two weeks. Jim did not feel well enough to accompany me. He decided to rest in our NE Portland home and wait for my return. He called my cell phone, as directed by the sheriff, who had told him to have his wife call back immediately. Jim’s voice shook as he described the sheriff’s call.

“I’m on my way,” I said - my blood pressure rising. I was angry that someone had unnecessarily frightened my ill husband. I was home in 15 minutes and assumed that we were dealing with a scam but also wondered if we were both in some kind of weird trouble. I knew we were too old to be called for jury duty.

I dialed the sheriff’s phone. When he answered I said, “You’ve called the wrong number. My husband is excused from jury duty because he’s 80 years old.”

“This is a *grand* jury summons. There are no age deferrals at that level,” he responded. “Besides, the summons was really for you. Your husband seems to be mixed up.”

I was suspicious, but the guy had a plausible response to every argument I made, and he didn’t have an accent, something I assumed was typical of scammers. “Oh, then I suppose we must appeal,” I said, through clenched teeth. Jim lay on the couch under a warm blanket -- shivering.

When I am gone, will my grandsons remember summer with me? Today I have a pitcher of filtered water in my refrigerator, I religiously change the filter every six weeks, and I have to remind myself to drink this safe, tasteless water.

“But, first,” the sheriff said, “you must go to the QVC and send a recharge order for \$5500 to this number; 503-307-6516. Your money will be reimbursed when you appeal your case in Court. If you don’t do this, you will be arrested within the hour.”

“Ohhh - I’ll do that - right after I make a phone call,” I said and hung up. I checked the phone number on the web - area code 503 - Verizon. No other identifying information was given. I was furious that this creepy criminal had convinced my husband that he might be arrested. I felt terrible that I had left Jim alone and tried to convince him that it was a scam - that he should not be worried. My assurances did not seem to help. He was certain that the sheriff was legitimate, so I called the Multnomah County Courthouse and explained the situation. I was immediately connected to a *real* Sheriff.

“Several people in Portland have fallen for this scam,” the *real* Sheriff said. “Once the money is wired it is impossible to trace it or retrieve it - even 15 minutes later. “You did the right thing by not falling for it.” He wrote down the number the phony sheriff had given Jim and called me later to say that the scammers had already deleted it. Clever crooks.

I was disgusted knowing that these criminals prey on seniors, and that my husband, an esteemed retired University professor was a target. I knew that Jim would not have responded as he did had he been in good health. I sat beside him and relayed the *real* Sheriff’s information. He seemed somewhat relieved.

It was a week later when the email from Bank of America appeared. I was sure it was another scam. Jim suggested it might be prudent to contact the bank. I didn’t. The next day we received a recorded phone message from the bank. I deleted it. The following day another recorded phone message said, “Please listen to the charges that have been sent to your account. Push “1” if they are valid and “2” if they are not. There were a bunch of them - one for \$279 and a couple for \$179 all from companies I’d never heard of. I didn’t punch either number, found our credit card, and called the number on the back to inform the bank of the scam.

Once transferred to the fraud department, I spoke to a calm, patient person. “We’ve flagged this account because the current activity does not fit the pattern for which it’s been used the past two years. We rejected the charges and did not pay them.” I asked her if she recognized the companies that had submitted the charges. “No,” she said, “They’re all European companies.

“Oh,” I responded, “I wonder if the charges were initiated by our grandson Julian. We share that card with him.”

“You may want to contact your grandson,” she replied.

We had given Julian a Bank of America Alaska Airlines credit card to be used for travel between the two Portlands while he attended Bowdoin College. For two years he used it exactly as intended, charging at least one round trip a year -- nothing else. When he left for his junior year semester abroad, we told him he should use the card for his travel to Copenhagen, within Europe, and his journey home in December. We rarely used the card ourselves.

I called Julian. "Hi, what time is it there? Were you sleeping?"

"It's 5:30 in the afternoon Gramma!"

"Oh, that's a surprise. I've been talking with the credit card company. Have you been having trouble with your card?"

"Yes! The card won't let me book a flight to Oslo or Berlin. I can't figure out what's wrong."

"What are the names of the booking companies?"

They were the same unfamiliar names the bank fraud department had given me. "That explains the calls I've been getting from the bank," I said. "Apparently we forgot to let the bank know that you would be abroad, and they stopped payment on those charges."

"I kept trying to use it over and over and it would not go through," Julian said.

"I'll take care of it, Julian. Soon it should work just fine. What's it like for you to be living in Denmark?"

"I love it. My host family is great, my classes are more interesting than I thought they would be, and I have friends in Europe that I want to visit while I'm here."

I called the bank, explained the situation, and called Julian again. "You may use the card now. We love you - have some terrific adventures."

* * * * *

The *phony* sheriff had robbed me of my common sense -- but he did not get our money or ruin Julian's European sojourn. My beloved Jim recovered from the scam ordeal but not from cancer. We lived together in our new Willamette View home for six more months before he died. We did not answer phone calls from unknown numbers.

Seeing Rembrandt After Cataract Surgery

Kara Klinger, Holladay Park Plaza



i

Lamps shine down on my right eye--two bright suns streaming through a fog of voices.

My heart pounds in spite of drugs to slow it down. A speculum holds my eyelid open. The ophthalmologist inserts a needle, extracts the old lens and pours a new lens in Painless. Frightening. My clouded vision is gone.

Cataract surgery isn't much of an issue, unless it's your own

ii

I didn't want surgery.

True, I could no longer read a movie marquee half a block away. The subtleties of paintings were lost, even when I stood in front of them. On black nights, halos over street lights began to explode. I could still see, though one eye was better than the other. Why gamble with something as precious as sight?

At my drivers' test, blurry letters danced behind bright lights. It was time.

iii

My ophthalmologist called me one of the lucky ones who made the transition easily. What a triumph! We had tricked time, reversed the aging of my eyes by ten years at least. Hooray, hooray for us! 20/20 again! What a gift, what a treasure! How much younger my eyes were than everyone else's!

I saw my friends' wrinkles, found grime in my kitchen sink and white hairs on my clothes. And then, OH NO! I saw— saw my face— aged ten years overnight.

How long have there been tunnels down my cheek? Hollows? Prissy lines above my lips? How could this mottled skin be mine? I protested, willed it not to be.

iv

On the road in winter, I can navigate again. At museums, I can read explanations in small print from two yards away. Ahh, the discoveries.

At a Rembrandt exhibit, my new eyes find genius--Rembrandt's people -- warm bodies breathing all around me. Transfixed, I walk among them. I see their pores, feel them sweat. I imagine the textures and smells of their elegant clothes as if I were wearing them. I touch fox fur, hold their brilliantly colored fabrics in my arms.

I know these people. Their deep expressive faces tell me who they are. Up close without filters, I see faces hundreds of years older than mine, ravishingly real.

Staring Stupidly

Lindsey Daniel, Holladay Park Plaza



When I wake up,
I'm not good for much
except staring
stupidly.

Try to do more and I mess something up,
pour Meow Mix in my bowl, or Cheerios in the cat's.
Best just to sit and let my brain awaken one cell at a time,
with little pops like bubble wrap.

When I was young, I threw myself
out of the warm, flannel nest
when the alarming buzzer pierced my dreams;
stood under the shower, sluicing sleep away,
while in the kitchen, the pre-set coffee maker did its thing.
By the time I was dressed and breakfasted and at the wheel turning the
key,
my mind caught up.

Well, usually.
Beneath my desk I kept two pairs of shoes,
one black, one blue,
for the days when I found myself at work with unmatched feet.

Now I watch the clouds or the morning
fog or the sun coming up in its time,
wondering at the way the world keeps spinning and
orbiting without my giving it a daily whack.
I sit on the couch in the saggy spot that knows my shape,
just savoring and staring stupidly.

Sweet Love

Donna Comfort, Friendsview Retirement Community



The cracks in my heart were in desperate need,
in desperate need of repair.

The hurt and pain deep inside
called for intensive care.

I couldn't fix it, though I tried;
I needed what only your love could provide.
A love that filled every broken space
and turned my thoughts to a brighter place.

With your sweet love, my soul you fed,
dressing the aching scars that bled,
with tender touch and soothing word,
and a love that my heart finally heard.

The American Dream?

Greg Hadley, Mary's Woods



If you are close to my age (85), you grew up in the Great Depression of the 1930s. Of course, there were certain folks who probably weren't adversely affected by the world wide economic catastrophe. To most people in our circle this was a time of financial hardship if not outright ruin. My father was a partner in an automobile tire store that went bankrupt. He was not employed on a regular basis for almost five years after that. I was too young to know that we were poor. There always seemed to be something to eat although choices were limited and usually bland or unexciting. Lots of potato soup, franks and beans and a boiled chicken on Sundays. During the summer and fall we had plenty of fresh vegetables and fruits grown in local gardens. Mother canned tomatoes, plums, peaches and cherries for us to enjoy in the winter. My parents seemed to have friends with older children. I was the frequent recipient of "hand-me-down" clothes that looked perfectly serviceable to me. So, I was warmly dressed, had a full stomach and a snug bed to sleep in. Who could ask for more? When everyone you know is in the same boat, things don't seem so bad.

There were lots of alphabet soup federal programs in the 1930s to get people working and boost the economy. CCC, NRA, WPA and others provided more psychological help than anything; people felt the government was "doing something." In reality, the only thing that pulled us out of the Great Depression was World War II. Every aspect of the economy mobilized for the war effort. Steel production, coal, oil, vehicles, airplanes, textiles, food production—everything needed to produce war materiel was in full swing.

Everybody not in the armed forces was working including many women which was a relatively new phenomenon. "Rosie the Riveter" represented a new class of American heroine. Wages and savings soared. While many basic commodities were rationed or in short supply, wartime created a pent up demand for consumer goods that was satisfied after the hostilities ceased. The economy continued booming after the war as the USA supplied goods and services to rebuild most of Europe and Asia. While the economic situation experienced the normal ups and down of a capitalistic system, the overall vector was always up.

Our returning service men and women seemed to crave a restoration of normality and the opportunity to pursue the hopes and ambitions that had been put on hold by the war. Most were searching for "The American Dream." Broadly, this meant having a steady job with adequate wages that offered a chance for promotion and economic growth. It also included the chance to acquire a home, support a family and see your children have good educational opportunities and a future that looked better than yours.

There were many variables to this concept but this summary fairly describes the aspirations of most Americans. Those who attained this goal became the backbone of the nation's Middle Class, a vibrant component of the economic growth in the country. There was a remarkable characteristic of the Middle Class. Whenever one of the class broke out and achieved wealth through hard work and good fortune, there was rarely jealousy for the successes. Instead, people said, "Good for them; I hope I can do the same someday."

In the 1990s, the economic engine of the economy began to change. As technology experienced explosive growth, thousands of new ventures were started to exploit the capabilities of small computers and wireless hand-held communication devices. Great tranches of investment capital were now diverted to high tech companies instead of to traditional sectors. The effects of this economic transformation were profound, some good and some bad. Technology began replacing human activity. Computers often increased the productivity of labor. Hourly wages stagnated.

There was a redistribution of wealth. Young entrepreneurs capitalizing on the technology revolution founded companies that achieved enormous levels of value in the marketplace. A handful of "twenty-somethings" virtually controlled the high-tech field and many of them became multi-billionaires before they were thirty years old. Old style economic models were turned upside-down. The economic history of this country from 1990 to 2008 would fill many library shelves. This short essay can only examine the effects superficially from 40,000 feet. The period was one where new ways of thinking were required about the concentration of wealth, working class wages, the ultimate role of technological innovation—and, yes, a different method of considering "The American Dream." The "good old days" were over. No one knew for sure what would replace them. Economic jolts in 2000 and 2008 clarified nothing.

The so-called Middle Class was shaken. Many no longer believed that their kids were going to do better than the parents. Soaring costs put higher education out of reach for many. Globalization forced some Industries to relocate their production to foreign lands thus eliminating jobs here. Enormous wealth concentrated in certain areas (Silicon Valley, Los Angeles, New York) was in stark contrast to the economic malaise in many urban areas. We were becoming a nation of haves and have nots. Instead of cheering on their good fortune, the 99 % now deeply resented the 1% and their massive accumulation of wealth. At times, the nation seemed close to anarchy.

Now comes Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, two of the richest people on earth. These two men—and several more like them—said, "We have been very fortunate in business and are grateful for the wealth we have accumulated. Rather than passing this on to our heirs, we intend to give this money to noble causes around the world that can benefit mankind in a variety of ways." We're talking multi-billions of philanthropy here. What a generous offering from these wealthy people. Their assistance will help many in important ways. We salute them!

This leads to our final proposition: How much is enough? Most people spend their lives working hard to support their families and hope to set aside enough for a comfortable, if not expansive, retirement. Each person brings different skills, abilities, circumstances and opportunities to these economic objectives. Include timing and luck and almost everyone arrives at the finish line with a different nest egg. In the worst case, poor financial decisions, bad habits and faulty money management may leave some woefully lacking in retirement funds at the end of their working lives. It is rare to get a second chance to correct this problem when we are senior citizens.

At the other end are people whose situations allowed them to garner great wealth. How should we define “great wealth?” The answer to this question is *totally subjective*; for the purposes of this essay let us say it is \$10 Million. I have friends and acquaintances who have achieved this plateau and beyond. Mostly they are solid citizens who profess gratitude for their good fortune, are generous contributors to worthwhile causes and do not put on airs of the rich and famous. Unfortunately, I also know a couple of individuals who describe their wealth as “never enough.” No matter how much they have, they are obsessed with obtaining more. If they have \$10 Million, they must have \$20 Million; if \$20 Million then \$50 Million, etc. I don’t judge but how much is enough? I think it is a question for all of us, not just those of great wealth. How long must we climb the steep, quicksand-laced economic hill seeking further wealth? Have you considered this question and its implications?

And, what of “The American Dream?” Do you still believe in it? Are you still pursuing it? Have you passed on this ideal to your children and grandchildren? At my advanced age and well past my “sell buy” date, I look back with enormous gratitude for a wonderful life full of more good times than bad, bursting with smiles, laughter and happiness, a few tears thrown in to keep me anchored to reality. However you wish to define “The American Dream,” I’m pretty sure I have lived it.

“The American Dream is not that every man must be equal to every other man. The American Dream is that every man must be free to become whatever God intends he should be.” Ronald Reagan

The Language of Shells

Mary Kalesse, Friendsview Retirement Community



It was the last hour of Maddie's 24 hour get-away and she still had not found what she was looking for. Every trip to the beach these days included that search for one perfect shell - her preference a sand dollar. Although fragile and easy to miss because of their flat form and sandy coloring, Maddie felt they were the best - their round shape, the floral design, the tiny hole on the bottom, beautiful in every way. One perfect shell was her rabbit's foot. A whole sand dollar from each beach trip became for her almost a personal promise of good luck, of personal wholeness and healing.

And boy, did Maddie need some wholeness and healing! Everything in her life seemed fractured, partial, discouraging, or a downright failure. Her job was full of pressure to perform what seemed like herculean tasks for a stickler of a boss. She felt totally unequipped for all that was being asked of her. Home life was no better. With a troubled teen, two preschoolers to keep in tow, and a husband working two jobs, her away-from-the-office life revolved around teacher conferences, homework battles, and a house that would not stay clean, organized or happy.

Maddie was desperate to find her perfect shell! Somehow she felt it could give her courage to re-enter her crazy life with a symbol of at least one thing that was whole and beautiful. It would be a sign that her life could become perfect too - all the disorder and unhappiness, all the scattered thoughts and loose ends tied up and brought together into one perfect whole.

But as Maddie walked the beach, no perfect sand dollars came into sight. The sea had been rough for several days and all she could find were broken shells. Sometimes she would think she had spotted a whole one only to turn it over and discover the entire underside was broken out. Other times she came upon areas where the waters had been especially turbulent, shallow, and rocky as they swept onto the sandy shore. These shells were merely fragments. As Maddie walked and scanned, she became more and more discouraged in her quest. Maybe this time, when she needed it most, there would be no perfect shell to give her courage, to give her something to hold on to that represented what she wanted life to be - perfect. Time was running out, beach-combing would have to end soon. Maddie sadly turned and headed back to the cabin that had been her place of refuge the past few hours.

As she tells it now, Maddie doesn't know what caused her to stop and pick up a broken shell. Maybe desperation? But she did and that changed everything. As she turned the broken sand dollar over and over in her hands, it seemed to tell a story that she could relate to. That broken, imperfect shell had a language of its own that Maddie could understand.

The shell she picked up from the surf, had been shattered, yet it whispered to her a story of survival through the rough and tumble of ocean currents that paid no heed to its frailty. Maddie considered her own life. Yes, life had been hard - was hard - she felt fragile and struggling to survive in waters too rough and deep. Yet Maddie had survived. She was hanging on to her marriage, her children, her work, her faith. As she listened to the shell, she heard a message of endurance, survival, and resilience. Her faith confirmed what the shell revealed in its brokenness - that all things are possible with God!

The message spoken by the little battered sand dollar piqued Maddie's curiosity. What if these broken shells, rather than a perfect one, were just what she needed to gather up? What if all of the unfinished, tattered pieces of her life and work could be reminders of her persistence, her resilience, anchored in the grace in which God had immersed her.

The testimony of that first shell led Maddie to continue picking up broken shells eager to see what stories other shell fragments would reveal to her. She was determined to listen carefully. The next shell had been stepped on by a careless beach comber, uninterested or unfamiliar with the language of shells. This one told a story of the casual cruelty so often experienced in today's world through actions or hurtful comments. In listening to the shell's voice Maddie was reminded that no one had been able to stamp out the faith she held tightly, nor her value or worth. She was and would continue to be a beloved child of God. His love for her was complete, eternal, unconditional. Isaiah 43 came to mind, "When you pass through waters, they will not sweep over you..."

In her final moments at the beach that day, Maddie picked up a sand dollar that had been broken open exposing its interior space. The shell shouted that her brokenness was a window to the world of God's loving care. She was cracked open through pain, pressure and loss. The shell gently reminded her His strength was being made perfect in her weakness. She might not understand the why of her burdens and sorrows, but as she resisted the temptation to hide or pretend perfection, God could use her struggles to reveal Himself to her and her world.

As she left the beach that day Maddie was filled with a new sense of courage and hope. Surprising her, it was the broken shards that had become the perfect shells for which she was searching. They spoke to her of a God who cared about her and the burdens she carried. He had spoken words of love that day through the language of the shells. In those words of love Maddie found the comfort, affirmation, and wholeness she longed for in her less than perfect life.

The Frog With The Big Sound

Barbara Barber, Kingsley Court Retirement Center



There's a frog living inside our garden pond,
And I can hear him croaking ALL night long.

Croak, Croak, he sings loud and proud,
I can't really sleep because he's croaking so loud.

I turned on the pond lights to see where he was at,
He must be very huge to make a sound like that.

But suddenly it's quiet and there is no movement at all,
So I turned off the light and ran down the hall.

I'm back in my bed with eyes closing tight,
Ready to go to sleep, way into the night.

But then I awake with that horrible sound, of Croak, Croak,
And realize, THAT frog is still around.

My mom helped me look in the pond the next day,
And we searched in the water but figured, he just got away.

Funny thing about that frog is he sounds soooo big,
He couldn't very well hide under any small twig.

There was a small bucket that was lying on its side,
And there he was! In a perfect place to hide.

"Here he is!" my mom said, "but he's very, very small,"
And she put him in her hand and said "he's just NOT big at all!"

“I’ll put him on a rock,” my mom said, “and there let stay,
And keep him safe in the pond, night and day.”

NOW I love to hear the “little frog with his great big voice,”
Sing to me nightly, songs with any froggie choice, of
CROAK! CROAK! CROAK! CROAK! CROK!

Good Night

The Perfect Christmas Pageant

Paul LaRue, Capital Manor



It was December – time to plan the annual Christmas Pageant at a small church in Dallas, Oregon. Time to recruit children from the Sunday School to be angels and shepherds – and sheep! Time to find last year’s costumes, or for Mothers to make new ones.

The most essential character, of course, would be the Baby Jesus. We could put a doll in the straw-filled “manger”. But wouldn’t it be fun to have a real live baby?

Steve, the choir director, and Christine, the organist, had a suggestion. “Our son Brian might be the right age. Fourteen year -old Nancy, our baby-sitter, could be the Mother Mary – she and Brian are used to each other, so it should work perfectly.”

When the night for the Pageant arrived. Parents and friends filled the pews and set the scene by singing: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”. The Pastor read words from Isaiah: “For unto us a child is born.” And while the choir sing: “Angels We Have Heard on High”, two junior high girls in white dresses with sparkling halos came on stage – and with them Joseph and Mary and Baby Jesus. The next verse asked “Shepherds, why this jubilee?” while bathrobe-clad boys with wooden staffs came herding the youngest children in their fuzzy sheep costumes. The stage was all set. But while the children sang “Away in a Manger”, little Brian didn’t agree with the words: “Little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.” Real baby that he was, he began to cry! Nancy tried jostling him on her shoulder, but still he wailed “Mommy!” Mother Christine couldn’t help – she was busy at the organ. Nancy’s mother couldn’t help – she was at the piano. And Daddy Steve was at the back of the church, ready to come up the aisle with a trio singing: “We Three Kings of Orient Are.”

On the 2nd stanza, one king sang alone: “Born a king on Bethlehem’s plain...” and the baby’s crying stopped. The soloist was Steve! Brian knew that voice – and was no longer afraid!

On Christmas Sunday morning, the pastor shared this story as a wonderful illustration. “When we recognize our Heavenly Father’s voice, we know we don’t have to be afraid.”

The angel told the shepherds: “Fear not, for I bring you tidings of great joy.” And the congregation sang: “Joy to the World, the Lord is come.”

This all happened at the Dallas United Methodist Church in December 1980. I remember it well. I was the Pastor of that church.

The Pink Coat

Pearl Steinberg, Willamette View



When I was in grammar school, my summer vacation ended just before the Labor Day weekend. That is when my mother would take me shopping for new clothes that would last, ideally, through the school year. We lived on Long Island in New York and the store that my mother favored was S. Klein's at Union Square and 14th Street on Manhattan's East Side. This store carried quality clothing at bargain prices because their merchandise was either last year's "must-haves" or this year's overruns.

The trip to the store was part of the adventure. We had to take the Long Island Railway into Penn Station, and then a subway down to 14th street.

I remember in exquisite detail the shopping expedition when I was 10 years old. The main focus on that day was the purchase of a winter coat. When we stepped off the elevator in the Girl's Outerwear department of Klein's department store, my eye was drawn to a mannequin outfitted in a pink coat. The coat had a velvet collar in a deeper shade of pink and a short cape attached to the shoulders. It was love at first sight. I told my mom that that was the coat I wanted.

My mother, meanwhile, had headed to the regular racks and after rifling through the coats hanging there, had picked out a simply tailored brown coat which she brought for me to try on. I pointed to the floor model of the pink coat and insisted that I first wanted to try on the pink coat. In order to avoid a scene, my mother asked a saleswoman if she could please find that coat in my size. When the salesperson returned with the coat in the correct size, she helped me put it on and then stood back as I looked into the full length mirror. My face lit up--I was enchanted. Never had a garment transformed me as this one did. Looking back at me from the mirror was the reflection of the being that I knew was the true me, a veritable princess. As far as I was concerned, we had found my new winter coat.

My mother had a different view. She pointed out that the light color was impractical and would have to be cleaned frequently, leaving me without a warm coat for days at a time. She suggested that I try on the brown coat to see how warm and handsome it looked. To please her, although I knew that I would never settle for such an ordinary garment, I tried it on. She exclaimed at its perfection--said the color brought out the rich brown of my eyes. She compared my eyes to the soulful look of a cow's eyes. That comparison was not, by any means, the words that would sway a ten year old to select that particular coat.

I told my mother that I had made up my mind. I really, truly, wanted the pink coat. I insisted that I would be very careful to keep it clean. She used every argument to prove that it would be a mistake. She even enlisted the saleswoman to bolster her side of the discussion. I must confess that at this juncture, I used a ploy that many children employ under similar instances of stress--I stamped my feet, raised my voice, and, in general, was totally obnoxious. My poor mother was embarrassed by my intransigence, and to placate me, said that we would purchase the pink coat.

Unbeknownst to me, she had signaled the saleswoman to wrap up the brown coat.

Pleased by my victory, as we rode home on the train, I dwelt on the thought of showing the new coat to my father. How delighted he would be when he saw how pretty it made me look.

When we arrived home, my dad asked if we had had a successful shopping trip. I grinned and said, "Wait until you see my new coat--it is so-o-o beautiful."

I took the box from my mother and tore open the package. To my horror, after parting the tissue paper, I saw the brown coat. "Mom," I cried out, "The saleswoman made a terrible mistake--she wrapped the wrong coat!" My mother urged me to keep calm, not to get excited. She said it wasn't a mistake. She agreed that the pink coat was very pretty, but she knew that I sometimes got carried away by the drama of the moment. She felt that she had to make an adult decision without creating a scene. Mother continued, "I truly believe the brown coat is the better choice, and so I asked the saleswoman to wrap it up. I know that, in time, you will come to realize that." She tried to reason with me, but I was beyond reason. I felt betrayed.

All that winter the brown coat hung in my closet. I wore my last year's coat with the sleeves 3 inches above my wrist. I never wore the new coat. I have no idea what happened to it. But after that experience, when we went shopping, my mother allowed me to have more input in selecting my wardrobe. She even let me make some major fashion mistakes, if they weren't too costly. I eventually learned to moderate my dramatic tendencies and I even had to acknowledge that Mother was often right.

The Seasons

Cleve Boehi, Mary's Woods



In the spring . . .

If I could be a ray of sunshine, I would lead you from your darkened room and warm your sweet face and failing body and walk you through the gardens that surround our Mary's Woods home. We would laugh together in the sunshine and delight in the fragrance of lilac and azalea.

In the summer . . .

If I could be a boat, I'd ask you to pilot us to our favorite spot right off our lake house property in the beautiful cove filled with water lilies and ducks and frogs and osprey and even bald eagles. We would sip our wine and savor the evening stillness and smile and smile and smile again.

In the autumn . . .

If I could be the wind, I would carry us away over all the homes we have loved and the waterways that have captured our hearts. I would transport us to our most romantic vacation spot . . . that lovely lakeside inn in Austria. We would sit on the balcony off our room and pretend to be Baron von Trapp and Maria from "The Sound of Music." We would smile and laugh at the thought of it.

In the winter . . .

If I could be a crystal snowflake, I would fall in such a way that a path would open before you. You would never feel the cold. The clouds in your eyes would clear and you would see the beauty and uniqueness in each and every snowflake. We would walk and skip like children and gather snowballs and chase each other and laugh and laugh and laugh again.

And in the final season of our lives, if I could be an angel, I would fly us both to Heaven. We would cast our eyes upon the beautiful world below and praise God for the rich and full life that we shared. And then we would hold hands and enter the gates of Heaven, and we would rejoice and dance and sing through all eternity.

The Woman in The Starfish Grill

Dick Smith, Rose Villa Senior Living Community



“Just one?” the waiter in the Starfish Grill asked.

“Yes, I’m Leo Conlin from Corvallis. I actually had a reservation for two, but my wife, Kate, phoned. She’s been delayed in driving out here to the coast.”

The waiter led him to a table by a floor-to-ceiling window with an attractive view of Manzanita Beach. Behind the row of window tables was a tier of dark leather booths, set higher than the tables to maximize the view.

After ordering a razor clam dinner with a glass of viognier, Conlin surveyed the scene outside. The late afternoon sun was slipping behind a line of battleship grey clouds. Through the gathering gloom he could just see successive rows of white breakers gnawing at the beach. On the nearby spit, a dark outline of coastal pines nodded toward the restaurant in the rising sea wind.

Turning to check out the warm colors and nautical decorations of the dining room, he was startled to see a beautiful young woman seated in one of the booths. Conlin had not noticed her come in, but there she was. She looked up from her menu, and for a moment their eyes met. Embarrassed, they both averted their gaze. Nevertheless, Conlin soon found that he could steal sight of her by turning his head toward the beach and observing her reflection in the glass wall. The youthful curves that pressed outward against her silky blouse stirred a deep yearning in Conlin that he had not experienced for some time. Too long ago, he thought — was it really months? He had been working too hard.

Finishing her order of oysters and a bread pudding dessert, the woman lingered over coffee and a book she had brought with her. She read slowly, occasionally turning a page. Twice Conlin thought he sensed her watching him, but each time that he discretely raised his eyes to view her reflection, her attention seemed to be on the book. Perhaps, he thought, her awareness of him was just his imagination, fueled by his own guilt for spying on her.

Then suddenly the book was closed and she began walking toward the adjacent bar.

He watched as her closely wrapped hips undulated through the doorway.

Conlin quickly signed his bill. “I think I need a nightcap,” he muttered to the waiter as he headed for the bar.

The bartender greeted Conlin in the semi-darkness and asked, “Looking for someone?”

“Actually, I was expecting my wife, but she’s been delayed until tomorrow.”

“Well, if you’re alone,” the bartender said with a wink, “the woman in the corner booth just tipped me twenty to suggest that she might provide some company.”

“Uh, thanks,” Conlin replied, looking in the direction indicated. The bar was decorated like an undersea grotto in twilight where customers might meet discretely. He walked toward her. The candle on her table cast just enough illumination for her Titian red hair to frame her fair skin and sensuous eyes. She glanced up at him in anticipation. He knew he had to say something.

“Buy you a drink? This table looks pretty dry.”

“Maybe. You alone?” she asked, leaning toward him. He wondered if she realized how much of her dense cleavage was showing. Women always seemed so naive about such things, but one wondered.

Clearly, here was his opportunity for an outstanding pickup line. But Conlin’s response was not going to be textbook. He always had to be honest — honest, even if it meant losing a delightful opportunity. Nevertheless, he couldn’t believe he was hearing himself tell the truth.

“Yes, I’m alone. My wife has been delayed until tomorrow afternoon.”

“I’m alone and waiting too, so I guess there’s no reason for us not to enjoy our company over a drink.”

That was easy, Conlin thought, relieved. “What’s your drink?”

“Beefeater and tonic — with a straw,” she added, moistening her lips.

They talked about themselves and their dreams over their drinks, and then over a second round. They were enjoying each other. At last, he said, “It’s getting late. Can I walk you to your room?”

“I haven’t checked in,” she replied with a sensuous smile as she snuggled closer to him in the booth. “Why don’t we just go to your room? I assume you’ve got a king size awaiting your wife’s arrival.”

Conlin could only nod. His mind was suddenly full of expectations. He paid the tab, and they walked to his room with their arms around each other. His room was on the third floor.

“You got an ocean view!” she exclaimed. She walked to the window where she gazed down on the rolling lines of surf destroying themselves on the beach. “I love ocean views — they make me think of sultry liaisons and memorable nights!” Still looking out the window, she took off her blouse, and then turned slowly toward him. She was wearing a sheer bra, designed to enhance both her cleavage and the shadow of her nipples.

Coming to him, she unbuttoned his shirt and pressed herself against him. He reached around her and skillfully unhooked her bra with one hand while holding her head as he kissed her deeply.

“This is a fun game you suggested,” she sighed. “What would your wife say?”

“But you *are* my wife,” he protested.

“No, we get *us* until I arrive tomorrow afternoon.”

“Mmm. I like that. Lots of things to try in the meantime. By the way, what’s your name?”

“Just call me the Woman in the Starfish Grill,” she said with a grin, and let her skirt fall to the floor.

Leo and Kate Conlin loved playing games together.

Time

Lois Manookian, Holladay Park Plaza



I wonder,
can I write a poem
while having lunch?

Will this become a poem
or simply an excuse,
my excuse for running out of time.

Time does clearly run away
in all directions
much of the time.

A daily contest not known to pause,
this balancing of Time and Life
includes my check book, or exercise;

Don't forget the laundry.
Read a book, but first a magazine
or take a walk; surely the sun is out by now.

Early morning has been my goal,
writing a poem as the winter sun comes up,
and the world around me changes.

Ah yes, time finds her running shoes
and runs away with life, and balance,
while I am needing food again.

Perhaps today, I will write my life,
or maybe tomorrow will give me a little
time, my best friend, running in all directions.

Tolavano Morn

Barbara Nelson, Capital Manor



Haystack Rock pokes through the mist,
This mild November morn.
Spots of blue,
The fog breaks through,
And hints of sun (not storm).

Six seagulls bathe in tidal pools
Along the misty shore.
And walk and "squack" and flutter off
And dine on fish, and soar.

Lone walkers, joined by joggers, dogs
Along the hazy strand.
A burst of sun brings kids with pails
To mold the dampened sand.

Then suddenly it "gathers up"
And drizzles us with rain!!!
We laugh, and cover up our heads
"Till sun comes out again.

Tortoise Talk

Dan Roberts, Mary's Woods



For a couple decades after settling in Southern Oregon's Rogue Valley, I spent all four seasons there. Winter's gray seemed a reasonable price for the beauty of the other seasons. Then one February, at the urging of friends, my wife, Diane, and I pointed our car south and discovered that repeatedly filling the fuel tank transported us to a very different winter.

Our destination that year was Death Valley's Furnace Creek, an oasis supported by a prolific hot spring. There we found a winter with clear skies, silky air, and longer days.

Diane and I had different responses. Yes, she enjoyed the winter sun, but she had grown up in San Diego, so what's the excitement. But for me, a week in the desert in the middle of a Pacific-Northwest winter was addictive. Like Scotch and dark chocolate.

For several years we made do with a vacation week in Death Valley in February or March. But, like other addictions, this one began interfering with work. I suppose I could have purchased a SAD lamp or found a support group with a name like Sun-holics Anonymous. Instead, we retired and began measuring our winter sojourns to the Southwest in months rather than weeks. Though we sampled, and enjoyed, locations as diverse as Green Valley, Arizona, and Palm Springs, California, our sunshine fix of choice became the part of the Sonoran Desert known as the Colorado, stretching from Palm Springs to the Colorado River. That is where I had a remarkable encounter with a desert tortoise.

After several winters trekking to the desert, usually staying in our RV, we acquired an ancient singlewide at Lake Tamarisk, a winter community next to a lake and golf course fifty miles from shopping. It's located next to a dying town called Desert Center, where a whiteboard in a now-defunct restaurant, gave mileage to places like Yakima and Boise. At the bottom, someone had added "13 miles from hell." After spending a week there one July (don't ask), we thought the distance to hell was exaggerated. But in winter, it's heaven, with daytime 70's and sweater-cool nights, and the occasional smell of sage or honeysuckle.

Lake Tamarisk has spectacular views of the mountains of Joshua Tree National Park to the north and the Chuckwalla Mountains that separated us from the Salton Sea to the south. Soon love for the Sonoran's rich ecosystem with its beautiful and diverse flora and fauna replaced the concept of desert as a vast wasteland. I was rarely happier than when tromping through landscape of Mesquite, creosote, or a yellow sea of blooming brittle brush looking for perfect blossoms of prickly pear, ocotillo, or the spectacular desert lily. While driving, the sight of apricot mallow and brittle bush blooming together would make me slam on the brakes and reach for my camera.

Over the years, we enjoyed interesting encounters with desert fauna as well. One sunny February, I spotted a coyote lying in the fairway we thought was properly ours at Furnace Creek Golf Course.

Watching the tortoise as I sat cross-legged switching lenses, I wondered about his intentions. That fixed beak could be a sneer or a snarl. The enlarged ventral plate used for sparring identified him as male. I didn't know much about tortoises, except the warning not to get too close. I'd never heard of a tortoise attack.

As I resumed clicking away sitting spread legged on the ground, I felt slightly vulnerable. The other three looked on silently. Jerry began taking his own photos. The tortoise was bearing down on me at maybe six inches a second.

Using the short lens, I kept shooting until he was between my legs and I was aiming directly down at him. At that point he stopped and looked up. We stared at each other for maybe a minute. Speaking to him had no effect. Then, apparently satisfied I was neither a threat, a mating prospect, nor a food source, he ducked under my left leg and crawled over the roadside berm, intercepting my sunglasses. He nudged the sunglasses to one side and ambled a couple feet into the desert where he stopped, tail toward us. And that's where he sat until we climbed into the ATVs and drove away.

I had gone into the desert expecting to be a voyeur, to observe a tortoise in his own habitat without interacting with him in any way. But a tortoise with a peanut-sized reptilian brain had advanced his own agenda.

Communication between humans and other non-domesticated species has a spotty track record, usually colored by fear or fury or predation that obscures more subtle content. On that April day, a tortoise's message was so clear it was hard to miss. The tortoise had acknowledged, inspected, and dismissed me. I was an interloper who, like an inconsiderate relative, had brought nothing of value and had overstayed my welcome. In case I didn't get it, that nudge to my sunglasses reminded me it was time to pick up my trash and leave. And his farewell on the edge of the desert, tail toward me, left no doubt about my place in his world.

A friend quipped that I'm the only one he knows who's been mooned by a tortoise.

True Colors

Robin Gault, Holladay Park Plaza



Now at the year's end, darkness
lengthens as the days grow brief, grow cold.
Now all the leaves seem kindled into flame,
summer's uniform disguise of green cast off
for gold and yellow, ochre, russet, crimson,
scarlet, burgundy, and bronze, colors once hidden
now burn against gray skies before they turn
to brown and brittle ash, before they fall.

Now in our last decades, you and I
walk beneath the leaves' November fires
and see the brilliance of this end of days,
knowing how all our masks are stripped away,
the green disguise of youth, work, householders' cares.
Now we can let our true colors blaze
against the fading light, reveal
the passion in our inmost hearts, before we fall.

Two Old Ladies

Loretta Hoagland, Mary's Woods



Lake County is in high desert country in southeastern Oregon. It's arid and desolate with peaks looming to over 7,000 feet. There is only about one person for each of its 8,356 square miles. For a time my brother-in-law was D.A. of Lake County and the one who told me this story. He had to stop now and then, laughing hard and trying to control himself. His laughter was contagious, and I joined in, though I didn't know what the heck he was laughing about.

It seems there were two old ladies, both in their 80s, who had lived for decades in a remote part of the county. They were sisters, both widows, and lived together in the family homestead miles from anywhere. He said that one day one of the sisters was alone in the house when she heard a racket outside. She looked out the window and saw a mountain lion dragging her dog away. She ran out the kitchen door with a broom and started beating the mountain lion over the head. Startled, he gave up and dashed away. The dog was pretty well torn up, so she put him in the back of their pick-up truck and drove miles to Lakeview to get him sewed up.

That's to give you an idea of these two old ladies.

On their property was a stand of trees. One day a logging truck pulled up to their house. Men stepped out and offered money to cut down and haul off the trees. They agreed on a price and the trees were taken down. When the ladies asked for the promised money, the men laughed and said "Where is it written that we owe you any money?" and off they drove, laughing.

They didn't know who they were dealing with. The sisters climbed into their pickup and headed for Lakeview, the county seat, to report the crime to the police. Since there was no signed agreement, the police couldn't do much. After they left the station, the police all shook their heads and felt guilty that the law wouldn't allow them to come to the rescue of the two old ladies.

A month went by. The ladies drove to Klamath Falls for their month's supply of food. As they were leaving town, they passed a lumber yard. Pulled up in front was the lumber truck. One of the old ladies said to her sister, "Drive on home. I'll see you later. You weren't here." Then she got out of the pickup, walked over to the rig, climbed in, started the engine, and took off. In her rear view mirror she saw the men run out of the building, jumping around and shouting.

Nobody knew rugged Lake County as well as the two old ladies. The truck was hidden so deep nobody could have found it.

The loggers reported the truck jacking to the Lakeview police department. The police said they would investigate what happened. When the loggers left the police station, the police roared with laughter, holding their sides and cheering the old ladies on. But they were police and had a job to do.

They drove out to the old ladies ranch. Both were at home and they offered the policemen some tea. Sitting in the front room, the old ladies said they were surprised that somebody had stolen the truck but they would sure keep their eyes open in case they spotted it.

A logging rig like that is very expensive to replace. Nothing for the men to do but put their hats in their hands and pay a visit to the ranch. Payment crossed hands, the ladies acting surprised like it was the first time they'd heard anything about the missing rig. Amazing, but it showed up on a street in Lakeview a few days later.

Don't mess with old ladies.

What I Did Last Summer

Patsy Steimer, Willamette View



The summer I was eight, our family took a vacation to Hungry Mother State Park in the mountains of western Virginia. We slept in a cabin in the woods, and every morning my father cooked eggs and bacon on a charcoal grill. In those days, my father only cooked on our family vacations and on picnics. He also washed dishes, made beds and swept floors, and he assigned chores to my little brother, Bobby, and me. He wanted our vacation to be time off for my mom, too. Our vacations were packed with activities. We spent our mornings doing educational things: nature walks with Park Rangers, visits to Civil War battlefields, tours of cigarette manufacturing plants, and visits to local farmers' markets. In my view, these activities were boring--a necessary prelude to the afternoon fun of swimming in the lake, diving off the high board, and, with any luck, meeting other kids to play with.

One morning, my father decided we should hike around the lake, a loop trail of about six miles. Now my dad was not a great hiker. He was an intellectual who had a desk job. He wore a starched white shirt and a suit and tie to work every day, and his outdoor activity for most of the year consisted of mowing the lawn. In retrospect, his ability to interpret a scale of miles on a map was limited. I don't think he really thought about how long it would take the four of us, the youngest of whom was four-and-a-half, to hike six miles. It was a cool, overcast morning, and the hike seemed like a perfect challenge for our family, so we drove to the trailhead and set out along the path. My dad was whistling.

After a morning of hiking, Bobby and I got bored and whiny. "How much farther?" I asked. When my father didn't answer, I stuck my finger in Bobby's ribs and whispered, "You ask him."

"Daddy?" said Bobby tentatively.

"Yes, Rabbit," my father boomed.

"How much farther? I wanna go back to the cabin." My father's only answer was to speed up his pace and whistle even louder. My father couldn't abide whining, and my mother wasn't too keen on it either, although I think she was getting a little tired of hiking, too.

By the time we had gone half way around the lake, it felt like lunch time, and all of us were pretty grouchy. We hadn't brought a lunch. I poked around in the brush and found a branch to use as a walking stick, and every so often, I stuck my brother with it just to annoy him. He looked as if he was going to cry so I tried to look as if I were scouting the path for poison ivy, so my dad wouldn't accuse me of reducing Bobby to tears. The path crossed a small footbridge over a dried up stream bed, and I entertained myself by jabbing my stick through the spaces between the slats.

As I stepped off the bridge, I felt a sting on my left ankle. I hopped down the path yelling, "A bee stung me!" My dad turned around and glared at me with a look that said, "What are you trying to pull here?" Then my mom looked over the railing and said quietly, "Gus, come here."

My father joined her on the bridge, and the two of them stared down at a nest of copper-head snakes. They knew they were copperheads because two nights before we had gone to a ranger talk about poisonous snakes. Their distinctive brown and copper markings and diamond-shaped heads made it apparent that they were the real deal. My dad ran up to me and pulled off my shoe and sock. There on my ankle were two red fang marks. I had been bitten by a venomous snake. Then my indoor, bookish, desk-job, non-athletic father went about the business of saving my life.

At first, he thought he could just carry me around the rest of the lake. Quickly enough he calculated the distance and put me down. He settled my mother, me and Bobby on the bank and proceeded to the edge of the water. He took off his shirt, waved it frantically and shouted, "Help!" at the top of his lungs.

Mother calmly started telling us a story. I don't remember the story, but I do remember snuggling closer to her and listening to her calm voice. I was beginning to think I might not get in trouble for stirring up the snakes and getting myself bitten.

Eventually a small, grey motorboat approached the spot where my father was standing, and the park ranger and his assistant determined what would happen next. Clearly, I had to get medical attention immediately. However, there was a park rule on the lake: only three people were allowed in a boat at one time. My father lifted me into the boat, and the two park rangers took off leaving the rest of my family to wait for the boat to return.

I wasn't afraid. I was captivated at the idea of being at the center of this great, dramatic adventure. Once we reached dry land, the ranger loaded me into the front seat of his battered, grey pickup and off we went down the dusty mountain road to town. His only words were, "If you feel like throwin' up, roll down the window."

We arrived in the little town of Marion, Virginia, and entered a dingy doctor's office filled with old ladies who stared as I was whisked into the examining room. The young doctor spoke with the ranger and looked at my ankle. He quickly began to administer shots — in my memory there were five of them — but as I look back maybe there were fewer. When he got around to the anti-venom injection, he held the instruction book in one hand and the enormous syringe in the other. "The last time I did this, he asserted, it was to a cocker spaniel....and it died." Still, I was not afraid. Of course, I wasn't going to die.

The doctor and the ranger agreed that I should be taken to the hospital for observation, and I was admitted in time for lunch. There was still no sign of my parents, so the nurse was especially attentive and solicitous. Occasionally, they tried to extract blood from the fang marks with little success. It wasn't until twenty or so years later that I realized they were using a breast pump.

Finally, my parents who had only been told that I had been taken to the hospital, arrived in my hospital room. My brother wasn't allowed to visit me, so Mother and Daddy came one at a time. Then my father stayed with me while Mother took Bobby back to the cabin and fed him dinner. My father read to me all afternoon from library books we had brought with us from home. He did different voices for the characters, and I loved having him to myself.

The rest of the vacation was uneventful. I wasn't allowed to swim because of the danger of secondary infection. The morning educational activities continued. We even went to church on Sunday. There was an article in the local paper about my ordeal. On the way out of town, we stopped to gas up the Plymouth, and a wizened old man came up to the car window and waved at me. I wasn't sure what to think. He disappeared into the gas station and came out with a brand new aluminum sauce pan with a lid. He reached in and handed it to me saying to my mother, "I just wanted to give her somethin'."

The only other thing I took away from this experience (except for an abiding fear of snakes) was a topic for my third grade "What I Did Last Summer" essay. It wowed my teacher, so I used it again in fourth and fifth grades as well, revising and embellishing it as any writer would. I began this way: "Last summer was pretty ordinary but let me tell you what happened the summer before last."