

THE GRÉCOURT REVIEW



*A Smith College Literary Magazine (1957 – 1997)
The Class of 1969 55th Reunion Edition (May 2024)
Northampton, Massachusetts*

*In memory of Andrea Rosnick, editor (1967 – 1969) and
Janet Taylor Lisle, co-editor (2022 – 2023)*



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The phoenix colophon is the work of Leonard Baskin, a faculty advisor to the original *Grécourt Review* in 1957.

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CLASS REUNION: STILL CONNECTED

Ellen Kierr Stein



Mixed Media Collage, 20 x 22 inches

In honor of the 55th Class Reunion, this collage represents our connection as classmates as well as our diversity as alumnae.

The repetition of colors, shapes, and lines unifies the multiple patterns. Distinctively different and sometimes overlapping, the grid sections were created by layering hand-painted papers. The goal was purposeful - to generate variety and rhythm within a framework of stability and design.

How better to represent our Class Reunion than to visualize the celebration of our life-long connection! (Ellen Kierr Stein)

INTRODUCTION: REVIVING THE *GRÉCOURT REVIEW*

Why revive the *Grécourt Review*? Could it be that one or two of our class writers admired our 2019 reunion art show so much we wanted a comparable platform for writing? Not a poetry reading. Art unfolds in space, and even those of us who missed the reception could spare a bit of reunion time to enjoy the exhibit. If you miss a poetry reading, you miss it. We needed something different.

Then came COVID-19. No 2020 reunions in Northampton; our friends in the class of 1970 had to make do with online platforms. We needed something that would connect us no matter what happens in 2024.

As connectors, literary magazines have potential. In this issue, class writers and artists offer humor, sorrow, drama, and curiosity. They give us some of what we love most about reunions: those moments of shared insight that renew friendships and bloom into new ones.

So, why call it the *Grécourt Review*? The GR was neither first nor last in a long string of Smith College student publications. The college opened in 1875, and by 1878 it had a literary club, the Alpha Society. In 1892 their small paper was replaced with something more ambitious: *The Alpha Quarterly*. Controversy attended this launch. Should students take time from their courses to manage a periodical? How would they fund it?

In the first issue, journalist S. Alice Brown (Smith 1881) argued that the paper would help prepare students to succeed as editors, journalists, writers, advertising agents, and business managers. Music professor Benjamin Blodgett warned of “dangers” such as “the over-weaning tendency to smart writing,” a “tendency to satire,” and (worst of all) the need to secure funds. He warned that “no advantage or value could possibly compensate [young women] for the forfeiture of delicacy and self-respect necessarily involved” in soliciting ads.

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The *Alpha Quarterly* lasted only a year, but was followed by the *Smith College Monthly* (1893–1930, 1940–1944) and dozens of other student publications. Some put out only one or two issues (e.g. *Cassandra* in 1921, *Outpost* in 1951, and *Spoonfed* in 1974). Others spanned years (the *Sophian* began in 1952 and is still going strong, in print and online). Defunct publications have been revived, as was *The Smith College Monthly* by Madeleine L'Engle Camp (1941; best known for *A Wrinkle in Time*). With a staff that included Bettye Goldstein Friedan (1942; best known for *The Feminine Mystique*) as managing editor, the magazine featured political essays and opinion pieces, book reviews, fiction, and poetry by students and occasional faculty members.¹ More recently, the English department's *Labrys: Art and Literature* (2001–2019) went silent during the pandemic, and *Emulate*, which began as a (subversive?) *Labrys* affiliate, has evolved to fill the void.²

Literary or not, each new publication started with lofty ambitions. L'Engle and her team aimed to reflect “all the varied trends of the student's thought.” *The Current* began with an imperative: “Fight sexism. Do it now!” *The Green Age Literary Review* was about the environment.

The new *Grécourt Review* announced itself as “a joint student-faculty enterprise” that planned to publish “the quality writing which Smith can and should be proud to offer” — faculty essays, prize-winning undergraduate poems, and “well-known outside as well as local writers.”³ The first issue included work by outsiders Babette Deutsch and Ted Hughes as well as Smith's own professor Newton Arvin and recent alumna Sylvia Plath. With its emblem designed by faculty advisor Leonard Baskin, the magazine was elegantly produced; its printing costs came to \$2,931.17 for 1958–59. Smith could and should be proud, if pride weren't too expensive.

The infant publication nearly died in 1959, when the press demanded payment of its \$1,396.17 debt before printing new issues. The editors asked the administration for help, and development officer Herbert Heston sought literary advice from Paul Buck: “Is a magazine of this kind of sufficient value to a College of this kind to

warrant our underwriting?" Buck, director of the Harvard library, said the *GR* was "an outstanding publication comparable to the best in any college and it would be a shame to see it die."^{4,5} If its value lay in its content, Heston wondered, couldn't it simply be mimeographed?

Mendenhall's negotiations with editor Rosalie Warren resulted in a limited bail-out, but also a change of focus for the magazine. He expected the *GR* "to stimulate in every way the flow of manuscripts, poetry and prose, fiction and non-fiction from within Smith College, so that as soon as possible the magazine may come to represent Smith writing – undergraduate, faculty, or recent graduates." As for finances, *GR* officers were not to "solicit from any friends or alumnae of Smith College without having cleared the names with Mr. Heston in the Office of Development."⁶

When we encountered it in the late 1960s, the *GR* had survived more than one brush with death and was being printed cheaply, held together with staples. The most elegant aspect of its physical presentation was that Baskin emblem – a fierce if bedraggled phoenix, rising from its ashes. In the 1990s, more gorgeously printed issues appeared, and there was reference in its front matter to a trust fund as well as SGA funding. Yet by the end of the decade it had given up the ghost.

That seemed to leave it free for the taking when we needed a platform for our 55th reunion. Any literary magazine that sports a phoenix in its front matter is begging for revival, and after our pandemic lockdown, so were we. We had had enough of isolation. We wanted connection, to nourish our minds and spirits.

Luckily our friends began downloading Zoom. If we couldn't get together in person, at least we could see their faces on our computer screens in virtual meetings. Some are small and informal: Half a dozen housemates meet when one of them e-mails the others: "Isn't it time we scheduled another Zoom?" Others have been large and carefully planned: Smith lifelines throughout the pandemic included the Boutelle-Day Poetry Center's streamed readings and

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discussions and the Smith Club of New York City's wonderfully varied array of online programs, organized by our own Ellen Matzkin.

The Class of 1969 developed its own online connections, as documented by Sue Herrick Foley on the "Reconnects" page of our website. The Smith '69 Zoomers evolved from a 2021 discussion of social justice, launched by Susan Hall Mygatt and Marcia Carroll Peterson, and initially moderated by Susan. Over two and a half years, the hour-long monthly forum has drawn some forty members, of whom about half usually attend any given meeting. New friendships have formed and old ones deepened as we discuss public affairs and private concerns, the challenges of aging, strategies for advancing positive change, and what we've been doing and reading.

Meanwhile, Susan Mygatt has launched another initiative: the Smith '69 Academy, a series of online study groups. Topics range from civil rights activist Pauli Murray to elite education in pre-revolutionary Russia, from medieval literature to celebrating trans people and their families. With a mix of lecture, PowerPoint, and discussion – sometimes based on advance reading – these Zoom seminars are another way to link old and new friends with stimulating ideas.

This special issue of the *Grécourt Review*, rising from its ashes, is offered as still another way for the Class of '69 to connect. Our news media keep reporting studies that link friendship to psychological and overall health, so we're sure our class connections support wellness in body, mind, and spirit – the theme of our 2024 reunion. We're even more sure that these connections are a joy in themselves. With thanks to all the creators who have contributed to this project, and to all the readers who will connect with their work, we look forward to seeing you in Northampton.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Smith College Special Collections, Alpha Society Records, CA-MS-00406. Series VI: Publications, 1879–1893.
- 2 Sophia Haydon-Khan, “*Emulate Magazine* Is Reimagining a Platform for Artists at Smith,” *The Sophian* (May 15, 2023): <https://thesophian.com/emulate-magazine-is-reimagining-a-platform-for-artists-at-smith/>.
- 3 R. S. Silberman, editor, letter to potential subscribers, 1958. Smith College Special Collections, Student Publications and Student Publications Records, CA-MS-01049.
- 4 Herbert N. Heston to Paul Buck (Nov 6 1959), letter. Smith College Special Collections, Office of the President Thomas C. Mendenhall, CA-MS-00032 Box 90, Folder 1.
- 5 Heston to Mr. Mendenhall, memo (Nov 11 1959).
- 6 Rosalie Warren, letter (Nov 16) to Mr. Mendenhall; Thomas C. Mendenhall to Rosalie Warren, letter (Nov 17, 1959)– ditto box 90 folder 1.

PART ONE

WELLNESS: MIND, BODY, SPIRIT

It's our 55th, and our theme is wellness – in body, mind, and spirit. It's what we want, for ourselves and all we hold dear, and we have countless ways to reach it. We do brain-challenging puzzles, we exercise, we eat wisely. We meditate. Most of all, we nourish our connections. We keep in touch with family and friends; we volunteer for Vision or a regional Trauma Intervention Program or a local chapter of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute; we embed ourselves in intergenerational communities.

In this section of the GR we sample a few of our classmates' angles on wellness: A collaborative poem. Glimpses from long walks. A thoughtful glance at the beauties of calendars and the special days they reveal or hide. A physician's account of weaving a community together with kindness and great music. A daughter's memories of her father. A temporarily sidelined tennis player's laughing complaint.

Don't you feel sorry for anybody who says, "I can't complain"? Does she lack imagination, or is she trapped by perceived social pressure? Complaint's an art form. Complaint at its best is a way of saying, "We're in this together." It calls for humor and empathy. It might just be a sneaky way of celebrating wellness without being too overbearingly positive about it.

And yet – it truly does take imagination to complain about a coastal sunrise or a free dog library. Whether we come upon them by chance or go out looking for them, we're grateful for the beauties that refresh our bodies, minds, and spirits, and shed grace even on our deepest sorrows. (GE)



A WELLNESS MEANDER



Smith students celebrate Mountain Day 1953 on the summit of Mount Holyoke (photo by D.I. Crossley '50). Courtesy of the Smith College Archives.

A Renga

By Jean Merrill, Margot Levy, Margie Barkin Searl, Margi Nareff, Jill Zifkin, Jan Kornbluth, Rosa Leader Smith, Lisa Rosenbloom, Beth Sweetow, Joyce Moran, Gale Eaton, Susan Bangs Munro, Jill Metcoff Jahns, Pam Chamberlain, Laurie Kramer, Nina Matis, Susan Hall Mygatt

Let us begin to
work for a future when we
welcome brazen change.

We're well-aged to perfection I'd say,
Smith prepared us for life, come what may.

Life's path both love-laced
and grief-filled, joy and sorrow,
well-traveled with friends.

Joined by our wellspring of memories, we ask,
What's next?...

Mountain Day wisdom:
Welcome wide-eyed walks, pack snacks,
say "Cheers!" to what's next.

Hop a random current. Freewheel like a gull. Catch air, swell
and sail into a pink horizon, feathers plumped and full.

On the beach at dawn.
After noon the waves drift in.
Wellness rules the day.

And as night's approach gentles welling breeze, fold wings, descend.
Toes, transmuted, spread to better purchase earthy equilibrium.

As we slowly walk
to the Quad we well recall
sixty-nines' same steps

What is the bond that makes us know each other so well?
Time-erasing reunion chats with friends old and new will tell.

And how well we see
each other's faces through time's
bright ripples and Zoom

boxes. Let us think outside the box about well-being.
Commit ourselves to healing our communities, our earth.

Cultivate friendships
while rewilding the earth.
In tandem, a rebirth

We follow the well-worn path,
on the lookout for unused trails

And all we can see
is the beauty of wellness,
inside us and out

From the force and power of the language of theater
We find a deep well of connection to the world and humanity

Dahlia bloom well
In the warm October sun,
as do we,

Nurturing our wellness through art, nature,
Smith friendships, and commitment to the future.

DAWN, CASCO BAY

Margi Wittigslager Nareff



COVID brought grief to so many people but turned out to be a gift for me. With gym doors padlocked for months, I began walking each morning at dawn. Not only has it become an integral part of my daily routine, but a joy that is both restorative and an opportunity for contemplation of nature, mortality and so many other things.

I have no creative process, nor do I possess talent as writer or photographer. But each day I plunge ahead in spite of my limitations. My contribution to the *Grécourt Review* springs from some of these diurnal rhythms. Capturing special moments on my phone's camera is a highlight. I visit with ducks, marvel at ice dripping from bare limbs and watch ever-changing sunrises. They are what keep me putting one foot in front of the other. Of course, losing weight has been a nice bonus as well!



CALENDAR POSTSCRIPT

Anonymous (Class of 1969)

Don't you love calendars?
The real ones that you hang on the wall near the fridge
With pictures of kittens or the ocean or famous paintings.
Turning a page each month to jot down all the big and little items
marking a year.
With a big circle around your birthday!
And digging out pictures of your circled day each year, too . . .
When you were three, the glossy black and white Kodaks with
scalloped edges that curled,
And your 17-year-old self in out-of-focus Polaroids, but in color!
Dozens of digitals taken with the expensive camera you got on
another circled day.
Now, scrolling through phone pics from last year's circle on a
sleepless night.
But each year still circling your special box.
My birthday may be a date on a pretty calendar on someone
else's wall,
But this one, this circle, belongs to ME.
. . . where on the calendar is the box for my postlude?
I know it's there, too.
Hiding,
Hiding on a pretty page with a kitten or a painting.
Hiding from me.
Who will circle that date?

GLIMMERS AND CATCHY TUNES

Jill Daubenspeck Zifkin

A glimmer-a-day just might be good medicine.

Such was the claim on a recent Facebook post I stumbled across. It stopped me in my scrolling tracks and sent me diving straight into the Google cave to dig up some info.

What's a glimmer, and how can it help? Yes, we all know that a glimmer could be defined as a bit of light, perhaps sparkling through darkness. As a metaphor (and according to Google), a glimmer can also be thought of as a fleeting observation that evokes a feeling of calm or joy – like noticing a hummingbird dipping its long beak into a freshly opened flower, or a child's chalk garden drawn on a sidewalk. Therapeutic applications build on this imagery. As opposed to triggers (stimuli that evoke sorrow or anger)¹ glimmers have been found to have a positive neural impact, which, over time, can accumulate, building a sense of optimism and connection.²

As I surfaced from my dive, a little light bulb lit up my brain. This expanded concept of glimmers seemed to dovetail with my new and revised experience of walking. As a teenager with a ravenous appetite and a sluggish metabolism, I walked rather than bus the three miles home from school. Step by step, lugging a heavy bookbag, this was supposed to keep my treacherous body from further ballooning. It didn't, but I kept the faith and walking became as much a part of my daily routine as brushing my teeth. I walked and I walked. Through college, career, and motherhood, I walked – always with a purpose: fighting my weight, saving on cab fare, or escaping from endless chores.

As time marched with me, I gradually began to enjoy my walks apart from any practical benefits. The combined impact of retirement and COVID heightened this sense of walking for pleasure. When my feet hit the trail, I'd cross paths with both neighbors and strangers; we'd nod, exchange a few pleasantries, and walk on

by with lingering smiles. The world seemed friendly. My mind wandered, and I also enjoyed that. Small surprises along the way seemed to call for my attention, demanding that I escape from the confines of my head and open my eyes to the pathway itself. Often, I came home with a sense of calm and well-being. My appreciation for Mountain Day deepened.

The thought occurred to me that glimmers and walking form an easy, natural partnership.³ Pausing to mull over that idea, I realized a mental soundtrack was playing Paul Simon's "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover."⁴ It's a catchy tune, and I can sing along to the chorus, but I had never given the lyrics much thought. Nor did I know a thing about what prompted Simon to compose it.

So, I took my second Google dive of the day. According to Wikipedia, the song was written when Simon was going through a divorce—hence the repeated lyrical imperative: "*Set yourself free.*" Reading on, I discovered that Simon modeled his tune on an old-fashioned Danish love song, "Often I Am Happy," by Carl Nielsen. Hmm, I thought. That seems to fit with the idea of a glimmer. Put some small escapes together, free yourself from the negative triggers of a divorce, and set yourself free. Reclaim happy.

The song kept looping through my brain during my post-dive walk. I started humming the tune, jazzed up my stride with a little boogaloo, and adapted the lyrics, fitting the rhymes around women's names. (Stan, Gus, and Jack were ushered out the back; Sue, Joan, and Lynn wormed their way in.) It was fun, even a bit addictive. The rhymes kept rolling, rolling, rolling.

So here are the new lyrics. They are a work in progress—at least, I can't seem to stop coming up with new ones. So, feel free to join in, change a line in the chorus, or add your own verse.

Chorus

Dance in the rain, Jane

Look for a clue, Sue

Turn over a stone, Joan

Seek and you'll see.

*Get out in the world, Merle
Call an old pal, Sal
Just sit and be still, Jill
You'll see what's to see.*

Verse 1

*Look and listen to the world all around
Signs of beauty and hope secretly abound
Right at your feet waiting quietly to be found.
There must be fifty ways to catch a glimmer.
Breathe slowly; meditate if you can,
Put down your screens; table that tangled plan.
Notice the miracles right at hand
There must be fifty ways to catch a glimmer
(Repeat Chorus – sung forte)*

Verse 2

*Some days just seem to trigger
Grief or anger - feelings that are bigger
Than any solutions we can figure.
We need a light to shed a glimmer –
To lift our hearts and help us cope,
Forming neighborhoods with the hope
That we can climb the steepest slope.
There must be fifty ways to catch a glimmer.
(Repeat Chorus – a little bit louder)*

Verse 3

*You might wonder why this path is so worthwhile.
Am I still searching for ways to reconcile
My life's accomplishments – I'm not a child.
Why search for fifty ways to catch a glimmer?
Small moments of joy build the possibility
Of seeing life more like a forest than a tree.
We connect to each other, sometimes invisibly.
We still need ways to catch a glimmer.*

One Last Round of the Chorus

If you can't tell, I had fun composing this ditty. Hopefully it was witty. (Sorry, I've caught the bug.) Okay, okay. I'm serious again. Ahem, it may be a stretch to go from catching glimmers of hope to finding effective ways of addressing climate change, gun violence, racism, or other mammoth, complex problems. On the other hand, what do we have to lose? Maybe, Baby, taking small steps toward connecting thoughtfully with the people and the places in our neighborhoods and world can lead to incremental changes and improvements.

We face the certainty of loss – daunting and painful. Taylor Swift tells us, *Shake it Off*.⁵ Sometimes you can; sometimes you just can't. Still. . . .

*Give glimmers a try, Vi.
Sing out of tune, June.
What can it hurt, Gert?
Seek and you may see
A way to stay connected,
Negativity corrected,
Smile and feel protected.
We'll just have to see.*

We need all the optimism we can muster, Buster.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Theodora Blanchfield, AMFT, "Glimmer: How to Trigger Feelings of Joy and Safety", *verywellmind* (May 8, 2023): <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-a-glimmer-5323168>.
- 2 Sara M. Moniuszko, "'Glimmers' Are the Opposite of Triggers. Here's How to Embrace Them." *USA Today* (March 23, 2022): <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/health-wellness/2022/03/23/glimmers-opposite-triggers-mental-health-benefits/7121353001/>.
- 3 Of possible interest: Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (2001).
- 4 Paul Simon, "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABXtWqmArUU>.
- 5 Taylor Swift, "Shake It Off." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfWlot6h_JM.



Photographs by Jill Daubenspeck Zifkin



Photograph by Jill Daubenspeck Zifkin

MEDICINE, MUSIC, AND A GIVING COMMUNITY: WELLNESS IN BODY, MIND, AND SPIRIT

Pearl Yau Toy

My first love was Medicine. I graduated from Stanford Medical School and am Professor Emeritus at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF) School of Medicine. Details are in this link – <https://profiles.ucsf.edu/pearl.toy> – which will disappear when I pass, which I hope will not be too soon. During my work at UCSF, I was surprised and grateful to Smith for a Smith Medal and the Notable Alum recognition.

I also love music, starting with piano lessons at age five, thanks to my mother who gave all four of her children music education – and plenty of love and food. My surgeon uncle also sent precious Deutsche Gramophone classical music records from Germany. When I came to Smith, I was a biochemistry major who studied with pianist Lory Wallfish, who treated her students like family. At graduation, I played the first movement of the first Beethoven piano concerto with the Smith-Amherst orchestra. Although my performance was modest, it was a landmark experience to play with an orchestra and I am very grateful to Smith for the opportunity. I am also grateful to Professor Peter Rose and his wife Hedy for treating me like family when I taught their children piano once a week. We just celebrated Peter Rose's ninetieth birthday by Zoom!

After graduation from Smith, I met and married Larry Toy (Harvard '67), the best thing we ever did! A Smithie introduced us. He liked me because I could play the first page of the Beethoven piano sonata No. 30, marked as "*Vivace, ma non troppo*," meaning lively, but not too much! But after that, I did not play the piano seriously again until my medical work was stable and our only daughter was accepted in college. When I restarted playing, I lost at the UCSF concerto competition even though there were very few competitors. Larry Toy, PhD in astrophysics and music lover, encouraged me to try again. I asked, "Which concerto?" He said, "My favorite is the

Beethoven 4th.” Not knowing that the 4th is difficult, I studied in the evening at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music Adult Division, and on holidays at the Cliburn amateur piano camp in Texas. That led to success in amateur competitions and opportunities to learn and perform the five Beethoven Piano Concerti one year at a time, at age 50 to 55 (See YouTube’s below). Smith’s piano professor Lory Wallfisch came to one of my concerts, the Beethoven 4th piano concerto. Bless her. I also started the Chancellor’s Concert Series on the all-science UCSF campus twenty-five years ago, including performers from the San Francisco Symphony professional musicians.

Lamorinda Village after Retirement

When we retired, we had no friends in our neighborhood because we both worked full time. Our daughter and her family had not yet moved to be closer to us. So we joined the local Village, a group of seniors who wanted to stay at home while being part of a supportive community. There are Villages around the country, each one different, reflecting local needs and volunteer resources. We got to know kind Village members, including retired faculty at the nearby University of California in Berkeley.

We started with volunteering at our Village, Lamorinda.

The leaders set a good example. For example, the Village Founder and the current Village President volunteered to deliver free food to our low-income members in the area—and our senior leaders enjoyed it.

Larry has experience with starting and running a successful non-profit organization, the Foundation for California Community Colleges. He was therefore welcomed to serve as President of our Village (2019-2022). In 2021, Larry joined the board of the national organization, Village to Village Network. He serves as Chair of the Finance Committee, and Chair of the Village Expansion Committee focused on expanding the number of new Villages in the country. He understands administration. Bottom line: don’t overspend. Seize opportunities to help and recruit potential members (for

instance, by organizing group COVID/flu shots and free grocery home deliveries by volunteers). Recruit new members every year to replace the 10% who pass away. It takes work, but Lamorinda offers a compassionate and intellectually stimulating community to its members.

As a volunteer, I focused on Wellness for our members in three areas: Socialization, Health, and Art.¹

- Social: I started the Women’s Group—because there wasn’t one. There was only a Men’s Group.
- Health: I took the lead in creating an “End of Life “series of Zoom talks and needed documents. I also organized Zoom talks on health and wellness. I selected and invited speakers, mostly my colleagues on the UCSF and University of California Berkeley (UCB) faculties, but we also drew speakers from the Lamorinda Village membership and their families.
- Art: Besides paintings, we share beautiful music and flowers. I started the weekly “Minutes of Music” that are short recordings of music played by members and/or their families. Another member started a very successful in-person singing get-together! I also invited a member to share weekly a photo of one of her many beautiful Ikebana flower arrangements.

We enjoy events at our Village on many days of the week. There are other events we don’t go to. For instance, there are weekly small group meetings:

- Monday morning: Meditation (free): A member was interested after reading an article about a good teacher. I contacted him and we invited him to join the Village. He kindly joined and offered to be our weekly meditation teacher for free. He is very kind.
- Monday afternoon: We have Chair Yoga (free). We have a very knowledgeable member.

- Tuesday morning: “Stronger Memory” (free). A knowledgeable member leads us to daily read out loud, write in cursive, and do math at our own level. We discuss our writings. We also help and get to know each other. For example, a member lived alone and was recovering from a fall at home. Our Executive Director went to her house and fixed the member’s computer so she could rejoin Stronger Memory meetings. Another member visited and brought favorite food.
- Friday: Zoom talks by good speakers (free). Although I started by finding good speakers from UCSF and UCB, our Village now invites speakers of many topics of interest to our seniors.
- Sunday morning: Our Weekly Update “newspaper” by email features the coming week’s events, a Minute of Music played by a family member, and a photo of an Ikebana work by a member.

There are also monthly meetings, including the Women’s Group social chat I started and a book club.

While we give, we receive more!

Finally, regarding aging and “Wellness: Body, Mind, and Spirit,” I appreciate the prayer attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr, asking for “the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Pearl in Concert

Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 1 (40 min)

Performed in Berkeley with the Community Women's Orchestra. Ann Krinitsky, conductor. Pearl Toy, amateur pianist. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOoSOW-DKSk&feature=youtu.be>

Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 2 (30 min)

Performed in Berkeley with the Community Women's Orchestra. Martha Stoddard, guest conductor. Pearl Toy, amateur pianist. www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIw7v8DEHMA&feature=youtu.be

Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 3 (38 min)

Performed at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music with Symphony Parnassus. Conducted by Stephen Paulson, principal bassoonist of the San Francisco Symphony. Pearl Toy, amateur pianist. www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMZnEk-3tqWw&feature=youtu.be

Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 4 (38 min)

Performed at UCSF. Jeremy Swerling, conductor. Pearl Toy, amateur pianist, winner of the UCSF concerto competition. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YlixvdwglXY&feature=youtu.be>

Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 5, the "Emperor" (44 min)

Performed in the Pacific Heights Presbyterian Church with the Symphony Parnassus in San Francisco. Conducted by Stephen Paulson, principal bassoonist of the San Francisco Symphony. Pearl Toy, amateur pianist. <https://youtu.be/2zc4mNUCONY>

ENDNOTES

- 1 Pearl's volunteer efforts have won praise from the current Lamorinda president Sharon Iversen, who holds her up as an example to other members: "We all benefit from Pearl's gracious ability to contribute and share her expertise while finding purpose in our community."

OUT OF THE SHOULDER COMES THE HUMERUS

Mary Seibert Goldschmid

This piece first appeared in the National Senior Women's Tennis Magazine (2013, Vol. 1), whose editor wrote, "Mary Goldschmid and I both had shoulder surgery in January. When I asked her to write something humorous about our shared experience, she asked if I meant 'humorous' in its ancient medical sense: the four bodily fluids which in excess influenced temperament. The first one, black bile. Yes, I said melancholically, despondently and sleeplessly. Mary said: There are 21 stages to the Tour de France, nine circles of suffering in Dante's Inferno, and overcoming chocolate addiction takes a full 12 steps. So if recovery from shoulder surgery has only four humours, why should a disciplined, determined member of the NSWTA fret? Beats me."

Humour One: Black Bile

There's nothing difficult about recovering from shoulder surgery as long as you don't need sleep, and especially not quality sleep in a hospital, which all insurance companies now disallow as a decadent reminder of the 20th Century. But insurers do permit the transport of some hospital gear home. Not only is your shoulder in a big sling, complete with a massive belly box to support your arm, it is also encased in something called a Cryo-Cuff, which must be French for muscle bidet. This contraption pumps and then recirculates ice water over your shoulder and, in the process, makes you look like a sumo wrestler attached to a plastic beverage cooler. This is fine unless you need to sleep. Hence, the first stage of shoulder recovery is black bile because that's how you feel trying to sleep sitting up, the only possibility.

Humour Two: Phlegm

Stage two is when you prefer to stay phlegmatically at home where the neighbors can't see you because (1) you are sleep-deprived and look it, (2) you are popping Oxycodone and it is making you look like Rush Limbaugh, (3) comfort food is your only comfort, (4) wardrobe choices are limited to low-fashion items like pull-on sweats that you can get on with only one hand, (5) you can't raise your arm enough to make way for deodorant or to blow dry your hair, and the result is Rastafarian.

Photo shoots not recommended in this humour. Indeed, if you can turn the home mirrors toward the walls, do so.

And don't count on husbands to help. Most never learned how to tie a ponytail, shave legs, or put on a bra. My husband's excuse for incompetence was that he only had experience taking bras off. I didn't laugh.

Humour Three: Yellow Choleric

Sometime in the second month after surgery, you emerge in public to meet your master, the choleric physical therapist. Try to learn to love this taskmaster who proclaims utter devotion to your well-being while bending your shoulder into positions that make you cry out in pain. Choleric are not bullies, but they do want precision and discipline and dedication to the task. Before long, you wonder whether you have what it takes. And, then, day by day, grunt by grunt, centimeter by centimeter, you learn you do.

Humour Four: Bloody Sanguine

Ah the sweet simplicities of life! How wonderful it is to tie shoes again, button buttons, uncork wine, blow dry hair. You look forward to PT sessions with your darling, sweet therapist and wish they would never end. There is even sanguine talk about how several

OUT OF THE SHOULDER COMES THE HUMERUS

more months of patient diligence at the gym will make you ready for competitive tennis. You are bloody optimistic. You eagerly anticipate more years of tennis glory, at least before it is time for your knee surgery or hip replacement.

Most of all, looking back over this humourous ordeal, you are grateful for short-term memory loss.

P.S. For those readers who think the four humours are a bit of a stretch in describing recovery from shoulder surgery, you're right. Stretching is what it's all about.

FOUR POEMS

Rosa Leader Smith

My creative process has been somewhat erratic over the years and I tend to write when the spirit so moves me, on a walk, in a private moment or often in a group setting or class reflecting on my life, travels, and becoming a grandmother for the first time. I started writing poetry around 2012 when I semi-retired from a career in psychiatric social work. This is a sampling of pieces that span the then to the now.

Lately I most often write during a creative Writing Circle offered on Zoom by the Dartmouth Cancer Center. My cancer journey started in 2019 and has been a source of challenging but fruitful inspiration, if nothing else, looking back and looking forward. Think management of chronic disease. Thus I have aimed to share some poems related to our reunion theme of Wellness – Body, Mind, and Spirit.

WALK UPON A SPRING DAY

When you start inspecting your friends
for signs of early decay
you know you're worried
about your own longevity
and even the outcropped rocks
in your neighborhood
appear to crumble.

After a battle with late winter storms
magnolias have snapped
limbs laden with fuzzy grey teardrops
cannot bear the weight
and brittle lay upon the ground
the snow a temporal shroud.

You are surprised
by early blooming snowdrops
on a south facing bank.

VERMONT STATE BIRD

The hermit thrush sings
in summer woods, not knowing
what winter will bring.

TO MY FATHER

When I think of cooing
I think of pigeons
When I think of grieving
I think of you
When I think of breathing
I know we will all stop one day.

When I think of pigeons
I think of you
When I think of lipomas
I think of you
When I think of pigeons
I think of the ones you housed
In your big old Vermont barn.

When I think of Dartmouth Hitchcock
I thank Mary Hitchcock
Whose name has been lost
Over these many years
To expansion and new donations.
But when you were there
You had your tumors removed
As I too have had mine removed.

When I think of you,
I often think
About how you failed to move
And when you stopped walking.
As you lay on your narrow bed
We silently watched Bogarts
And other noirs on your
Small black and white screen
In a last experience of togetherness.

Thinking of you and of your birds
Which have long since abandoned
Their coop in your barn. Thinking of you
When you took to your sick bed;
About how you continued to breathe
Until all your breath stood still.

EASTER SUNDAY

The cherry tree is in full bloom already. Glorious
in pale pink it celebrates itself. Dogwood
lags behind as if digging in its heels would stop
the trend of climate change. When I was in Cuba
I saw the sequia¹ on the central plain.
The drought. Little fires kindled spontaneously
and spread, dying out only when they hit
the road, starved for something to burn.

My eyes stung as the bus sailed through dark
memories and a distant storm. Sometimes
the driver slowed down. I inhaled smoke and fire,
hoping for rain to fall on fields of cane.
After a long season of hot despair
I was looking for a road where I could see ahead.

ENDNOTES

1 Pronounced *sekeeya*; Sp., drought

SANTA CRUZ, PACIFIC POWER



Watercolor by Mary Stewart Douglas

PART TWO

CONNECTING THE SMITH '69 ZOOMERS

Since 2021, Smith '69 alumnae have met once a month on Zoom to discuss current issues and life topics of interest. It's a random group. We did not all know each other in college, but friends brought friends. By 2023 there were about forty of us, and our discussions spilled over from the hour online to sprawling group e-mails.

In May, Tina Turner died, and one of us asked if we remembered seeing her at Smith. Did she perform at John M. Greene Hall, or maybe downtown at the Academy of Music? Why couldn't more of us recall the details? Had we all been living under rocks back then? We traded memories of our clueless youth, and as happens with these conversations one thing led to another. Soon we were discussing impostor syndrome, admissions policies, housemothers, and the troubled times we've lived through.

This group of essays arose from our discussions in the summer of 2023, in which reminiscence and concerns for present and future were intertwined. A watchword for our 55th reunion – “Embracing Our Futures!” – can't mean exactly what it did when we were newly minted graduates. Our futures have changed as we have, and the world we're living into isn't quite what we foresaw.

Among Thomas Corwin Mendenhall's presidential papers in the College archives, a series of records documents the changing relationship of the Smith student body with the faculty and administration during the late 1960s. Included are folders with labels such as “Unrest – general – 1966–1969” and “Unrest – general – 1970–1972.” We lived through the unrest as students; one of us, returning in 1972 as assistant to Dean Russell, saw first hand how much had changed in the blink of an eye. (GE)



INTIMACY ON ZOOM?

Marcia Carroll Peterson

More than two and a half years ago several classmates got together on ZOOM in response to an incident at Smith that was widely reported and left us all a bit nonplussed. It was the beginning of a journey that has enriched us all and opened us to new thoughts, new perspectives, and new understandings.

Many of us had not known each other at Smith or knew each other only in passing, but it soon became apparent that we no longer suffered with the need to make ourselves more successful, more accomplished or more “hip” than one another. With age came a willingness to be more open, more vulnerable and more empathetic.

How did it happen? How did we get from anxious, insecure (in most cases) first year students in 1965 to women who could and wanted to know each other much better and to share one another’s burdens as well as joys?

There are a couple of answers: one that is historical and one that harkens back to a gift that Smith gave us intentionally or not. We are the generation of assassination – Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, JFK, Martin Luther King, Bobby Kennedy. Within a few short years we watched or became aware that the innocence of our childhoods in the 1950s was being challenged in so many ways: hot and cold wars and much more.

There were ordinary citizens who died fighting for Civil Rights, women who were seeking equity in a country very slow to provide it, farm workers who were creating their own union under the leadership of Cesar Chavez. Our four years, which began with President Johnson signing the Voting Rights Act and Muhammad Ali beating Sonny Liston, ended with the Inauguration of Richard Nixon, the Stonewall riots, Woodstock and the end of the Warren Court. Even if we didn’t know of all these things, we felt them because the country did. And we were readers and watchers and believed in civic engagement, however limited our opportunities

for it may have been during our college years. The violence we had witnessed, which was to blossom again with the Kent State killings in 1970 — the victims, students much like us and those who held the guns, also young — was another reminder that our world was much larger than Northampton and considerably more dangerous. We were moving out into that world, some already married, some off to a professional degree, some to the work world and others still to non-profits, the Peace Corps or seminary. But we had all been changed by the events of those four years, both inside the College and in the nation and world. The sadness of 1968 and the protests some of us had participated in seemed to end with Mr. Nixon in the White House, so we turned our attention to changing things at Smith and with other 1969 graduates ended up on a cover of TIME magazine as the most radical graduating class in generations.¹

The next decades would find many of us working mothers, married, divorced, remarried, and now, again some of us grandmothers. But that was the traditional route. What was so different was that we were using the tools that our Smith education, our experience and our values had given us to make the tough transitions and indeed transformations that life makes possible. We explored new dimensions in our most intimate relationships, worked to make our children's lives rich and give them greater opportunities than we might have experienced, and created. We became artists, writers, musicians, lawyers, business executives, members of Presidential cabinets and served and created in so many diverse ways.

We experienced loss of loved ones, career disappointments, health crises, despair at our politics, work for the environment that seemed like the tragedy of Sisyphus. And the joys which have been abundant and serve to give us sparkling memories.

As we began to speak with one another back in March of 2021, we described the need to learn to face the deeply ingrained racism that we were not as aware of as we wanted to be. We shared books, articles and movies that had helped us begin the journey of greater understanding. And then we began to speak about so many things: politics, the pandemic, aging, our children and grandchild-

dren or not. We realized that many of us who had grown up in a traditional two parent family now were in much different families, two mothers, two women married to one another, single, widowed, divorced after long marriages, and facing these next years with questions. We started to offer our experiences with a humility that made them accessible. And we talked of options, understanding that some solutions were not available to all of us.

In other words we opened ourselves to each other, even though some of us had never had an in-person conversation with our ZOOM classmates. We cried at some of the cruelty of life, we virtually worried with a grandmother about her young granddaughter, we railed at what we saw as the ignorance of some of our own family members about vaccines. We developed an intimacy that allowed us – no, encouraged us – to really be there for each other no matter the geographic distance. Not all of us described our Smith experience as wholly or even partially positive, but here we were sharing with each other our deeply felt sadnesses and our mountaintop experiences. We seemed to have gotten along the way a level of confidence and the gentling of age that made it possible.

And we laughed and admonished ourselves for our lack of sensitivity to those older women who were our housemothers. In fact, discussion of that topic by email is one of our longest threads because now we were at the age our housemothers might have been when we knew them – but we didn't really know them because we were pretty absorbed in our own lives.

I am offering these few words about those who have participated on the '69 ZOOM because we want to see each other, to be in person, to share hugs and to once again catch up on news. And because for many of us, me included, this two-and-a-half-year journey has been one of richness, of warmth, of advice offered with gentleness, of greater authenticity than I could have imagined on a cool screen for an hour once a month.

ENDNOTES

- 1 TIME, April 18, 1969: <https://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19690418,00.html>.

BOOKS WE'VE RECOMMENDED TO EACH
OTHER: FROM THE ZOOMERS' MINUTES, FIRST
TWO YEARS +

Culled by Margi Nareff

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,
Michelle Alexander

The Nature of Prejudice, Gordon Allport

A History of God, Karen Armstrong

What Rose Forgot: A Novel, Nevada Barr

Fort William series, Wendell Berry

Horse, Geraldine Brooks

Poverty in America, Matthew Desmond

White Fragility, Robin DiAngelo

Cloud Cuckoo Land, Anthony Doerr

Four Seasons in Rome, Anthony Doerr

The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, Frederick Douglass

The Woman Behind the New Deal, Kirstin Downey

A Lynching at Port Jervis, Philip Dray

The Souls of Black Folk, W.E.B. DuBois

*A Fever in the Heartland: The Ku Klux Klan's Plot to Take Over America
& the Woman Who Stopped Them,* Timothy Egan

What Strange Paradise, Omar El Akkad

Invisible Child, Andrea Elliott

Necessary Trouble: Growing Up at Midcentury, Drew Gilpin Faust

One Hundred Saturdays, Michael Frank

Stella Levi and the Search for a Lost World, Michael Frank

Lessons in Chemistry, Bonnie Garmus

A Violent Conspiracy, Susanna Gregory

This Other Eden, Paul Harding

A Discovery of Witches, Deborah Harkness

The Little Old Lady That Broke All the Rules, Catharina Ingelman-
Sundberg

The 1619 Project, NY Times, coordinated and edited by Nikole Han-
nah Jones

White Too Long, Robert Jones

How to Be an Antiracist, Ibram X. Kendi
Braiding Sweetgrass, Robin Wall Kimmerer
Demon Copperhead, Barbara Kingsolver
The Lost Children Archive, Valeria Luiselli
The Understory, Robert MacFarland
The Sea of Tranquility, Emily St. John Mandel
All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, A Black Family Keepsake, Tiya Miles
The Imperfect Alchemist, Naomi Miller
Race Against Time, Jerry Mitchell
Village of Secrets: Defying the Nazis in Vichy France, Caroline Moorehead
The Song of the Cell, Siddhartha Mukherjee
The Book of Form and Emptiness, Ruth Ozeki
The Roosevelt I Knew, Francis Perkins
The Book of Two Ways, Jodi Picoult
Bewilderment, *The Overstory* and *The Echomaker*, all by Richard Powers
Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil, Susan Neiman
The Sympathizer, Viet Thanh Nguyen
Rose Code, Kate Quinn
Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America, Heather Richardson
Aging with Wisdom, Marilynne Robinson
Homecoming, Marilynne Robinson
Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy, Gary D. Schmidt
Love, Medicine and Miracles, Bernie Siegel
Up Home: One Girl's Journey, Ruth Simmons
Leisha's Song, and *Missed Cue*, Lynn Slaughter '69
Aristotle, Clint Smith (view reading of this poem on YouTube
<https://youtu.be/U6lifKTbFTw>)
How the Work is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery in America, Clint Smith
10,000 Joys and 10,000 Sorrows, Olivia Ames Hoblitzelle
Paradise Falls: The True Story of an Environmental Catastrophe, Keith O'Brien, Eileen Stevens
Growing Old, Elizabeth Marshall Thomas
The Hidden Life of Dogs, Elizabeth Marshall Thomas
The Nickel Boys, Colson Whitehead
The Underground Railroad, Colson Whitehead
The Agitators, Dorothy Wickenden

BOOKS WE'VE RECOMMENDED TO EACH OTHER

The Warmth of Other Suns, Isabel Wilkerson

Caste, Isabel Wilkerson

Band of Sisters, Lauren Willig (based on the experiences of Smith
women volunteering in France in WWI)

Master Slave Husband Wife, Ilyon Woo

American Nations, Colin Woodard

Each Kindness, Jacqueline Woodson

THE SMITH CLASS OF 1969: ADMISSIONS

Judith Ferster

The Class of 1969 Zoomers interrupted our 2023 summer break because of two public events. First came the Supreme Court’s June decision banning affirmative action in colleges and universities. The two presidents of Smith, the retiring and the incoming, together issued a strongly worded public letter on the College’s commitment to diversity:

We will comply with the Court’s decision. At the same time, the college will continue to work to ensure that our student body remains diverse. Our admissions process is a holistic one that considers various aspects of an applicant’s background and experiences—including grades, curriculum, extracurricular activities, work experience, geography, socioeconomic background and more—so that each applicant’s unique voice and perspective are fully appreciated.¹

The second public event came in July, when the *New York Times* reported on a publication from the National Bureau of Educational Research (NBER). “Admissions Data Suggests Being Very Rich Is Its Own Qualification,” read the headline.² Summarizing a major report by three Harvard economists, the *Times* article reported that children from middle- and upper-middle-class families—including those at public high schools in high-income neighborhoods—applied in large numbers to selective private colleges. But individually they were less likely to be admitted than the richest or, to a lesser extent, poorest students with the same test scores. In that sense, the data confirm the feeling among many merely affluent parents that getting their children into elite colleges is increasingly difficult. This matters because, as the economists point out, “Leadership positions in the U.S. are disproportionately held by graduates of a few highly selective private colleges,”³ so the admissions policies of such colleges may help perpetuate the intergenerational transfer of wealth and power and limit opportunities for outsiders.

What increased someone's chances of going to a selective school was being from an extremely wealthy family. As Chetty, Deming, and Friedman put it in a working paper:

Children from families in the top 1% are more than twice as likely to attend an Ivy-Plus college (Ivy League, Stanford, MIT, Duke, and Chicago) as those from middle-class families with comparable SAT/ACT scores. Two-thirds of this gap is due to higher admissions rates for students with comparable test scores from high-income families; the remaining third is due to differences in rates of application and matriculation. In contrast, children from high-income families have no admissions advantage at flagship public colleges. The high-income admissions advantage at private colleges is driven by three factors: (1) preferences for children of alumni, (2) weight placed on non-academic credentials, which tend to be stronger for students applying from private high schools that have affluent student bodies, and (3) recruitment of athletes, who tend to come from higher-income families.⁴

This study was done over fifty years after we were in college, and it focuses on historically men's schools: the "Ivy-Plus" schools do not include the Seven Sisters. Still, we were curious. Could we ourselves have been seen as less on the side of equality, social mobility, and opportunity than we had hoped? Were we part of the process by which educational privilege reproduces itself?

How We Got Into Smith

Smith did not have an affirmative action policy when we applied in 1964. Applicants for admission were required to submit their scores on the SAT and three achievement tests, and high school transcripts showing a balanced array of high school courses: 4 units of English; 3 each of mathematics, history, and languages (including one of Latin or Greek); and at least one lab science.⁵ Twenty-five black women were candidates for our class; of the eight who were

accepted, five enrolled. (For the class as a whole, 2,481 applied, 1040 were accepted, and 640 enrolled.)⁶

Although the newly coined phrase “affirmative action” was not used, the College was actively investigating ways to increase student diversity. President Mendenhall was working with colleagues in historically Black institutions and seeking advice from Southern alumnae while sympathetically fielding pleas and demands from black students. The Board of Admissions and the Committee on Educational Policy were discussing how to support at-risk students academically as well as financially. In “1969 many elite universities admitted more than twice as many Black students as they had the year before,”⁷ and Smith was among them. In 1968, 48 black students were considered, 34 were admitted, and 20 enrolled; in 1969, 122 were considered, 86 were admitted, and 44 enrolled.

When the NBER study was reported, we had already been trading autobiographical paragraphs about how we got into Smith. To organize our anecdotal impressions, we were invited to answer a survey. Twenty-nine group members responded to questions about our high school records, our college applications and acceptance, and our feelings as new Smith students. We do not constitute a scientific sampling of the Class of 1969, merely a self-selected friendship circle who shared a number of experiences. A few informal findings:

- Most of us seem to have been hard-working middle class girls with good scores and grades, and lots of extra-curricular activities in high school. Ten went to private schools; the rest graduated from suburban (or urban) public schools all over the United States. (One urban alumna reported vandalism of her school’s bathroom stalls, but most of us did not have to fight hostile environments to get an education.) Twenty-six were involved in extracurricular activities.
- We came to Smith with good academic records. Of those who could remember their grades, eleven were in the top 5% and eleven were in the top 15% of their high school classes. Some got awards, were on their schools’ honor rolls

or were National Merit Scholar semi-finalists. Fifteen out of 29 reported having been leaders in high school.

- Twelve out of 29 reported applying to Smith as early decision applicants. Did that commitment increase Smith's interest? Recently a number of selective schools have filled as much as 62% of their classes early.⁸ But we don't know how Smith acted when choosing us.
- We were geographically diverse, coming from every part of the country (including two from Northampton). This study leads to admiration of the Admissions Committee for its national and international recruitment.
- Racially, our group was no more diverse than the class as a whole: One was Asian, and one had possible (though unproven) Native American heritage. None were Black. Although there were a few other students of color in our class, they had not joined the emailing group.
- We were no more remarkable for socio-economic diversity. Our small group reflected middle class America, not the upper 1%. Our parents valued education and made sacrifices to help us pursue college. Most of them managed to pay our tuition; some of us had scholarships and work-study jobs. We knew that a few of our fellow students were seriously rich. (One of us had a dorm mate whose parents equipped her room with new items, while college-supplied furniture was sent to basement storage.)
- Three of us had multi-generational Smith connections. Did Smith's policy on legacy admissions give these three an edge? One of us actually worked in the Admission Office in the mid-eighties. At that time, the President would review files of alum-connected applicants who were being denied, not to overrule the decision but to be ready for any backlash.

As a group, we can claim merit (high grades, test scores, prizes, and extracurricular activities), but we can't be sure how much other factors influenced our acceptance. One of us was asked by a high

school rival not to apply to Smith because the College would never accept two from her small town and, as a legacy, she would have an unfair advantage. Did she? Our survey can't answer the question.

In spite of strong records in both high school and college, fourteen of us remembered having some feelings called in current discourse "the impostor syndrome." In general, it just means that we weren't sure we deserved to be at Smith or could do the work. One, reflecting on this pervasive feeling, said "I am particularly amazed at how many people felt socially inadequate. From my perspective everyone [else] seemed so much more socially adroit. . . ." It might have been nice if the College had had a Confidence Whisperer in our first years. Some of us could have used the assurances, predicting what turned out to be true, that many had successful post-graduation lives and careers.

We arrived at Smith in a time of social turbulence; both it and we changed dramatically during our four years. We were one of the last classes before the Ivies and the small men's colleges and universities went coed. Before us, women could not attend those Ivy-Plus schools that functioned to replicate social privilege from influential generation to generation, but the graduates of Seven Sisters colleges often came from such families and/or married into them. We were commonly expected to do likewise. (Remember those Yale and Dartmouth mixers?)

Increasingly, however, we didn't want to settle for marrying influence and achievement. We wanted to be influential and accomplished ourselves. Many of our classmates entered doctoral programs, law schools, and medical schools at those Ivy-Plus universities. Many carved out successful careers in male-dominated occupations.

Would We Still Get Into Smith?

Looking back after half a century, we wonder how successful we'd be if we were applying today. In a sense the two Smith presidents' response to the end of affirmative action is one answer to that other question about ourselves — could we still get into Smith? When we discussed the survey findings on Zoom, several group members

recalled that our class was the most selective in the College's history up to that point. In the 1980s, one of us reported, the acceptance rate had crept up to the low 40s because, once so many of the elite men's colleges had gone coeducational, fewer women were choosing Smith. But this year's incoming class acceptance rate was 19%.

It was pointed out that systemic changes in the application process can skew perceptions about acceptance selectivity. The Higher Education Act of 1965 tended to increase both access to college education and its cost. Students now get loans and grants directly, rather than funding going to the institution. Meanwhile, the elimination of application fees associated with college apps has resulted in a huge shift in the numbers of applicants who are less likely to attend if admitted.

So if we applied today, we would be competing in a broader, more economically diverse pool. Smith's current admissions and financial aid policies are designed to level the playing field. The holistic policy means that Admissions has built diverse classes by looking at not only scores and experience but also extracurricular activities, work experience, geography, and socioeconomic background. Combined with Smith's current commitment of \$90 million for financial aid, this makes affirmative action moot. According to the college website, 63% of students in the class of 2025 receive need-based financial aid, and there is currently a policy of grants, rather than loans.⁹ Smith may be the only women's college to eliminate loans, a big step to greater affordability today that also makes it a more interesting place.

Legacy admissions, which have joined affirmative action policies in the news lately, might still give a few of us an edge. The Higher Education Act of 1965 did not forbid colleges and universities to give admissions preference to students with legacy or donor status—but it denied participation in federal student aid programs to those that did. In July 2023, Representative Jamaal Bowman and Senator Jeff Merkley reintroduced legislation banning such preferences outright,¹⁰ and legacies are also a target of the Biden Administration. On the other hand, a Princeton sociologist who studies social mobility argues for keeping legacies. They don't work to the

advantage of the privileged, he says, and they don't increase alumni giving – but they do increase the life chances of poor students who network with the privileged at their elite schools.¹¹ As of 2022, Smith still appeared on a list of colleges that consider legacy status.¹²

Debates over college admissions policies are essentially debates about how best to promote social justice. Some of us were already socially aware and active in 1965, and others were touched by public issues during our years at Smith. The Civil Rights movement had gathered force throughout our adolescence, and now we felt the slow-growing awareness of the Vietnam War. Multidenominational clergy led fasts and discussions for Vietnam. There were some SDS meetings on campus and off. Of course not everybody agreed. (One conservative student invented SUDS—Students for an Undemocratic Society – and wrapped herself in a white sheet to hand out mimeographed flyers that said, “Good mourning. We are mourning . . . because Spring-maid Sheet Factory is making sheets for our soldiers in Vietnam.” Don't buy their sheets, she said, or take jobs with them; they're worse than Dow Chemical.) Whatever our politics, however, we generally agreed on wanting what was right and best for the world.

We've also been concerned with women's issues. Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique* in our mothers' generation, basing it partly on a 15th-reunion survey of her Smith classmates. Our generation graduated at a time of radical feminism (WITCH, the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, started in 1968), bra-burning, and consciousness raising. One of us commented, “I was a women-can-do anything feminist but didn't begin the hard work of consciousness raising until graduate school.” Many of us faced professional obstacles because we were women. We've lived into the #MeToo era partly through the efforts of our classmate Catharine MacKinnon, who once wrote, “Transforming a privilege of power into a disgrace so despicable that not even many white upper-class men feel they can afford to be associated with it took decades of risk, punishment and work, including legal work.”¹³

These vibrant social movements greeted us more forcefully when we graduated. We can never know for certain if we got into Smith

on academic merit alone, or if our old mix of high school achievements would still get us into Smith today. We do know that attending Smith has affected our responses to important social issues ever since—including the issue of college admissions.

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HOUSEMOTHERS

Gale Eaton

Once I imagined my future as a housemother.

This was long after I'd abandoned other sparkling futures as an opera singer ("You're not the musical one in the family, dear") or a ballerina ("Don't even try to be a waitress — you have the memory for it but not the coordination"). I'd begun to dream of being a writer; I'd become realistic enough to foresee the need for some other revenue stream. Housemothers had suites: bedrooms, sitting rooms, and private baths. They had access to the cultural life of town and campus. They had friends. (One was friends with Iva Dee Hiatt.) They had the basics.

By the end of freshman year I could already see their lives weren't perfect. We had three housemothers that year. I never got to know the first one, the beloved Mrs. S., who was so popular there was no room for freshmen at her table. She was said to notice when girls were sad or overworked, send them on errands and treat them to Awful Awfuls, or "elf" them with small gifts slipped into their mailboxes. (I would be like that, I thought. A popular housemother.) She died over Christmas break, having delayed medical attention until well after the last minute. Our only warning might have been groans in the night, heard by girls who roomed directly over her suite.

Our substitute housemother, Mrs. D., never stood a chance. She was faced with a house in mourning. She was small and unassuming, with hair like a dandelion clock. Her lisp was easy to satirize. So was her adoration of her son, whose knowledge of clathical muth-ick wath so great that W-FCR had to ban him from regular contest participation; otherwise he'd win the Polish ham every single week. She was a nice enough woman, but suddenly freshmen were *required* to sit at head table.

The new permanent housemother, Mrs. T., arrived on Valentine's Day and enjoyed an enthusiastic but very brief honeymoon. (She

actually didn't need a honeymoon. Mr. T. visited on weekends, walking meekly behind her.) Mrs. T. had expectations that didn't work out. She fondly imagined her girls gathering around the piano to sing hymns of a Sunday afternoon. (Not likely.) As a dietitian with Navy experience, she expected to run a tight but fair ship. (The cooks pushed back. Henrieke's famous black-bottom pies made their way up to the kitchenettes.) She spotted infractions everywhere, and marched over to College Hall. (Did she expect back-up? Did the administration weary of her?)

Mrs. T. was even easier to parody than Mrs. D. When she was angry, her nostrils pinched together and her chins multiplied. She had thin legs and massive shoulders. She welled up over her corsets like a cartoon soprano, emphasizing the effect with little rhinestone clips in the corners of square necklines. I should have been more sympathetic. The corsets owed less to vanity than to orthopedic necessity; her back had been broken during the Blitz, when she was ordered out of London but stubbornly remained at her job, analyzing captured Nazi weapons. I tried to be sympathetic. I sat politely at her table.

Mrs. T. may well have read a 1964 publication called *The College Housemother*, by Helen Reich (Assistant Director of Student Affairs at the University of Iowa). Aimed at women "approximately 45 to 60" and "particularly" widows whose children were grown, it offered job seekers an overview of what housemothers could expect and how to become one. Reich's text was pragmatic, but the foreword — by Helen B. Schleman (Director of Housemothers Training School, Purdue University, 1939–1960) painted an idealistic portrait of the housemother:

It is she who determines the quality of "the climate" of the house — almost single-handed. From her stability, common sense, and impartial kindness, assurance radiates to the least prepossessing girl or boy in the group, as well as to the campus leader. Because of her caring every member knows that at least, in this house, he counts, he belongs, he has friends.

Both Helens, although well aware that undergraduates were self-absorbed and could be cruelly satirical, thought housemothering was worthwhile. They clearly expected it to be a viable occupation for years to come.

And now I, too, have arrived at an easy-to-parody age. Even my high-school sweetheart has begun to look as if he'd been invented by Dickens and drawn by Phiz. Our outlines aren't so smooth as they used to be, before we collected half a century's worth of dents. Our various tics and mannerisms are more salient. Like the best of our elders before us, we've learned to withhold news of aches, pains, and griefs from the young; we hide the stories that would round us out. To most of them we must be—as the housemothers once were to me—unnoticed backdrops to their lives, or amusing eccentrics to enliven their subplots. Minor characters.

Because, who were the housemothers, really? My teachers and fellow students were part of my life's drama then. Housemothers were (I imagined) reliably benign. Or were they? The night Delta landed Lynne and me in Boston too late to reach Northampton before curfew, I thought we should catch the late night bus, but Lynne said her housemother would never let her in. She didn't even dare risk spending the night at my dorm, and we spent it instead at Logan, surveying travelers to keep ourselves awake. "What do you think of higher education for women?" I asked a leather-jacketed man on his way off the red-eye. He glared at me. "I think women should be struck every hour on the hour. Like clocks."

My own housemother that year was the gentle Mrs. C., who would have done her best for us. Evidently other housemothers could be punitive, or could make a girl fear repercussions. When I asked three dozen classmates in a Zoom group for housemother stories, I heard none about girls locked out in the after-curfew cold, but a few that suggested harshness and unreliability. Our memories of those women ran the gamut.

"Try as I might," wrote one friend, "I cannot remember the name of our housemother, although I can easily conjure up her face, her

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physique, and her disposition." Two others compared notes and didn't "even remember having a house mother, let alone remembering a face or name." Another confessed "I'm sort of embarrassed to say that—I was house president but I never really got to know anything about her as a person. A lovely, well groomed lady. But I have no idea where she was from or anything about her family."

Mostly they were well groomed and formal; glimpsing a housemother in her bathrobe was like "seeing the Pope in his pjs." We remember bits and pieces: sturdy shoes, dresses with matching jackets, a cigarette dangling from the corner of a lip—or a cigarette holder like FDR's. Rumors: she drank a lot; she had a tough time. Passing comments: Mrs. K. said "that in her day, women chose their husband from men who could dance well." I remember that Mrs. C. once joined my friend Janet in smoking dried banana peel, supposedly a marijuana substitute, and the experiment failed. I remember she thought her late husband's willingness to lick an ice cream cone on a sidewalk showed a dashing, liberated spirit. (He had died just a few short months before she became my fourth house mother. I didn't remember that.) Another housemother was remembered as "simply an adult presence," who "did little with or for us, individually, or as a group." Just as well, someone replied; we didn't want moms.

Thinking about this, one of us said she "always found the title, HOUSE MOTHER, a bit odd. I never met one who behaved at all like a mother. It seemed a rather bleak existence to live for years in 2 smallish rooms surrounded by young women who mostly wanted very little to do with you." Hah! That was exactly what attracted me to the position! But a more thoughtful classmate answered, "Agree, though in that day and age, there may have been a lot of widows who were grateful for the room and board and whatever they got paid."

In reality, many of the housemothers were interesting and accomplished women. Mrs. W. "was well read and played the viola," and sniffed along with students as they watched Nixon beat Humphrey on the TV in her sitting room. Mrs. T., who had moved from

Lawrence to preside over Chase when it opened, “was awesome. She had worked with AmeriCorps and did some work with local migrant tobacco workers,” one of us recalls, and another says she “was enrolled in the remote sculpture program at Bennington and spent most of her time sculpting in the basement. I never saw her art.” I never saw it, either, but imagined it as tall and metallic, with lots of airy space. She signed her name “E. Thos” and moved briskly.

Many were kind. One “sweet soul, friendly and supportive,” volunteered to accompany a girl to Springfield for a premarital blood test. “I didn’t need it,” our classmate writes, “but she wanted to come. It was such a thoughtful offer. I would like to believe she cared about her ‘girls’ and wasn’t simply bored.”

Classmates who befriended housemothers reported some remarkable stories. Mrs. P. “was quite proper, but I enjoyed her company. I used to go visit with her in her sitting room. She had quite a life and many talents – told me of her early life as a ballerina and her escape from Nazi Germany through Switzerland. . . . She was an excellent seamstress and broke one of her rules to show me the professional way to alter a dress I had made. She used to go to the ‘Y’ to get a massage every week. I have been thinking about that lately. . . .”

Similarly, Mrs. J. “was a very well-educated Polish woman, a widow. She came to the USA with unacceptable (to American institutions) credentials and very little money. So she became our housemother. I talked to her for hours on end. She was funny, playful, smart, and an inspiration to me. She had fought – yes, fought – in the Warsaw Uprising of WWII. . . . After her stint at Talbot House, she fell under the protective wing of Mr. Mendenhall. He got her hooked up to the physics department at Smith. She taught astronomy, her great love.”

Mrs. J. may have been friendly with a housemother in the Quad, Mrs. B., to whom I was introduced by another Bangor student. Mrs. B. had a painting by Waldo Peirce hanging over her sofa. She was surprised when I recognized the artist, but you couldn’t grow up in Bangor without knowing that style. His house was surrounded by

a tall fence, like the stockade around a frontier outpost, because he liked to paint his family nude on the front lawn and he lived right across from the theological seminary. He may have preferred to hang out in France—there was a story about the time he leapt off a homeward-bound liner and swam back to shore in Paris, leaving his brother to think he'd been lost overboard—and Mrs. B. said he'd given her the painting on the Riviera. A resident of her house tells me she was a snob. It seems possible. She was also a flirt, at least with my father. She'd somehow acquired one of Maine's 4,000+ islands and wanted him to show her how to get there, and she actually showed up looking for him in Maine. She called him "Captain Eaton" and batted her lashes. "Don't leave that woman alone with my husband," Mother hissed at me. But Mrs. B. had a fellow housemother with her, and I think it was Mrs. J.

Most of our contacts with housemothers were superficial. They were nice, or difficult. One was "SO 'proper'" and another, being Quaker, addressed a Jewish boyfriend as "thee" because he had attended the Friends school. If courtesy demanded we sit with them at meals, some of us strategized in advance, enlisting friends to make sure the conversation would flow. Meals were where we spent most time with them, or weekend teas, when they would pour from silver teapots and hand around platters of cookies and pastries from our excellent kitchens. They modeled good manners, scolded what they saw as bad ones, and sometimes drove us to rebellion. One of us went to dinner wearing a skirt over her jeans. Mrs. K. "thought I was lowering the tone," she writes. "I'm not proud of my petty rebellion. I don't think I ever sat at her table. I thought she was well-intentioned and dealing with me was a burden." Why would we befriend women who saw us as burdens?

Looking back on it, some of us wonder what it was like for them, enforcing the rules. Did they have to check for compliance with the "door open and three feet on the floor" rule—or worse, send a dateless girl upstairs to do the checking? What were their responsibilities in cases of communicable ailments, such as (oh, no!) crabs, or (as one poor housemother misheard a diagnosis) tuberculosis? Did they have the training they needed to cope with such emergencies?

Yet they played their roles in loco parentis. One actually talked a freshman's parents into giving "permission for overnights per the 30-mile rule," and another wondered aloud to a graduating senior's parents at how she'd managed to get good grades when she was "up all night" (typing senior theses for good friends at Amherst). Some tried to console us in times of need, if they heard about or understood the need. (They were not always good at consolation.)

Just as no two people read exactly the same book, no two students knew the same housemother. One of us remembers the ballerina who escaped the Nazis with affection; another remembers feeling nervous and on edge in the same woman's presence. She "was mean; almost relishing her own meanness. She would come into my room and look around at everything and then run her finger along the grooves between drawers of my dresser, for example, hold up her finger which had some small amount of dust on it, and reprimand me for not cleaning well enough. 'Do you SEE this? That's not cleanliness!'"

Some of us found humor in our housemothers. (I'm glad that wasn't just me.) Even the "warm and supportive" Mrs. M., generally well liked, couldn't help being funny: "She had experienced a serious blood infection in her middle finger, which was permanently stiff; you can imagine how this affected a bunch of cusp-of-mature (but not there yet) women. That finger was permanently poised to convey parody or disapproval or just making a point, mostly to our amusement. I remember once her disappointment that we didn't share her delight in, what was it, coffee Jello? I guess we probably got 'the finger.'"

Meanwhile a more irritable housemother was bothered "by the common practice of studying/talking late in our living room . . . and leaving shoes behind (they were almost always Weejuns loafers, reasonably pricey at the time). People began to notice that the abandoned loafers often seemed to disappear. Mrs. X. denied knowledge. The next year or semester she was not there. They cleaned out her closet and found at least fifteen pairs of Weejuns. Of course now, with my 76th birthday a day or two away, it occurs

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to me that she was in the early stages of dementia, but it certainly didn't then. . . . I don't think it occurred to any of us that she was sick because she wasn't likable and we were young."

Our housemothers were a dying breed. Some of us worked as heads of house and house residents after graduation, and got a glimpse of how things must have looked from the other side; though, not being elderly widows, they couldn't have had the same experience. And things were changing fast. By the time I reached what might have looked (to my younger self) like an appropriate age to become a housemother, that was no longer an option, let alone a safe haven for a future I could have embraced.

Still I remember them. Especially the ones who weren't likable. The ones who annoyed me when I was young. Who got at best my superficial attention. Who were too easy to parody, too hard to know. Their job isn't my future, and even their age is now my past. I'm humbled by the comments of my classmates who wish we'd taken more pains to understand and appreciate them while we had the chance.

And I'm left pondering the interplay between age and identity. On one level even a child knows that individuals go from childhood to old age and are still the same people. On another level, we don't really believe pictures of our grandparents as children and we can't really imagine growing old ourselves, because aren't identities fixed qualities? Every fairy tale or opera has the juvenile leads, the aging heavies, the elderly kings and witches. Age has always been part of the role. Remembering housemothers – or looking into the mirror with eyes newly unblurred by laser surgery – I can't quite work out how it gets to be part of a person's essential being.

FOR MY SON, SPREADING HIS WINGS

Mary Stewart Douglas



Watercolor

HOUSEMOTHER MEMORIES

Mary Ann Ericson

Gale's call for housemother stories has triggered a wealth of memories for so many of us. And as with the stories of our admission to Smith, I have been struck by the recurrence of common themes together with totally fascinating and unique anecdotes. I have loved reading them all! And all of this has evoked a range of recollections for me.

As it happens, my housemate Marcia Schenk Steckler nudged me to write something based on my time living in the faculty apartment attached to Laura Scales House from 1972 to 1976, while I was working as Assistant to the Dean of Students, Helen Russell. Although I suspect Marcia intended that I simply add a short email to the ongoing thread, her nudge has resulted in my writing a much longer "essay," since I have taken a rather slow and winding trip down memory lane!!

In reading through the group's various recollections, I began to focus on the fact that we were witnesses to the end of a particular era. We really were among the last Smith students to experience the unique and rather arcane role of housemothers.

Let me begin with observations from my early days in Franklin King House. . . .

And let me begin with our house mother in King for our first three years. Although I had to text Marcia for a reminder of her name, I had no difficulty remembering the woman who shepherded our house through the great Northeast Blackout in November of our freshman year and was a gentle presence throughout the national and world-wide upheavals in spring 1968—Mrs. S. I have a vivid memory of a rather attractive older woman with lovely upswept snow-white hair and genteel manners. I'm pretty sure she was a widow, as were the others who followed her. While I have a vague recollection that she was a bit "dizzy," I have a more substantial

memory of her graciously overseeing meals in the dining room and quietly serving tea in the living room. Although she seemed a bit prone to nervousness, she also somehow managed to carry off an air of placidity. If there were an emergency in the house, you would go to her. We understood that she was the connection between College Hall and the house, and stood "in loco parentis," although what that meant from a practical point of view was rather vague. She seemed to oversee the kitchen, and she oversaw the dining room, particularly at dinner. Many of us followed her into the living room after dinner, where she was almost regal in her manner of serving up tea (or was it coffee?) out of a beautiful samovar.

All seemed orderly and refined, not that the house didn't have issues, and not that there wasn't lively conversation and debate (the campus leaders of SDS as well as the president of the Young Republicans resided in King). However, the rituals around dinner, the cloth napkins, the wait for our housemother to "lead" us into and then out of the dining room, the custom of the housemother serving tea in the living room after dinner in those lovely demitasse cups, were all components of "gracious living," as we had come to understand it. It suggested to me that, despite the chaos in the world around us, there would always be a talented housemate playing the piano, there would always be tea and demitasse (was it ever coffee?), high tea (on Thursdays, I think) and though I never learned the game, there would always be a foursome for bridge after dinner.

Many of you have mentioned dining at the housemother's table (or conversely, trying to avoid it!). I recall with a smile how my housemates would give me grief if I was seated at the head table, because I could chat up a storm, and would lose track of the fact that no one could leave the dining room until the house mother left! I can still feel the eyes of good-natured housemates who would try to get my attention by looking at me with a level of intensity designed to alert me that we all had places to go and things to do. . . .☺

Perhaps because I was so busy talking, or perhaps because the times they were "a-changin'," I do not have any clear memory of Mrs. S.'s conversation or interests. What I do recall is that by the fall of '68,

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Franklin King House was quite different from the house we entered in the fall of '65, and not only in the way that all Smith houses regularly transformed, with a new class of incoming freshmen replacing graduated seniors, students leaving for and returning from Study Abroad, students transferring out and transferring in, etc. In '68, with the opening of Mary Ellen Chase House for seniors, the concomitant relaxing of rules governing movement from one house to another, and the appeal of transferring out of the College altogether, there was what seemed to me a real "flight" from King House.

I suspect that it was reflective of a host of issues, and I don't know if our attrition was any greater than that of other houses, but suffice it to say that the influx of new students across all four class years was substantial by fall of '68. There wasn't the same sense of cohesion as in years past, since so many in the house were new. Racial tensions began to simmer, in part because of the perceived self-segregation of the new black students in the house. Although House rules and traditions continued, there were a lot of boundaries being tested: parietals, pot, noise, house chores. (A group of students temporarily boycotted house watch, because they thought everyone should have their own house key, thus obviating the need for watch! The keys did come, sometime around '70, I think, along with so many other changes.) There was still tea, and high tea, and all the rest, but it was becoming clearer that things were changing. I should point out here that I was particularly sensitive to the life of the house because in the spring of 1968 I was elected House President.

At this point, let me circle back to the housemothers. The challenges in the house were compounded by the comings and goings of housemothers themselves! It created another level of instability in an already unstable world. I cannot remember exactly why or when Mrs. S. left, but I think she simply "retired" at the end of the spring '68 term. I remember and liked our new housemother, Mrs. A., who seemed to catch on quickly to the rhythms of the house, though she, too, was quite a nervous woman, much more so than Mrs. S. I think she was recently widowed, and by the end of her first semester in the house, she was gone. I suspected that it was a nervous breakdown, given various clues and given that her departure

was explained in terms of some “medical issues.” While it wasn’t clear whether her issues had anything to do with the challenges of overseeing a house in transition, it was unexpected and distressing, to say the least. I think our next housemother was a “temp” who occupied the beautiful suite off the living room for only a short while. I’m unable to conjure up an image of her, but am pretty sure that I was regularly back and forth to the Dean of Students office trying to work through the ebb and flow of housemothers and house issues!

Toward the end of my tenure, I think we had a fourth housemother who shuttled between our house and another (perhaps Scales?), but I happily handed over the gavel in April of ’69 and chose to block the turmoil in the interest of making plans for my future! Since I was juggling a lot of other personal issues that spring, much of it seems something of a blur. Regardless, it seems that we were always dealing with a housemother transition, and housemates testing boundaries all over the place! (Didn’t Sessions House threaten sometime in ’68/69 to “secede” from the house system altogether over parietals? I raise that issue because the matter of one, two, or three feet on the floor seems to keep coming up in our recollections and parietals became something of a preoccupation. It was a reflection of the quickly changing times. ☺)

Whether beloved and charming or bemused and clueless, the housemother of 1969 had become, or was becoming, obsolete and irrelevant.

There was so much going on, both in and out of the campus houses, that events were overtaking them. By the summer of 1972, the housemothers were gone. I returned to campus that summer, having been offered a newly created position as Assistant to the Dean of Students, to serve as a kind of ombudsman for the Head Residents in the newly-designed house governance system. In the short span of three years, the College had embraced a totally new paradigm of how the functioning and oversight of the houses should be handled. Housemothers had been replaced by much younger head residents, individuals and sometimes couples, most of whom were graduate

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students. The College had moved to this new model, which more appropriately fit the times. (I remember Mr. Mendenhall sharing with me a copy of the campus study which had recommended the new paradigm for administering the houses. As I reflect on it now, it occurs to me that the movement from recommendation to implementation was swift, indeed!)

By 1972, unpaid house jobs and many traditions were gone and already forgotten. Sitting “on watch,” “table wait” in the dining room, and sitting at the “housemother’s table” were things of the past. With the broad expansion of parietal hours, calling out “Man on the floor” seemed an antiquated concept, and students had both house and room keys. Administratively, the College was assessing the entire dining system, and regional dining had begun to take shape to replace the functioning of some forty or so separate dining rooms. For sure, by the time I returned in ’72, I could see for myself that “The old order changeth, yielding place to new.” What was most striking to me was the speed with which this all happened. The “old order” of which we were a part, yielded to the new, for which we paved the way. . . . It seems to have happened in the blink of an eye!

PART THREE

CONNECTING WITH THE WORLD

How many of us are nourishing our bodies, minds, and spirits by travel? When housemates get together on Zoom it's a major topic of conversation. Flip to our news in the Alumnae Quarterly and there we are, visiting friends in Ecuador, watching tigers in India, or planning trips to Portugal.

Holiday letters, too. Some we look forward to every year come from Smithies who live abroad (represented here by an overview of the Smith in Europe community and by two memorable letters). Others come from classmates who cross the world's oceans for work or on vacation and send us stories, poems, paintings, and photographs ranging from selfies to professional art. We relish them all.

Those of us who travel less these days may travel vicariously, through our friends' creations. (GE)

There is no Frigate like a Book
To take us Lands away
Nor any Coursers like a Page
Of prancing Poetry -
This Traverse may the poorest take
Without oppress of Toll -
How frugal is the Chariot
That bears the Human Soul -

Emily Dickinson



WHAT IS SMITH IN EUROPE?

Gesine Brueckmann Pohl, Hamburg, Germany

What comes up before your mind's eye when you look back at your fondly remembered years at Smith College? Stately buildings on a quiet, leafy-green campus, tranquil Paradise Pond, mirroring fluffy clouds and lush overhanging willows. Overall, an idyllic environment nestled at the feet of the Berkshire mountains, the perfect place to immerse oneself in academic pleasures. Well, then you might be surprised to hear that over the years Smith College has become something of a global foreign relations giant, its network spreading into some unexpected places.

You may not remember that Smith College allows its students to spend up to a year at a foreign university, in its Junior Year Abroad programs: London, Hamburg, Paris, Florence, Madrid, and Geneva, with a special relationship to the American University in Athens. These are the original sources of Smith's "foreign relations" project, going back decades. The JYA students, who get full credit for the time spent studying abroad, are mentored, learn the language, immerse themselves in the foreign culture — always an exciting and mind-broadening time.

But sometimes something else also happens. As young people often do when they are in their early twenties: JYAs fall in love and even decide to get married — to locals! That is how Smith College alumnae have over the years "infiltrated" all the cities above, often in clusters in the neighboring areas or even spreading to other parts of the country or nearby countries. They are well-integrated, active citizens, have children and have careers, e.g., watching over a vineyard in southern France or managing public transportation in Geneva or populating school and university faculties or writing an authoritative Icelandic-English dictionary — to mention just a few of the life choices. Of course, there are those alumnae who don't marry a local, but simply choose to return to the JYA country to continue their studies or take on a good job. There are classmates who don't have the JYA experience but nevertheless decide to work and

WHAT IS SMITH IN EUROPE?

settle outside of the U.S., often in Europe. And vice versa, like the American Studies students from Hamburg University who spend an academic year in Northampton. Here's where **Smith in Europe** comes into play:

Smith in Europe was the brainchild of our fellow alumna Jane von Salis, Class of 1948, and a circle of friends. Jane married a Swiss man and lived in Switzerland. Keeping in touch with classmates and other alumnae spread out in different countries was difficult. Jane and friends got together in Lucerne in 1980 and came up with the idea of inviting interested alumnae to a European meeting every two years in a varying European city, planned by alumnae who lived in or near that particular location. The first "official" Smith in Europe meeting was in 1982 in Copenhagen. (On a personal note, I can say that for me it was a rescue mission, having just survived the whooping cough with my two very young children.) The new tradition that Jane and her like-minded classmates established has continued, interrupted only once by COVID, until today. Quite an achievement! Take a moment and have a look at the wonderful places European (and other) alumnae have gathered to reconnect and for a few days share the life of other European Smithies.

1980	Lucerne, Switzerland	2002	Rome, Italy
1982	Copenhagen, Denmark	2004	Reykjavik, Iceland
1984	Scheveningen, Netherlands	2006	Geneva, Switzerland
1986	Montecatini, Italy	2008	Athens, Greece
1988	Athens, Greece	2010	Istanbul, Turkey
1990	London and Bath, England	2014	Berlin, Germany
1992	Dijon, France	2016	Edinburgh, Scotland
1994	Hamburg, Germany	2018	Brussels, Belgium
1996	Bad Ischl, Austria	2020	COVID
1998	Stockholm, Sweden	2022	Milano, Italy
2000	Madrid, Spain	2024	Paris, France

The list of places we have met in is quite remarkable. And what are these European meetings like? Four days (Thursday to Sunday) of a wonderful mixture of intellectual and sightseeing activities, spiced with the special knowledge of the women living in or near

the location. The most magical element is the diversity of ages, women from 22 to 85, coming together based on a shared college experience spread over decades (which makes it different from a class reunion), and the diversity of circumstances that each woman carries with her. A few times we managed to lure the president of the college to join us (Jill Ker Conway, Mary Maples Dunn, Carol Christ, and Kathleen McCartney).

You have met some old friends and made some new ones. You come away feeling refreshed and – yes – a little rejuvenated, maybe even ready to influence your part of the world.

Hamburg, Germany

BASLER FASNACHT (A LETTER)

Deanna Gaunce Nebert

My partner Arthur and my flute teacher Detlev had both told me for years that the carnival in Basel was an exceptional treat. Arthur claimed that it would be impossible to get reservations without booking years in advance. Last spring we surfed the Internet, found the dates for this year's carnival and looked (just in case) at hotel sites. What do you know? There were several hotels available during the carnival days. So we booked a room, found flights, and went to Basel. If you have a hotel room, your hotel also gives you a ticket for public transportation within the city for the duration of your stay. You can even take the bus from the airport to the main station without paying, just by showing your hotel reservation. So we didn't need a car, could take trams or buses everywhere we went, or walk to the city center when public transportation was re-routed around the area where the carnival activities were going on. Let me tell you about it.

The Fasnacht (or "carnival" as the rest of the world has it) was from Monday, 10 March, to Thursday, 13 March, this year [2014]. The Basel carnival doesn't announce the arrival of the Lenten season at the same time as in Catholic areas (the city is Protestant), it starts a week later. The carnival is strictly divided into active (inhabitants of Basel who are members of a carnival club) and passive (everyone else) participants. Activists wear costumes, carry lanterns, or play instruments. Participants watch. That's all – they don't throw confetti, they don't sing along, they don't wear costumes (or masks, or jester's caps), they don't sway in time to the music. They do buy badges (called *Blagette* in Baselese) to show their financial support of the carnival activists. It's especially important to wear the badge on your clothing where it can be seen. Otherwise, you may become the victim of extensive confetti stuffing on the part of the activists. The 2014 carnival motto was "*Gäll, blyb suuber!*" (Keep clean!). Here's a link with a quick (ca. 1.5 minutes) film presentation from the Basel Tourist Association: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqGbugKe7Rw&feature=youtu.be>.

There are several main activities. First, there is the *Morgestraich* (the morning strike), which starts on Monday morning at 4 a.m. — yes, it's the middle of the night. The lights all over the city are extinguished at 4 o'clock, and when the signal to start is given, all Hell breaks loose. Drummers and pipers march in formation toward the center of the city (the Market and Barefoot Squares), accompanying the objects they have made their "subjects" of political interest. These are actually large lanterns which are lit up, while other, smaller lanterns light the path of the procession. Here's a link to one of the shorter clips on the morning strike (ca. 3 minutes): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c996w2L SsuY>.

This year there were over two hundred such groups marching. The lanterns were put on display at the major church square (on the *Muensterplatz*) following the actual parade, when they could be admired from all sides in the daylight. Well past dawn after the morning strike, smaller groups of anarchist drummers and pipers moved through the city streets, entertaining passers-by and themselves. Piccolo music and drumbeats filled the air for hours.

Shops began selling the typical Fasnacht food right after the parade ended. In Basel, this means "flour soup" (sounds disgusting, but is really very tasty, as the flour is browned and then added to bouillon), cheese and/or onion quiche (called *Waihe* in Basel). There are also special breads and pastries, but I stuck with the more traditional things. (That's my historian's curse, I guess.)

Starting at 1:30 p.m., the first major daylight parade began. The groups from the morning strike marched around the center of the city. Wagons with costumed participants moved with them, throwing candy, flowers, oranges, apples, bananas, and even carrots to onlookers. Brass bands, famous for playing tunes in a familiar but off-key style reminiscent of cats' yowling (called *Guggenmusik*), marched in this parade as well. There were so many groups that the parade was organized in two directions (one marching clockwise, the other counter-clockwise along the route) — otherwise, the parade would have gone on long after it was supposed to end at 6.30 p.m. Children begging for candy shouted, "Papi, Papi," to the men in the wagons passing it out — a hysterically funny ploy, I thought.

In the evening, smaller groups of piccolo players, drummers, and brass ensembles continued their ad hoc concerts throughout the city. Others took breaks in the pubs and restaurants, stowing their masks and instruments near the entrances.

On Tuesday, it's the children's parade, following the same route and times as the adults from the day before. The kids distribute the candies, etc., themselves to their peers. Some hand out candy with one hand and throw confetti with the other. Very often, parents (in and out of costume) are included. Smaller children have tags around their necks, with their names and phone numbers, in case they get lost.

In the evening the brass bands take over and play their *Guggenmusik* at different public squares in the city. When these concerts have ended, the musicians go into the pubs and restaurants and play for the patrons there, then continue on their rounds.

On Wednesday, there's another parade in the afternoon (same hours as the days before). In the evening, the political satirists have their say: These performers sing songs and recite poems making fun of whatever they feel like, all of it in Basel dialect. The venue is called *Schnitzelbängg* (*Schnitzelbank*). We could have gone to the public performance, but instead we stayed in the hotel and watched on TV. This had several advantages for me: 1) the performers were using microphones, so I could hear everything clearly, 2) there were no loud interfering noises (like people laughing or clinking their glasses next to me), and 3) when I didn't understand the point right away, Arthur could explain what had been said without disturbing anyone. For me, it was a brilliant solution.

There's another blow-out party on Wednesday evening, lasting until (what else?) 4 a.m. on Thursday. But after the three days of revelry, we had had quite enough by later Wednesday evening.

On Sunday evening, before the main action began, the active participants meet in their groups (called cliques) without their costumes and transport the (unlit) lanterns to their starting point for the morning strike. I watched one such group from our hotel room window. We noticed the piccolos playing at first, opened the win-

dow, and watched the group march slowly off in the direction of the city center. I mentioned to Arthur that the piccolo playing was superb, and he replied, "Of course. Did you think I would offer you something second-rate?"

Not only is the musical experience first-rate, the artistic effort which goes into the masks, the wagons, and the lanterns is fantastic. Activists work on these projects year-round. It's quite a remarkable experience, even for the passive observer! In 2020 and in 2021 the Swiss government forbade large public events due to the coronavirus pandemic, thus canceling the Fasnacht. The activists who had invested so much work were understandably distraught. Fortunately, it has resumed since 2022.

Here are some photographs (all from the Internet, I didn't carry a camera with me) to show some of the artistic highlights. Unfortunately, there are too many megabytes to include with this file, so I have included the hyperlinks instead. Just click on them (or paste the links in your browser) and you can see the pictures.

Some pictures from the morning strike:

- http://files.newsnetz.ch/bildlegende/93192/1161346_pic_970x641.jpg. Note the lit lanterns on the players' heads.
- http://files.newsnetz.ch/bildlegende/93192/1161270_pic_970x641.jpg. These musicians are wearing lamps on their heads.
- http://files.newsnetz.ch/bildlegende/141378/1737906_pic_970x641.jpg. When the groups start moving, the whole public square is filled with musicians and lanterns.
- <http://www.jds.fr/medias/image/basler-fasnacht-2014-1-30005-1200-630.jpg>.

Here's the group (in costume) which we watched from our hotel on Sunday evening: <http://danimu.ch/Basler-Basel-Fasnacht-2014/Montag-Cortege-Wettsteinbruecke-2014-Teil6/Basel-Fasnacht-Montag-Cortege-Wettsteinbruecke-2503.JPG>.

This is from the same group. Their subject dealt with "wood" and associated themes, like wood shavings, etc. <http://danimu.ch/Basler-Basel->

[Fasnacht-2014/Montag-Cortege-Wettsteinbruecke-2014-Teil6/
Basel-Fasnacht-Montag-Cortege-Wettsteinbruecke-2509.JPG](http://Fasnacht-2014/Montag-Cortege-Wettsteinbruecke-2014-Teil6/Basel-Fasnacht-Montag-Cortege-Wettsteinbruecke-2509.JPG)

Here's one of the brass bands from the parade: <https://i.ytimg.com/vi/iuXo64wr26c/hqdefault.jpg>.

Here's one of the men who had to clean up the mess every night: <http://files.newsnetz.ch/story/1/4/5/14545275/4/topelement.jpg>.

The kid in the middle can't be older than ten, I think. (Unless Basel has lots of midgets.) [http://files.newsnetz.ch/story/1/5/2/
15254520/3/topelement.jpg](http://files.newsnetz.ch/story/1/5/2/15254520/3/topelement.jpg).

Some children in the parade on Tuesday looking for victims to throw confetti at: [http://files.newsnetz.ch/bildlegende/141620/1740040_
pic_970x641.jpg](http://files.newsnetz.ch/bildlegende/141620/1740040_pic_970x641.jpg).

The weather was beautiful all three days. People said it was a "bikini" Fasnacht! [http://files.newsnetz.ch/bildlegende/141776/1741260_
pic_970x641.jpg](http://files.newsnetz.ch/bildlegende/141776/1741260_pic_970x641.jpg).

Confetti everywhere: [http://files.newsnetz.ch/bildlegende/
141776/1741322_pic_970x641.jpg](http://files.newsnetz.ch/bildlegende/141776/1741322_pic_970x641.jpg).

Here are two political satirists (from the *Schnitzelbägg*). One hot topic was the disruption to traffic caused by an inordinate number of road construction sites in and around the city: [http://www.
handelszeitung.ch/sites/handelszeitung.ch/files/imagecache/
teaser-big/lead_image/baengg-2014.jpg](http://www.handelszeitung.ch/sites/handelszeitung.ch/files/imagecache/teaser-big/lead_image/baengg-2014.jpg).

Summary of the festivities: I enjoyed every minute and would go again at the drop of a hat. (I'm not even a carnival lover. Basel is simply exceptional.) I also understand why the organizers insist on the division between active and passive participants: That's the only way to keep the Fasnacht like the locals want it. If you've got strangers butting in every year, it doesn't take long until everything devolves into a drunken orgy.

Keep it pure. Don't tell anyone about it!

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S TALE

With apologies to Shakespeare

Christine von Prümmer

I was born June 20th 1946, a year after the end of World War II. In 2021 I celebrated my 75th Birthday with my brother Klaus and his family. I had a chance to reflect on the many birthdays past and to anticipate the birthdays yet to come. At the time I shared my thoughts with friends who were used to getting a Christmas/New Year's letter from me. Today I feel that this letter, with a few editorial adjustments, can serve as my contribution to the *Grécourt Review: The 55th Reunion Issue*.

The idea to write a summer letter for a change came upon me in the closing minutes of my 75th birthday. Grappling with the back-end of *WordPress* in an attempt to structure and update a website¹ I'm in charge of, I stayed up way beyond the point at which I should and, indeed, could have gone to sleep. And since summer started officially at midnight, this letter will truly be a **Midsummer Night's Tale** – though not quite as epic as Shakespeare's *Dream*.

It so happens that my Birthday, June 20th, is the longest day of the year and I have always felt a special magic surrounding my **Midsummer Birthday** which coincides with the summer solstice (*Sommersonnenwende* in our hemisphere). Wikipedia informs us that "Traditionally, in many temperate regions (especially Europe), the summer solstice is seen as the middle of summer and referred to as 'midsummer.'" For me, the date always has marked the last day of Spring and the beginning of Summer.

This year I've decided to share a few of my more lasting **Midsummer Memories** with you. I'll start where it all began, with an anecdote which has become family folklore over time.

1946. Easter must have been very late and June 20th fell on the Catholic *Feast of Corpus Christi*. Traditionally there is a "*Fronleichnam*" procession through the town, the path of which and the four altars

where the procession stops for prayers and benediction are strewn with flowers. I was born just after 9 a.m., and my dad set out on his bicycle to tell the news to my maternal grandparents who lived across town. Their landlord, who owned a nursery/garden center, had flowers to spare and gave the new father a bouquet to take to his wife. It was inevitable that my dad ran into the tail end of the procession and had to wait for it to pass. It was equally inevitable that soon the news was all over town that the von Prümmer family had had their new baby and that Franz had followed the procession to grab the flowers off the ground and from altars to take home for the new mother.

1966. In 1966 I had completed my 13 years of formal schooling and in mid-June was ready for my final exams, the “*Abitur*” or “*Reifeprüfung*”. Passing these exams not only signifies the successful graduation from secondary school but also serves as university entrance qualification. My 20th birthday happened in the middle of my finals and I still remember that I spent the morning sitting a four-hour exam and the afternoon trying to prepare for the following day’s exam. No **Midsummer** festivals or birthday party that year. Not that I minded. After all, I had been accepted and given a full scholarship (tuition, room, and board) to study as a Sophomore at Smith College during the academic year 1966/67 and I was busy getting my things together. Just as soon as the exams were over and I knew I had passed them, I said good-bye to friends and family, my parents loaded me and my trunk into the family’s VW Beetle, and we drove to Rotterdam. I had booked a passage on the *MS Seven Seas*, a student ship sailing across the Atlantic in ten wonderful, relaxed days. In New York City I was met by Ms. Johnson, my father’s one-time boss and my “American mother-to-be.” She confused me by asking whether I wanted to powder my nose, introduced me to *Howard Johnson’s* Triple-Decker-Turkey-Club-Sandwich, and took me to *Camp Alice Merritt* where—to my great surprise—I was to spend the rest of the summer acting as Girl Scout counselor in a holiday camp for under-privileged Hartford teenagers. But all of that is another story.

1967. My first birthday in America. By now I know that *Smith College* will extend my one-year scholarship for another two years and I will

not go home at the end of the summer. In spite of my lack of experience (I had never been a Girl Scout) *Camp Alice Merritt* has asked me to spend my summer teaching — of all things — *Hiking and Campcraft* to four successive groups of 12- to 13-year olds. That's because the *Girl Scouts of Connecticut* are short of adult camp counselors, and since I'm turning 21 this year they can legally put me in charge of a unit of 24 kids. Fortunately there's Betty who is only 17 but has all the badges and skills needed to lead the unit and teach the girls and myself the necessary skills. My birthday is just before I'm due to set off for my summer job, and Johnny (that's Ms. Johnson) has invited a few friends to join us for a celebratory meal in a swanky restaurant the evening before. In New England the legal minimum age for drinking alcohol was then and still is 21 years and consequently the restaurant does not serve me an alcoholic drink to join the others in a toast to my birthday. That's okay, can't ask them to break the law. But what I do resent is the fact that they bring me a drink called "Shirley Temple" and disguised as a cocktail, fake Whiskey Sour I think.

1993. This year took me to Scandinavia, more precisely to Lapland, for two vastly different international conferences within the first two weeks of June. The first one, on women-friendly perspectives in distance education, was organized by the Women's International Network (WIN) and took place in the informal atmosphere of a rural adult education center (*folkhögskola*) in Lapland. The second one, on developing a Scandinavian research agenda in distance education, was a more formal conference at Umeå University.

After the conferences my mother and I went further north, crossing the Arctic Circle and experiencing the 24-hour days. On June 20th we found an Italian restaurant in Jokkmokk, with a waiter who happened to have lived and worked in Frankfurt for years and spoke perfect German — with Hessian dialect no less. He suggested a hill-top near the city as the "perfect" place for seeing the midnight sun. Well, that turned out to be a flop because of millions of bloodthirsty mosquitoes who attacked us the minute we opened the car doors. We managed to escape and drove to a lakeside we had discovered on an outing the day before. Empty of both mosquitoes and people. As I write this I'm looking at the framed photograph I took there:

midnight, my mom standing on the shore, looking over lake and islands, and the sun spectacularly lighting up the water and the clouds. Unforgettable.

And now for the **Midsummer** that had the most lasting impact on my adult life and provided me with a Silver Jubilee in 2021.

1996. It's really hard to believe that 25 years have passed since those momentous events in June 1996! To my own surprise, after eight years of working on it, I had managed to complete and hand in my doctoral thesis just in time to get all the formalities done before the Dortmund University summer recess. This was very important for two reasons: Firstly, I was determined to complete my Ph.D. before my 50th birthday on June 20th, and secondly, I had booked non-refundable flights to Las Vegas for my mother and myself and we were scheduled to leave on June 17th for a six-week holiday in the States.

Fortunately for these plans, the date for my "*Disputation*", the defense of my dissertation, was set for June 7th. And even though it was the hottest day of the year, I came through the oral exam with more or less flying colors and was awarded my *Dr. phil.* (doctoral) degree "*magna cum laude*".

The rest of that day passed in a blur, as did most of the ten days left until our plane took off from Cologne Airport. In fact, I was in some sort of a daze for much of the first three weeks of our vacation, so it was a good thing that we were met at Las Vegas Airport by Klaus and Monika who took us to the hotel and out for a meal and helped us adjust to the crowds and the bustle of Las Vegas. They had arrived a few days earlier for a newspaper conference and already knew their way around town and casinos. Their birthday present to me: four tickets to the *Siegfried & Roy Magic Dinner Show* at *The Mirage* hotel. What an absolutely breathtaking and truly magical **Midsummer** evening.

Altogether the four of us had a lovely week in Las Vegas, touring scenic Red Rock Canyon before driving (in separate cars) to the

Grand Canyon where we split up. Klaus and Monika went South and my mother and I headed North: Bryce Canyon, Yellowstone Park, through Montana and Washington toward the Seattle area where we visited our long-time friends Jim and Jean and their extended family. Driving south on Highway 101, my mother and I realized a dream we both had had since way back when: a spectacular route along the Pacific coast and Redwood forests, through Oregon and Northern California to San Francisco where we enjoyed the hospitality of fellow Smithie Marsha. Finally the drive back to Las Vegas in order to catch our return flight, again an unforgettable adventure following the trail of the 1849 Gold Rush, exploring Yosemite Park and Sequoia National Forest, and lastly crossing the desert to reach the city lights. One last night in Sin City before heading for the airport and home and the second half of my life.

2011. My last birthday as Senior Researcher at FernUniversität where I had worked since October 1978. Due to compulsory retirement at 65 years of age I was going to be a pensioner from July 1st, lucky to still have a few contracts for research projects, workshops and presentations. With retirement imminent and having just come out of a painful year with various aches and health issues I wasn't in the mood for celebrating with colleagues and friends from my work context. Instead I started a new tradition of going away on a family holiday. By then I already knew I was going to move to Darmstadt where my brother Klaus with his wife Monika and their son Matthias have lived for a long time, their daughter Franziska and her children not far away in the town of Weiterstadt. Spending a holiday with the family seemed like a wonderful way to begin this new stage in our relationship.

Long before, my friend and colleague Ute and I had made plans for a joint birthday outing as Ute is exactly five years less one day younger than I am, her birthday being on June 19th. We had hit on the East German island of *Rügen* as the place to go to and had found a likely holiday cottage – intriguingly named “*Rapunzel-Turm*” – in Binz, the main seaside resort on the island. Since this was plenty big enough for four adults and a little cocker spaniel I asked Klaus and Monika if they wanted to join us for a two-week holiday. Both

Ute and my nephew Matthias could only take a one-week vacation which worked out really well: Ute came along for the first week – two birthday dinners and a 2-day **Midsummer** party! – and took the train back to Bochum. She was replaced by Matthias who conveniently arrived by the same train that took her away. We all had a great time and enjoyed exploring the largest of the German islands. We were very lucky with the weather and enjoyed the seaside, the countryside, historical sites, prehistoric graves, summer meadows, the white cliffs, spectacular sunsets, and the delicious food.

2016. Having had such a wonderful holiday five years ago I decided on a repeat performance and organized a **Midsummer** holiday where we could again explore parts of the *Terra Incognita* which used to be the communist *GDR*, i.e. “East Germany.” With the town of *Görlitz* we chose the easternmost city in Germany where we spent a great ten days exploring the town and both sides of the border. Having grown up during the Cold War, it seemed absolutely fantastic to be able to walk and drive across the *Neisse River* into *Poland* without “let or hindrance,” not even having to show passports.

Historically, *Görlitz* spanned both sides of the *Neisse* river but was divided after WW II when the *Neisse* was designated the GDR-Polish border. Now, of course, Poland is part of the EU and you can freely cross the river without so much as noticing any border control posts. If it had not been for the different languages you would not have known that you had crossed the border.

Having escaped the WW II bombings *Görlitz* has a rich architectural heritage including the historic old city center as well as the grand Wilhelmian town houses built in the late 19th /early 20th century. After four decades of neglect during the communist era and almost three decades of (partial) reconstruction the buildings are in various stages of decay and restoration. No wonder *Görlitz* had been discovered by film makers and is featured in movies such as *The Reader* (2008), *IngLOURIOUS BASTERDS* (2009), and *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), the latter featuring a beautifully restored Art Deco department store in the town center. As we discovered after arrival our grand – if slightly run-down – holiday apartment had

previously been rented to a Hollywood studio for the use of Kate Winslet during the filming of *The Reader*.

In addition to exploring Görlitz we took various daytrips – East into Poland, West to Dresden and Bautzen, North to the Fürst-Pückler landscape gardens in Bad Muskau (a world cultural heritage site) and South to Zittau which sits in the tri-border area of Saxony, Poland and the Czech Republic. And we stopped in Weimar en route since it is more or less half-way between Görlitz and Darmstadt.

2020. We had great plans for a three-week **Midsummer** holiday in England where we wanted to visit friends, especially Graham and Rita in Brighton, as well as exploring Cornwall. These plans had to be abandoned due to the onset of the pandemic which broke out just after we had celebrated this year's International Women's Day. Fortunately we had not yet booked the tickets for our Eurotunnel crossing or holiday accommodation, but still, even without that kind of hassle, it was a severe disappointment. At least by mid-June we could get together for a family meal in the restaurant *Bayerischer Biergarten*, observing all the precautions of distance, masks, and negative tests. Little did we expect that things would get worse and it would be the last but one birthday party for the rest of the year. Shortly after Franziska's September 2nd birthday all family get-togethers had to be suspended as COVID-19 forced us into lockdown.

2021. At last we were again able to participate in limited activities and dispense with masks outdoors. I had a long-overdue haircut and while a mask was required in the hairdressing salon I did not need a negative test beforehand. Although being tested has become considerably easier since the Doc Phone shop downstairs has set up a walk-in testing center and sends the results via e-mail within 15 minutes of doing the test. Fortunately, mine have so far come up negative.

As for my 75th birthday it had been clear since last year that I did not have to make plans for a big party or alternatively for a getting-away-from-it-all holiday. But due to the partial reduction of the restrictions on our social life I was able to reserve a table for eight

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S TALE

in the historic *Alte Bergmühle*, an old water mill turned restaurant and hotel. Fellow Baldwin House Smithies Deanna and Anna may remember the place from our *Sauerbraten* dinner during Anna's visit in the fall of 2019. The indoor dining areas were closed due to COVID-19 restrictions but our table was set up in a shady corner of a lovely courtyard and with a bit of a breeze making the summer heat bearable. Great food, too, and it felt really wonderful to enjoy a meal in the company of family!

So much for my **Midsummer Reminiscences**. Let's hope there will be many more memorable events in the years to come.

Darmstadt, Summer 2023

ENDNOTES

- 1 Luise Büchner-Gesellschaft, <http://www.luise-buechner-gesellschaft.de/>.

PAINTING THE WORLD

Mary Douglas

ROOFTOPS OF PRAGUE



Watercolor

I've been painting on and off for about twenty years. Although I worked in oils for a while, I was increasingly drawn to watercolors because of the interesting surprises created by the flow of the water. It took me a while to realize that I did not need to be particularly skilled in drawing, or rendering a likeness, to be able to enjoy watercolors. Figuring out techniques – such as how to paint a progressive wash, how to use salt to get unexpected color patterns, and how to throw warm colors into a sky – always gives me satisfaction. My art has been separate from my professional life as an environmental lawyer. I like to paint for the pure fun of it as I have complete freedom to experiment – and fail – without pressure.

PAINTING THE WORLD

My focus is on shape and color. I'm not conceptual in my approach, but unabashedly like to paint beautiful scenes, particularly landscapes and seascapes. Lately I've been drawn to the built environment of cities and towns, using photos from my travels as a starting point. I'm always delighted when friends or family ask for one of my paintings, and give away many of them.

CARTAGENA



Watercolor

FALL IN BATTERY KEMBLE PARK, DC



Watercolor

THE EVOLUTION AND DEVOLUTION OF ASPIRATION: A 76-YEAR CASE STUDY

Linda Guess Farris

In contemplating the *Embracing Our Futures* theme of our 55th reunion, I felt it was time to wrap up my lifelong research, publish the findings and get back to the future. This case study is near and dear to my heart, as over the years, I've literally lived and breathed it.

But before embracing the future, let's reflect on the past. I reviewed my 76 years of data, and have marveled at the bell curve of my goals over the decades:

1. Please my Mommy
2. Get out of Texas
3. Pursue an Education
4. Settle in San Francisco
5. Join the Sexual Revolution
6. Secure Equal Rights for Women
7. Achieve Perfection and Total Understanding
8. Establish World Peace
9. Make a Living
10. Retire
11. Find My Glasses
12. Avoid Falling Down

Results: I achieved goals 1 through 5 as well as 9 and 10. Equal rights, perfection and world peace were a bit more elusive. I am currently focused on the more modest but still challenging goals of finding my glasses and not falling down.

Data Points:

Goal #1 – Pleasing Mommy

Within a couple short months of my arrival at Queen of Angels Hospital in Hollywood, my mother Alice began chronicling my

successes, failures and budding personality traits. She remarked that before I could roll over or talk, I seemed very intent on making her happy, smiling and laughing every time she entered the room . . . not at all surprising since I was born into a family of co-dependents. People-pleasing was already coursing through my veins. At four months, I dutifully followed Mommy and Daddy to Texas. I could not yet articulate my objections. I was a Goody Two-shoes from the get-go, and as soon as I could speak, I assumed the role of self-righteous little tattletale to keep my naughty older sister in line. I was eager to over excel at home and at school, where Mom was my 7th grade teacher in Hitchcock (population 5,000). After several years of maternal pressure, I even succumbed to a nose job at age 16. In retrospect, one of my better decisions and a real bargain at \$300 back in the day. I was the perfect teenager, something my step-daughter a few decades later quickly tired of hearing.

Goals #2 & #3 – Getting out of Texas and Pursuing an Education

These goals coincided. Was getting out of Texas required for getting an education? At age 14, I followed in Mom's footsteps to study abroad. For my sister and me, it was a year at *une école pour jeunes filles*, Chateau Mont-Choisi in Lausanne, Switzerland; for Mom it was Florence, Italy at 17. Our school year was bookended by summers traveling across Europe from Italy to Norway, an education in itself. After graduating from Memorial High in Houston, I returned to Europe as tour guide for a summer Eurail Pass adventure with my two best friends. Three 18-year-old virgins on their own in Europe provided a different kind of education, specifically self-defense, which we aced by coming home intact. Then it was off to Smith, about as far away as I could get in the continental United States from the Lone Star State. I was accepted to Mom's alma mater, Mills College, but she was more than happy with my choice of Smith. She and my Auntie Kay delivered me to Northampton, a four-day drive in a family Volvo station wagon packed with my graduation present (a new bicycle) and essentials: a large trunk, a mid-century modern orange chair and coffee table, a lamp, and my electric Smith Corona. I'd never visited the college or even New England and was thrilled with the topography and

beauty of the campus. For the next four years, my bike delivered me from Emerson House past Paradise Pond, to my classes, the gym, the library and back home for lunch and dinner. I loved everything about Smith, except the winters.

Goal #4 – San Francisco, Here I Come

As beautiful as New England was, the aforementioned winters were way too long and cold, so I decided sophomore year that I would move to San Francisco after graduation. It just happened to be Mom's favorite city in the world. I even chose the same YWCA residence club on Nob Hill where she had lived in the 1930s. In 1969, room and board (breakfast and dinner daily) was \$125 a month, the price of two days of parking in downtown San Francisco today. I can only imagine what Mom paid thirty-plus years earlier. Although I moved to Marin County six years later and spent the next 48 years in Sausalito, Tiburon, Fairfax, Petaluma, Rio Vista and Point Richmond, I commuted to San Francisco for work until my retirement in 2015.

Goal #5 – Doing My Part to Advance the Sexual Revolution

My new nose emboldened my already extroverted personality, resulting in lots of dating in college. I made it to most of the men's colleges and tended to fall in and out of love on a regular basis. In fact, my Emerson housemates at our senior dinner predicted, "Ten years from now, Linda will still be returning from a first date saying 'This is it! This is really it!'"

In April of 1967, only a couple of months before *The Summer of Love* in San Francisco, I took advantage of Operation Match, the first computer-based matchmaking service in the US. The brainchild of two Harvard students, participants were provided 75 questions which, when returned with three dollars, resulted in a guaranteed minimum of four matches. One of those matches led directly to Williams, where I kissed Frank hello and my virginity goodbye. Although Frank and I moved on six months later, we remained close friends until his death in 2022. A lawyer and a poet, he wrote his own epitaph, "The music stopped. No more chairs."

Once in San Francisco, I joined the sexual revolution already in progress. The singles bars of Union Street were much more conveniently located than the men's schools back East. I was still close to Mom, largely because I didn't tattle on myself. And I'm not tattling now, in the event she is reading this from the beyond.

Goal #6—Secure Equal Rights for Women

My first job in San Francisco was working for the group department at Nob Hill Travel in the Fairmont Hotel. In my nine months there, I escorted two tours of Urban Land Institute members, one to the Hawaiian Islands and one to Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore and Manila. The \$375 monthly salary didn't begin to cover the stress of not only keeping wealthy spoiled land developers happy, but also dealing with delayed flights, health emergencies and even an emergency landing with one wife clinging to me and sobbing, "I don't want to die."

I followed the advice of a tour member who took an interest in me and managed to break into advertising. The TV series *Mad Men* brought back all the horror, as I was the secretary to the Creative Director. (Think Don Draper.) He was a full-on misogynist and soon I was labeled a women's libber. So I accepted an invitation to a San Francisco Ad Club luncheon with guest speaker Gloria Steinem and the rest is history. A group of us took Gloria's advice to organize, and not long after that fateful lunch, we launched San Francisco Women in Advertising. I was the first program director. Shortly after, I joined SF NOW and took on the challenge of PR director. I ended up with a poster of Golda Meir over my desk with the caption, "But can she type?" The kicker is that the job required shorthand, so I enrolled at Grace Ball Secretarial College for night classes. Not the kind of post-graduate studies my Smith friends were pursuing.

Ah, but the revenge? I left the agency to work for one of our clients, KGO-TV, in their creative department. We fired the agency.

Goal #7 – Perfection and Total Understanding

The Human Potential Movement arrived about the same time as the Dawning of the Age of Aquarius. And I was all in. I signed up for a series of workshops entitled Challenge to Change, but when I told the group my long-term goal was achieving perfection and total understanding, it was not well received. Some thought I was over-reaching, so I was challenged to change. I quit the group.

I went on to pursue every other seminar I encountered along the New Age path to enlightenment. I was Here Now with Baba Ram Dass; studied theosophy, reincarnation and astrology; took Erhard Seminar Trainings and became what critics called an “EST-hole”; participated in a multitude of Actualizations workshops; and even got my parents involved. Also got my parents to trade their Presbyterian Church for the Church of Religious Science (Science of Mind). I tackled Transcendental Meditation, Neurolinguistic Programming and, of course, put my feet where my mouth was and walked on hot coals. Ouch! Thanks to my aloe vera plant, I was able to wear shoes to work the next day. I feared having to call in with self-inflicted burns. Oh, and I got therapy for co-dependence.

I’ll admit I’m not perfect, but it’s not like I didn’t try!

Goal #8 – World Peace

In 1984, I was invited to help plan the celebration of the United Nations International Day of Peace to be held in the San Francisco Civic Center. By then I was Director of Marketing Services for KRON-TV and was able to get the station to promote it and our lead news anchor to emcee. I also booked three of the guest speakers. Similar celebrations were being planned around the globe. In June before the September event, I was headed to Moscow and a nine-day passage on the Trans-Siberian Express with my mom. So what better way to promote world peace than distributing flyers about the world-wide celebration translated into Russian?

I caught up with Mom and the rest of the group at JFK and had checked my luggage at SFO through to Leningrad where we would

go through customs. Our tour guide called us together before departing and warned us to remove anything from our luggage that might be the least bit controversial as the entire group could be detained. Too late. I immediately regretted my naïveté and shared my panic with Mom, who, always fearless, told me not to worry about it. I did, until I devised a plan. In my carry-on luggage, I had brought dragon and bear hand puppets and a few other gifts for kids I'd meet along the way. So when I found myself face-to-face with a very dour female Russian customs officer, I morphed into an exuberant American nutcase whipping out the gifts and doing a little puppet performance for her. She was so disturbed by the attention I was attracting that she waved me through without even opening my checked bag. On the advice of our Russian Intourist guide, I discreetly disposed of the flyers. Although I didn't achieve world peace, my peace of mind was restored.

Goal #9 – Make a Living

My feminist consciousness raising efforts in the '70s included weekly rap sessions that ran the gamut of issues affecting women. A number of women in the group regretted having married, and others regretted having children. And I immediately realized that I never wanted to be dependent on a man. I also knew that I would not be supporting myself on a secretarial salary.

At 26, I decided I'd rather live with my boyfriend than with Mary, my miserable roommate, so it was time to break the news to Mom and Dad. What better way than a manifesto on feminism which concluded with the announcement that I would never marry or have children? Oh, and by the way, I was moving in with Mike. Dad opened the five-page single-spaced letter and when Mom called home from out of town, the former Navy officer summarized the entire diatribe in three words: "She's shackled up." For Mom, I was simply "living in sin."

Eventually, I did end up marrying not once, not twice, but three times, inheriting stepchildren along the way, but never birthing any babies of my own. After shedding the two practice husbands,

I met Wayne, a real keeper, especially since he never expected me to cook or do laundry.

The careers? Nineteen years in local television marketing, three years of writing and promoting a couple of books, and finally nineteen more years as director, then VP of Marketing for First Republic Bank.

Goal #10 – Retire

No adjustment required. I was a natural. As much as I loved the bank, the culture and reputation we'd built, not to mention my friends and paychecks, I was ready to wake up with nothing to do, and go to bed with only half of it done.

I gave two years' notice, trained a couple of replacements, and wrote a marketing "bible" with explicit instructions for roughly two dozen projects. I was well known as the emcee of corporate events – holiday parties, annual awards shows, benefits dinners, and new hire orientations. But pushing 68 years old, all of a sudden, I had no idea who all these people were. All I knew was that they were half my age. They showered me with retirement festivities, and I finally bid them farewell with, "You've been a wonderful audience."

These past eight years have included several summers of boating in the Pacific Northwest, followed by a few years of playing the roles of Mimi and PawPaw for Gwennie and Wes. After the COVID shutdown, I embraced the hermit life and finished my memoir. To preserve what is left of our minds, my sister and I read French books over the phone to each other daily, seventy books in three years. And I watch a lot of news so I'll know if democracy or the world has ended.

Goal #11 – Find My Glasses

I search for my iPhone even as I'm holding it to my ear. Upon arriving upstairs and downstairs, I struggle to remember why I

made the trip. After regular texts and calls from neighbors, I now check to see if the garage door is open every time Wayne departs. We take a couple half our age out to lunch on a regular basis to thank them for being on call 24/7 to help with our iPhones, iPads, computers and TVs. We're simply not smart enough for our smart phones and smart TVs. I love to talk, but more and more have to ask if she, he or they can recall what I was talking about. And what was your name again?

Goal #12 – Avoid Falling Down

Now the ultimate goal has become, in the words of John Travolta, Stayin' Alive. When Mom was 75, she and I were crawling over rock slides in Nepal to get to the border of Tibet. Now I limit my hiking to the treadmill in our garage. I heard that living in a two-story home will add seven years to one's life. I'm assuming that varies with the number of times you fall down the stairs. I now religiously hang onto the banister. My sister managed to fall down in the bathroom of her one-story home and break her back. I can assure you, that got our attention. I even gave up drinking although I thought I was much more entertaining after a couple of margaritas. Wayne assured me that I wasn't. My final precaution: I remain seated while watching the news, so that I won't fling myself out the window.

Conclusions:

In the final analysis of reaching my goals, I give myself an A for effort.

To be fair, I've had many advantages. My life has been shaped by a loving, happy home, an independent mother and hilarious father. I'm thankful every day for my wonderful husband and big sister. Along the way I've had a ball, been filled with joy, love and gratitude and have laughed my ass off. And I will continue to do so . . . until the music stops.

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM JAPAN

Jane Baker Holt

Jane writes, “With 20+ visits to Japan and 14,000 photos from each 1-2 month trip, it was difficult to select just a few photos for this project. Deciding on a place, Miyajima Island, and a day, 4 April 2023, made the task easier. My husband and I travel to Miyajima annually for spring cherry blossoms and autumn foliage and we never tire of photographing the iconic sites of this sacred island. Over many trips we have followed in the footsteps of Buddhist monk, Kobo Daishi: from Koya-san, where he is buried, to Miyajima’s Daisho-in, our favorite temple in Japan, where he is enshrined. These are but a few photos taken on one day of our journeys. Enjoy.”



The Great Torii, the entrance gate to Itsukushima Shrine, indicates that the entire island of Miyajima is a sacred place. At high tide the torii appears to be floating.



Close-up of the Great Torii at low tide when you can walk out to the gate, photograph, and revere it, noting its vermilion pillars, cypress bark roof, and copper plates, all newly restored from 2019 to 2022 to improve earthquake resistance.



Kobo Daishi is enshrined at Daisho-in where his hundreds of miniature statues are blessed by followers with gifts of coins, scarves, and hats, including a batting helmet from a fan of the Hiroshima Carp baseball team.



Statues, adorned with gift bibs and hats, line the garden walkways at Daisho-in Temple. An atypically happy Jizusatsu, the guardian of travelers and of children who have died before their parents, is amongst the throng.



Tengu of the elongated nose is a mountain and forest spirit whose statue is placed at Daisho-in near the start of the climb up sacred Mount Misen.



Sakura (cherry blossoms), Senjo-kaku, Hall of 1000 Mats, and Gojuno-to, Five-Storied Pagoda, photographed from the local artists' favorite spot, a hillside with a dangerously steep climb over roots, downed trees, loose sand, and dried leaves. The view was even more photogenic a few years back before one large cherry tree fell down, making the framing of the buildings less dramatic.

PART FOUR

EMBRACING OUR LIVES: FUTURE AND POETIC TENSES

The old Grécourt Review ceased publication soon after 1997, and the Wright Hall Connector – where GR editors enjoyed coffee breaks and snacks in the 1960s – no longer exists. But Smith’s student writers are better supported than ever. The English Department continues to award prizes for undergraduate poetry, essays, and fiction. The need for a literary magazine has been filled since 2001 by Labrys and more recently Emulate. And in 1997 Smith established a poetry center on the ground floor of Wright Hall. To introduce this section of our 55th reunion GR, we asked Jen Blackburn for an update on what’s now called the Boutelle-Day Poetry Center. Its outreach programs, connecting everybody from high school students to alumnae poets, are as vibrant as its purple sofas.

Our reunion theme is “Embracing Our Futures.” I struggle a bit with this, as I struggle with Henri Bergson’s argument that time’s an illusion. Did he really mean that? I should try reading Matter and Memory again. But instead I listen to Joni Mitchell singing “Chelsea Morning”: “Oh, won’t you stay, we’ll put on the day / And we’ll talk in present tenses.”

In this section we return over and over – in poetry and prose, language and art – to the connections that make our lives so meaningful. We savor the ever changing pleasures of language, and remember what we learned from television or dimly apprehended from the fascinating stories of elders. Multigenerational understanding and misunderstandings weave through our coming-of-age stories, and omissions (accidental or strategic) knock our work and volunteer lives into new directions. Our artists help us look at angels, lumber trucks, and our own hands with new eyes.

Our lives have been shattered, and we’ve reinvented ourselves. We look back in wonder: Could that really have happened? Public disasters have changed our perception of time. How long did the World Trade Center take to fall? How long did it take a pandemic to transform our lives? Private griefs have transformed our worlds. We’ve absorbed loss and delight, and

here it is – time to put on another day. Thanks to all our class artists and writers for looking at reality with courage and openness, finding beauty and meaning in all of it. This issue is about embracing our lives – past, present, and future – and our connections with each other. Thank you all. (GE)



THE BOUTELLE-DAY POETRY CENTER

Jen Jabaily Blackburn, Program & Outreach Coordinator, Boutelle-Day Poetry Center, Smith College

Launching her “2020” program in 1996, Smith College President Ruth Simmons called on everyone to “Dream big dreams!” Annie Boutelle, a lecturer in English, knew what she longed to see at Smith—a poetry center. With colleagues’ encouragement and assistance from senior Meredith Martin, Boutelle fleshed out the dream: a director, student interns, public readings, a video archive and outreach to schools.



Elizabeth Alexander, Eavan Boland, and Annie Boutelle, 1997

In September 1997, Eavan Boland packed Wright Auditorium to its seams for the Poetry Center’s inaugural reading.

Poet Elizabeth Alexander agreed to take on the directorship of the center for her two-year stint at Smith. Alexander brought with her a wide, embracing idea of what poetry is: a range of people with different politics, poetics, values, backgrounds, ethnicities, sexual orientations and styles. Alexander set the tone: This was to be a

vibrant, energy-filled center, celebrating poetry in its many shapes and guises.

When the center hired Ellen Doré Watson as director in 1999, she picked up Alexander's arms-wide-open policy and added the presence of international poets whose work is read both in the original language and in translation.

Audiences have continued to build over the years, ranging from 75 to 2,000, even surprising the poets. Lawrence Ferlinghetti reported it was the longest line that he had ever seen for a book signing. Stanley Kunitz counted his Smith reading as one of the three best he had ever given, and Mary Oliver had tears in her eyes when beholding the crowd in John M. Greene Hall.

Matt Donovan joined the Poetry Center as director in fall 2018. In fall 2020, The Poetry Center at Smith College became The Boutelle-Day Poetry Center at Smith College, a name that honors our founder Annie Boutelle and memorializes alumna Tammis A. Day (AC '05), whose foundation's transformational gift has enabled us to bring more poetry to the Smith community and beyond. Former U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith read via Zoom to celebrate the occasion. Jen Blackburn (who has worked with the Center since summer 2011) transitioned into a new full-time role as Program & Outreach Coordinator in 2020, bringing the Center's full-time staff to two.

Since 2020, we have taken on a number of new initiatives and projects, including *The Map of Every Lilac Leaf*, a book of poems commissioned by Matt Donovan and the BDPC to celebrate the collections at the Smith College Museum of Art; *The Poem I Wish I Had Read*, a [YouTube series](#) featuring poets discussing poems they wish that they'd discovered in high school; *Common Reassemble*, an ongoing series of visual poetry projects involving blackout poetry and collage; online workshops for teachers interested in bringing poetry into the classroom across the curriculum; and special end-of-year readings to which we invite high school students and teachers – our first featured poet was Hanif Abdurraqib in spring 2023, and we look forward to welcoming Ada Limón in spring 2024.

In fall 2022, Adrie Rose AC '22 joined the Center as the inaugural Tamms Day Editorial Fellow. With the support of and in conjunction with the Center, Rose founded Nine Syllables Press, a chapbook press that is the first of its kind among the historic Seven Sisters. Nine Syllables Press was founded with a particular desire to address gender inequality in publishing, and to lift up the voices of women poets, particularly in the BIPOC and LGBTQIA++ communities.

WORD SALAD AND LESS

Jean Merrill

If the English language diet is being reduced to drive-through fast
word selections,
then I will stimulate my palate with
the mouthwatering tidbits
the scrumptious scintillas
the delectable crumbs
and the savory scraps
of what is left on the five star menu of words we once enjoyed.

I wrote this poem because I have become very concerned about how correct grammar has become old-fashioned, how textspeak has reduced expressive words to single letters, and unintelligible nonsense has a new category called word salad, spewed by politicians and pundits. In addition, I was inspired to write this by a poem on the same topic written by Deborah Dumaine, Smith College, Class of 1970.

DAVY CROCKETT

Mandy Merck

I learned to read very late. American educators of the '50s discouraged the teaching of reading to preschool children, and when I finally arrived in the first grade, I found the prevailing phonetic system (in which you were supposed to learn the sound associated with each letter and then combine them) boring and difficult. Despite my mother's increasingly desperate injunctions to "sound out" the words of *The Squirrel Outside My Window*, I would open each session with the same question: "What's that squiggly letter again?" (Hysterical mother: "S! Like a snake! **SSSS!** – **KWAA!** – **IRRR!** – **ELLL!** **SQUIRREL!**") Maybe it was the book. As I recall, *The Squirrel Outside My Window* was somewhat short of plot points, and if it offered any squirrely characterizations, I would have rejected them. After an infancy spent listening to *Wind in the Willows* and *The House at Pooh Corner*, I was completely off anthropomorphic animals, or indeed any form of fantasy narrative, which I had come to regard as an adult condescension to children's credulity.

My resulting disposition to realism manifested itself in an unusual attention to what semiologists call the iconic properties of the sign. I knew what things looked like (or, as I see now, what pictures of things looked like) and happily volunteered to illustrate all the phonics cards which decorated my first-grade classroom. I could scarcely read the word "run," but I expertly rendered the flexed leg which I drew on the R card. And this ability maintained me in my teacher's esteem. I can still remember Mrs. Snodgrass's excited reaction to my clay rabbit, for (alone of all my peers) I had modelled its ears realistically along its back, rather than sticking up Easter Bunny style.

But my antagonism to the symbolic, to the arbitrary connections of letters with meanings, had its drawbacks. First of all, I was illiterate. And secondly, the energy I might have expended on reading was diverted either into talking (which got me into trouble) or to art (which got me into even more trouble when I insisted on painting every single figure in the class's barnyard mural: the cows, the trac-

tor, the horse in its harness, and certainly the fence, since no one else had mastered perspective).

Fortunately for everyone, I left this school in 1954, when we moved from the center of Salem, capital of the northwestern state of Oregon, to its suburbs. Our new street was in a postwar development of one-story ranch houses, with large yards giving on to the last remnants of pasture (real cows now). It was named – quite wonderfully – Pioneer Drive. Through the “picture window” of the period we could see the snow-topped peaks of the Cascades, the mountains which Oregon’s original pioneers had traversed, and beyond that, further east, the direction of the past in American history.

On December 15 of that year, ABC television broadcast the first episode of a three-part drama destined to transform children’s culture across the world, Walt Disney’s *Davy Crockett, Indian Fighter*. I missed it. It wasn’t until well into 1955 or ’56 that my parents bought their first set, an ugly black and gilt box which they sequestered, for aesthetic reasons, in the bedroom I shared with my sister. Of course, I’d been watching television for years by then, inviting myself to *Howdy Doody Time*, and later Disney’s *Mickey Mouse Club*, at various neighbors. But the Crockett trilogy went out in the *Disneyland* slot, dinnertime on Sunday evenings, and my memories are of snatched viewings, previews probably, and perhaps invitations cadged from households willing to sanction visitors on school nights. I couldn’t get enough of it, and most of my contemporaries must have felt the same. The second and third episodes – “Davy Crockett Goes to Congress” and “Davy Crockett at the Alamo” – attracted an estimated 60 million viewers, more than a quarter of the country, to a children’s program. Its theme, “The Ballad of Davy Crockett,” became the number one song in the country in 1955, selling 18 million copies and engraving its tune, chorus and “Born on a mountaintop in Tennessee” opening on the memory of my generation.¹

In Britain, the Crockett craze hit slightly later, but with no less impact. After a months-long publicity blitz in early ’56, the film version of the TV trilogy, *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier*, was released by Disney in April. By the following autumn, children

all over the country had produced enough Crockett jokes and song parodies to warrant a whole section of the Opies' 1960 *Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*. Among the more refreshing British takes on the theme was the motif (recorded in Great Bookham, Swansea and Romford) of "Davy Crewcut, King of the Teddy Boys":

Born on a roof top in Battersea
 Joined the Teds when he was only three
 Coshed a cop when he was only four
 And now he's in Dartmoor for evermore.

(For variations involving matricide from Scotland and throat-slitting from Wales, see the Opies.²) Actually, Disney's Davy, Fess Parker, who toured America and thirteen foreign countries in his oiled quiff and sideburns to push the film and hundreds of items of Disney-licensed Crockettabilia, did bear a remarkable resemblance to that other Tennessee Ted, Elvis Presley.

Meanwhile, back in Oregon, I soon became the proud possessor of a Davy Crockett t-shirt, belt and officially branded jeans. The last were of a then unusual brown denim, and ultimately proved more phallic than the ring-tailed cap which I somehow failed to score. In the summer of '56, I was happily playing at home when my mother suddenly commanded us to get into the car that minute. 1956 saw one of the great polio scares in the U.S., and she had belatedly remembered the vaccine we were scheduled to receive at my new school, a big Catholic one downtown. I arrived there in an agony of embarrassment, wearing my Crockett jeans in front of my whole class. They were (you have to be my age to understand the horror of this), *boys'* jeans, jeans whose front zip proclaimed the gender of their wearer as powerfully as a jock strap. Girls' jeans in the '50s fastened at the side. My jeans (like much of the Crockett merchandise) were marketed exclusively for boys in a society whose sexual divisions seemed unbridgeable. Thanks to Walt Disney, I appeared at St. Joseph's Catholic Grade School in *drag*.

Sometime around then I must have picked up the rudiments of reading. The literature at St. Joseph's was a real eye-opener after

all those friendly little squirrels in my state school. Catholics went in for martyrdom in a big way, and American Catholic youth's favorite martyr of the '50s was Maria Goretti, an Italian girl who had reputedly performed a few miracles after her rape and murder at the age of 12. (Of course we weren't told she was raped. The Catholic comic book which retailed her heroic end maintained that she had died defending her virtue against a youth who wanted to show her a copy of *Playboy*. I often wondered whether I would die rather than read *Playboy*. Probably not, I decided.) Such stories had their sadomasochistic charms, but I can't remember really reading for pleasure until, at the beginning of third grade, I was given my final spin-off from the Crockett craze.

Enid LaMonte Meadowcroft's *The Story of Davy Crockett*³ was one of a series of illustrated children's books called Names That Made History. Most of its subjects were the predictable white American males, supplemented by a few international superstars like Mozart and Joan of Arc. *The Story of Davy Crockett* was originally published in 1952, and sold about 10,000 a year until 1955 and Disney's Davy, when the figure jumped to 300,000.⁴ I was one of those 300,000. My copy is inscribed for my eighth birthday, October 16, 1955. It was given to me by my mother's best friend since high school, a "career woman" who lived in a high rise apartment in Portland and appeared on local television. I sat down in the big armchair in the living room and didn't get up until the book was finished. Then I went to the library and checked out *The Story of Buffalo Bill*, *The Story of Daniel Boone*, and *The Story of Kit Carson*. I also devoured a rival series called, if memory serves, *The Childhood of Young Americans*. Indeed, I got so totally into reading that, a year or two later, my mother – noting my enthusiasm for the songs in the then hit musical, *My Fair Lady* – suggested that I try Shaw's *Pygmalion* (which I refused, assuming it was another of her infernal animal stories).

What was it about *The Story of Davy Crockett* that engaged me so intensely? Obviously, the Disney tie-in was a huge factor. With my experience, I have a big investment in the television versus literacy debate. Not only do I regard TV as (here beginneth the Media Stud-

ies lesson) a complex textual system which inculcates and refines its own reading skills, but I am indebted to it for encouraging me to become (at last) lettered in the old-fashioned way. And it's interesting to note the stress that Meadowcroft lays on her subject's own educational difficulties. The ten-year-old Davy is appalled at the prospect of a school opening in his part of the woods, and later has ink spilled all over his exercise book by the class bully. It's not until page 102, when he's nearly 18 and about to get married, that he finally learns to "read and write and figure."

Of course, the historical Crockett did have a reputation for illiteracy, including what must be one of the first recorded dependencies on Congressional speechwriters. This, combined with his origins as a child of an impoverished taverner, and his own notoriety for drinking, womanizing and telling "tall tales," made him into rather a different figure than the Disney Davy. Before his death in 1836, Crockett was well on his way to becoming a caricature rustic, whose comic exploits were retailed in almanacs, ballads and minstrel shows. Not until the 1870s did his image modulate into respectability when, as the wilderness receded and the myth of the American hunter took hold, his backwoods persona was converted into the chivalrous hero of stage melodrama, the unschooled-but-sensitive suitor who rescues an heiress from an arranged marriage.⁵

Meadowcroft's emphasis on Davy's early attempts to read rewrites the story again, this time as a *Bildungsroman*, history as the childhood of the Great. And, although my youthful enthusiasm for this genre eventually led me across the Atlantic to the young Lancelot and the young Mary of Scotland, the American bias in these stories must have enhanced their appeal. Not only did it add the attraction of national identification to that of age, but in *The Story of Davy Crockett*, it effectively combined them.

Crockett was born in 1786, and Meadowcroft traces the parallel development of the young hero and the young country. When Davy is ten, Washington is just retiring from the Presidency, and as the Crocketts move westward, so do the nation's boundaries. The resulting identification of the hero (fittingly, a scout who becomes a

legislator) with the new democratic state supports Franco Moretti's contention that youth in the *Bildungsroman* represents both mobility and modernity.⁶ Indeed, the Crockett legend, as commentators more critical than Meadowcroft have noted, became a rallying cry for Manifest Destiny, with his death attempting to wrest Texas from Mexico the perfect ending.

But I was a child content to turn from religious to civic hagiography, and I scarcely noted the purple passages, like this one in which the young Davy attends a Fourth of July celebration:

He didn't know much about his country.
He didn't know how big it was or what lay
beyond it. But something about that flag made
him feel good all over. And he knew suddenly
that his country would never do anything
wrong if *he* could help it. (pp. 41-41)

It's startling to learn now that, even in the dark days of *Disneyland*, the Crockett myth was subjected to intense ideological critique. Mark Derr surveys a wide range of political responses in '50s America, with a United Auto Workers official denouncing Davy's "Be always sure you're right, then go ahead" individualism as anti-union, while the liberal editor of *Harper's* compared his cult of personality to that of Stalin. (Predictably, the American Communists replied by criticizing the liberals' disregard for native democratic traditions.)⁷ Meadowcroft's Fourth of July scene now seems to me a clear anticipation of Crockett's most strikingly conscientious act—not the defense of the Alamo in a dubious claim to Texas based on the Louisiana Purchase, but his Congressional opposition to the removal of the southeastern Indians from their lands east of the Mississippi. As Meadowcroft renders it,

"A treaty's a promise," he declared, reaching for some butter. "Not even President Jackson has a right to break a promise. And I'll fight against his Indian bill as long as I've a leg to stand on." (p. 160)

The result was political martyrdom for the Tennessee congressman, who lost both the vote and his seat in a state where Jackson the native son was hugely popular and the Cherokee, Choctaw and Chickasaw were not.

I don't want to exaggerate my childhood commitment to this cause. My youthful encounters with Native Americans were limited to seeing teenagers from the local reservation silently ironing in the kitchens of my mother's friends and performing their dances in recitals which I found tedious. And Crockett's own stand was overdetermined by other political differences with Jackson, differences which Meadowcroft—needless to say—ignores. But I wonder if her "Mickey Mouse history,"⁸ as Mike Wallace characterizes the sanitized *weltanschauung* of the Magic Kingdom, had its positive consequences. I'm thinking, of course, of the political movements of the late '60s, particularly the mobilization against the war in Vietnam (and the few congressional figures who initially opposed it, including an Oregon Senator of some distinction called Wayne Morse). Much of my own feeling about that conflict could have been couched in Davy's terms, that the country wouldn't continue to do anything that wrong if *I* could help it. And, just as in the '50s, millions of my Coonskin contemporaries felt the same.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Mark Derr, *The Frontiersman*, New York, William Morrow, 1993, chapter 1, 'Disney Meets Davy', pp. 23-36.
- 2 Iona and Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1960, pp. 6-7; pp. 118-120; p. 166.
- 3 Enid LaMonte Meadowcroft, *The Story of Davy Crockett*, New York, Grosset and Dunlap, 1952. Page references given in the text.
- 4 Derr, *The Frontiersman*, p. 27.
- 5 Derr, pp. 264-67.
- 6 Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World*, London, Verso, 1987, esp. pp. 4-6.
- 7 Derr, pp. 34-35.
- 8 Mike Wallace, 'Mickey Mouse History; Portraying the Past at Disney World,' *Radical History Review* 32, 1985, pp. 35-57.

DOORS

Holly Menino

1950. I am three and I have the chickenpox. I am three, I know because I have been able to count for months now. But all I know about actually *being* three is that everything involves waiting and in order to wait time has to pass. I wait behind the screen door in the kitchen until I hear their car pull up, the doors open and then close. I hear them coming across the lawn. This will be Tiu Joe, the uncle who has been living with us, and VaVa, the grandmother who has never seen me yet. Joe heads up the steps. VaVa is slower, thick ankles above thick black shoes coming methodically up the steps. Joe steps past me and when VaVa lays eyes on me she shrieks. She backs down the steps screaming for Jesus, Joseph, and Mary to help her and not incidentally for my father who has evidently allowed this to happen. She thinks the spots and scabs on my face are smallpox.

Imagine her shock. Imagine my shock at seeing my screaming grandmother. The door opens and she sees a contagious toddler. The door opens and I see a stubby woman in a housedress crying out in Portuguese to God and his relations.

1928. Imagine another door opening on another shocking sight, this one over on the other side of my family, my mother's side. Mimi, who in a couple of decades will become my great-aunt, is in the kitchen. She has cracked two eggs into a skillet for her husband when he comes down for breakfast, and she is watching the eggs fry when the knock comes. When she opens the door she recognizes him right away. Maybe a little scrawnier, maybe a little less hair. He is dead. Or presumed dead at least. It is her turn to scream.

He tries to make himself heard over her. "What's wrong?"

She hopes her screaming will summon the husband Tom from upstairs.

“What’s wrong? Don’t you know me?”

Oh yes. She knows him. Too well. The upper lip with the humorous curl at the end of the narrow strawberry mustache. Too well. The mole just under his right earlobe. His long-fingered left hand reaches out to smooth the way for his explanation, “Please—.” Even as she produces such volume and pitch she notices that there is no ring on the extended hand. A mystery.

Then from behind her, “Cut that out, Mimi! What in hell?” Tom has come down for breakfast in a crisp white shirt and paisley tie. He takes my grandaunt by her shoulders and moves her behind him so he is now facing the visitor.

“Hello. May I help you?”

“No,” she gasps. “You can’t. He’s not here.”

“Mimi— you’ll have to excuse her—” Tom’s reason attempts to surmount her hysteria. “He clearly *is* here. Can you come in?”

The visitor says, “Yes,” and follows through.

Mimi sits down in one of the chairs at the table and props herself on her elbows, bracing against her sobs.

To better consider the situation Tom pauses to go to the stove and inspect the frying pan where the two eggs have vulcanized into a cross-eyed stare. Tom is robust and successful with dark hair newly calmed with pomade. He turns back to the quandary. “Can one of you—I don’t care which one— please explain? Mimi, you’ll have to get a hold of yourself— what in hell is going on?”

“I’m Alton Wickham.”

“No,” eyes streaming, nose running, Mimi defies this. “You’re not. You’re dead.”

"Alton," Tom repeats the name, "Wickham."

"Yes. She is my wife, Mimi Wickham."

Tom seems to experience a glimmer of understanding. "Yes, but she is Mimi Marvin now. She is *my* wife."

Alton casts a reproachful gaze at her. "You didn't wait."

"Seven years," she snaps, "and you're dead. What was there to wait for?"

Alton's shoulders sag, but he expected something like this and has already formed an explanation. "It took me a long time to get here, a long time. To find you."

"What was so hard about it?" she demands. "I didn't leave town, only moved house."

"This house is your place?" He looks to Tom for confirmation and sends a glance of appraisal around the kitchen. "Nice."

"Yes," Tom says, "I'm a pharmacist."

"Also nice."

Having established dominion over the place, Tom wants to right the situation quickly. "What happened to you, man?"

Alton shrugs. "I don't know. I forgot."

Mimi sniffs and eyes him rudely.

Tom persists. "Was it from the battlefield?"

"Apparently."

"Shell shock?" Tom pushes for an answer.

Alton is concerned about accuracy. "No, they said it wasn't that."

"Who are they?"

"The doctors. The different docs."

Tom looks at his watch impatiently. "Is there coffee at least?"

Indeed Mimi has a pot on the back of the stove. Tom takes the cup she fills and walking and sipping at the same time goes to a chair in the front parlor where a cardigan hangs over the back of it. Abandoning the cup for a moment to slip into the sweater, he proceeds to the closet in the front hall for his topcoat. When he returns the cup to its saucer on the kitchen table Alton is still standing by the door.

"We open at 8:30," Tom explains about the pharmacy. "So I'll have to leave this for you to straighten out, Mimi." He bends over her shoulder to smooch goodbye, plants his peck of possession somewhere near the corner of her mouth, and whisks past Alton out the door.

"I wish I'd never opened that," Mimi says.

To test his standing Alton says, "Is there coffee?"

Perhaps from habitual obedience Mimi pours a cup and points to a chair across the table from the one to which she returns. He sits down and they watch each other carefully. The level of coffee in their cups is low when Mimi says, "But you seem all there."

"Yes, pretty much a hundred percent if you don't count for the time I lost."

She begins cross-examining. "Capital of Canada? Twelve times five? Seven kinds of birds?" – and finally – "Where is the ring I gave you?"

"Dunno."

"Where have you been?"

"I wish I could tell you."

"Then tell me where you were just before you came to the door."

"The post office. They gave me this address."

"And before that?"

"Train station." He begins to patiently trace back place by place the path that brought him to the kitchen, then interrupts himself. "We're going back to Walter Reed. That's where I started from."

"What happened to put you there?"

He smiles apologetically. "I forgot."

"Maybe that's a mercy."

"And everything before that. So I forgot you, forgot you were beautiful."

"Oh, please."

"Oh yes, I forgot, but you are."

"How did you know to come look for me?"

"I had this feeling. It kept coming over me. I talked to the docs about it and they thought it was love. I could still read—some people like me can still read and write—but I had to work back through the Army records, back through the ranks and files. It took a long time. Paperwork started with the surgery, went back to the thing on the ground, the grenade. I found my enlistment. It showed my hometown, this one. It showed I was married."

She sighs. "I can't think. You were gone such a long time."

"Right, a long time. I lost that time. But that's all I lost. Time. It was just time." He reaches across the table for her hand and in her other hand the cup rattles in its saucer.

"No, Alton. You lost me."

He keeps his grip on her hand. "This is right."

"No. When time goes by things change."

"We can change them back. You can."

This is what she does. She visits a lawyer and explains the dilemma.

1956. Mimi is standing with her back to me recounting the case she made to the lawyer. "Alton was my first and he was the best I've had. But I couldn't just go back to him. That would be bigamy and it would leave Tom in limbo — the lawyer pointed that out, legal limbo. I needed a divorce, which as far as I could see *nobody* did unless they went to Europe and stayed there. But the lawyer didn't see it that way. He said *You won't have to leave the country. If you marry legitimately right away, people will forget how you made that happen. Just don't ask too much of Tom.*"

Her nightgown is flung across the bed in our guestroom. It is lavender and maybe it isn't real satin but it sure has a sheen, nothing at the neck and shoulders but a lace vee that runs up along the straps. She is seventy-eight. I am nine, not much interested in satin and frills but fascinated by the stays which she says are the newest. No laces, just a long unforgiving row of hooks up one side of the back and a long row of rigid eyes on the other. In front her breasts find purposeful accommodation in the stays' protuberances but still offer plenty of resistance. I am to pull, dear, give it everything I have, to make the hooks sink into the eyes. This is a woman who does not give up.

“Did Tom really let you and the lawyer do that?” I am enjoying her story and hopeful that Norm, the fourth great-uncle taking a nap upstairs, and Phil, the great-uncle just before him, will star in future chapters.

“Well” — here she smiles, half-sheepish, half-proud — “there was a good deal of shouting. Tom was quite a sensible person and what I wanted just bewildered him.”

“What did he say when he shouted?”

“Oh. *Are you out of your mind?* — he just didn’t see the point — *The man hasn’t got two dimes to rub together.*”

“Not even dimes?”

“Remember that was a little before the market crashed. Tom went to another lawyer who threatened to sue for alienation of affection. Alton said, *I should have tried that first. My case is as good as his.* But he didn’t care. And I didn’t either. Oh sure, that first year before the Crash was pretty lean. But he was in his element — me,” she beams good humor down at me — “if you know what I mean.”

I don’t. But the hooks have sunk into the eyes, she can breathe, and she doesn’t seem to see that I’m not catching on. Her story is drawing her along.

“Then in twenty-nine the market went boom and all the stocks were worth nothing. So Alton scraped together some coin and went downtown and bought up a lot of Bell Telephone. Fixed the dime shortage, made us high rollers.”

I have often heard about high rollers when Mimi is having her martinis.

“VaVa bought Bell Telephone, too. My grandma.”

“Now that woman —” Mimi draws a plain silk slip down over her stays, sits in the chair by the dressing table, unpins a heavy fall of

white hair, and hands a hairbrush over her shoulder to me, “— is a viper. How anyone could target the world’s sweetest, most open-hearted woman in the world, how she could persecute your mother, I don’t know.”

I don’t either. And by then the only time I have seen VaVa she screamed when she saw me and ran back to the curb and back into the car and slammed the door. She hasn’t been back yet.

My mother is in the gap between Mimi and VaVa. Owing to the seven years Mimi waited for Alton, my mother is the closest thing Mimi has to a child of her own. God’s perfect creation. I am to take a hundred strokes with the brush. I am at thirty-two while she demonizes VaVa.

“It was jealousy over her son. He married your mother. Her precious son. The wrong kind of love— never mind the fact that you’ll be getting Bell from both sides of the family— very wrong.”

Evidently there is a right kind of love. How would I know? I haven’t heard much about love or haven’t paid much attention and the word is only a vague vibration of what will shake me eight years into my future.

1964. Mimi is dressed against the snow in a long dark coat when she sweeps into my bedroom. She sees me and lifts her hands apart. “What is *this*?” Exactly what she’d said when she walked in the door to stay and look after the three of us girls and saw a lamb in a wooden crate, an orphan palmed off on me by a local farmer. “What is *this*?”

“Shingles.” Which she already knows. I am miserable, not to mention a rupturing scabby mess. The rash and the pain wrap around my right side front to back. As the shingles came up they itched furiously. But now they give pain, unmixed radiating pain.

“So.” Folding squarely at the knees Mimi plants her commodious and accommodating self at the foot of my bed. She has left her hat downstairs but the hat pin still juts out of the roll she has made of her hair. The French twist has just come in and Mimi always knows what’s in. “No hope for the dress.”

“Nope.” I am wearing the only garment the shingles will allow, the lavender satinlike nightgown Mimi shipped when she heard how I was afflicted. It swims around me, vaguely brushing my knees and feet. “It’s a goner.”

“Let’s see about that.” Mimi’s version of sympathy is to heave herself up from the bed to go to the closet for the dress. It is pale blue with spaghetti straps and somewhat bell-shaped. She holds the hanger away from her to critique it. “This will hold for another season, at least one more season. You’ll still be with it, still look terrific.”

“Right now it just hurts.”

“The dress? No—” her eyes narrow “—something else.”

“Something else.”

“Oh,” she says with finality, “love.”

“Julie is who he is taking now. Is what I heard.”

“Well,” she snaps the hangar carrying the prom dress back over the closet pole, “it’s just a date, just one dance. She won’t get him. Believe me with all you’ve got going for you, she won’t get him.”

As far as I can tell, what I have going for me is shingles.

She slips out of her coat and hangs it in my closet beside the pale blue dress. “Let’s look at this another way. What does he have going for him?” She is sure this tactic will triumph until I say, “Red hair.”

“Oh.” A little defeat. “Alton had red hair. At least before he went over there.”

“And he pays attention to me, I mean really pays attention.”

“Like Alton.”

I’m getting pretty sick of Alton. “Mimi, what were the other ones like?”

She has to think. Norm is gone now. He died shortly after the lamb I tried to raise on a bottle. When I bawled over the lamb she helped me through it. I didn’t see what Mimi did when Norm died. Or Phil. Tom is still alive and living across town with a wife named Wanda.

“Well, maybe *good* isn’t the word I should have used. But I say *good* about Alton because he was the first and you always remember the first more vividly.”

I haven’t got that far yet, not far enough to look back on anything. I have no experience. So I haven’t learned that pain, like shingles, like love, can diminish and leave in a whisper. I cannot look beyond the seeping crusted rash under lavender swash to see that VaVa will come to stay with us when she is the one who gets sick and that she, who never served a meal to my mother, will sit quietly next to my father at the table and listen beady-eyed to our talk. Because she knows work the way Mimi knows men and martinis, VaVa will sew things for us girls—for me a drawstring bag to contain the giant rollers I use to smooth my hair. But also she will discover soft serve and television.

We have her out in the wheelchair one day and she spots the Dairy Joy. It is a forbidden location because of the kinds of boys who hang around there.

“We can’t go there. We’re not allowed.”

She shifts slowly in the wheelchair, incredulous. “Who says that, your father? You got to be good girls? Always good girls—not me.

I didn't. How you gonna get *anywhere*?" She lifts the handbag from her lap and swings it in the direction of the Dairy Joy. "*Vamos*. You think I bought the Bell for nothing?"

Four chocolate dips and VaVa has blessed the Dairy Joy—if one of us is pushing her wheelchair we can go to the service window without fear.

The television will also find an easy berth with VaVa. She will love to prop her weighty legs on the ottoman and watch fantasy flickering on the screen, and her steady absorption frees the three of us from parental limits on television time. When the screen opens on a well-dressed couple by the rail of an ocean liner she laughs. She doesn't laugh often because she is never quite sure she understands our English. But when she does laugh she packs a lot into every haw and huff.

"I came over alone!" she tells us. I am straightening her speech here because by this time she has had a couple of strokes and mixes Portuguese with a few of the other languages she learned when she came over. But my sisters and I can usually get her gist.

"You could not do that, an unmarried girl, leave the country to join a man. My family would never have allowed." She wants to instruct us in insurrection. "I had to lie. João was already here, but my sister was too. So I told my parents I would live with her and take care of her children. Because she had to work. Everybody had to work then. I waited a year. First I did look after *sobrinhos*, then I went to the mill. After my baby died, the first son, I sent the photograph back to Portugal, the one João and I had made on our wedding day. That made it look like a decent engagement." She laughs harder and now I will be the one with beady eyes because I will see what Mimi didn't. VaVa lost the first boy and that made her hang on tight to the second. Now that she has the second son under the same roof she can laugh and ignore my mother.

This happens too late for Mimi to meet VaVa. When Mimi comes to console me about the pale blue dress, she won't be able to swoop

in so quickly for very long. But she swoops, and evidently still considering my questions about her men, she says, "Maybe *lovely* is a better word."

I have no experience. So I can't imagine the precise activities she is remembering. But I know the *feeling*. I know the feeling. She is helping me through this, the shingles and being in bed while the rest of my world dances.

When I say, "He is gone" and use her old lavender nightgown to demonstrate how Julie's boobs stick out in her push-up bra, Mimi laughs and pats my knee. "Maybe. But you know what they say, one door closes, another one opens . . . if time allows."

THREE POEMS

Judith Ferster

FIRST AND LAST

In the baby book my mother kept,
my first sentence:
“Birdie fly away all gone.”
So many concepts required to launch it:
independent creatures move,
birds don’t stay –
early lesson in loss.
I also heard my mother’s last sentence: “I don’t know why
no one will give me anything to read.”
At that point she couldn’t have meant it
but lined up all those negatives
flawlessly. Her own mother
was one of the first
Montessori teachers
and taught her to read early.
In her last few days, my mother
thought she saw hers,
as if ready to die reading.
Syntax had not flown away,
not gone
until she was gone.

THE AGES OF WOMAN

I

Except for the pain of a snapped tibia at three
(I heard it crack) and the itch
of the full-length cast,
I don't remember thinking about my body

II

until menses, when pamphlets
predicting blood and breasts
came true. The complex
contraption of belts, pads, and pins
was not for me so mother,
perched bed edge,
gave a live demonstration
of tampon use, white cylinder
getting swallowed.
From then on,
the plastic tube of twin tampons
was a constant companion
in my purse, just in case.

III

When initiated
Swim Cadets hovered outside
bathroom stalls coaching tampon
virgins, I was smug,
armed with no-nonsense booklet-free
maternal mentoring.

IV

My newly-married parents had bought
curved couches,
not so that Bill and I could not stretch straight
and were stuck at sitting, kissing, cuddling, clutching
until the voice from above called, "It's time
for Bill to go home." Surely their choice
was not prophylaxis for their high school daughter,
intended, not envisioned. But
décor made Bill and me more
decorous. He went home;
I attacked a carton of ice cream.

V

Before I left for college, Grandma said,
don't come back pregnant when
there's something on every corner
to stop it. Savvy Gramma, mother of two,
first generation of immigrant family
to have only two. Gramma sharing.

VI

That was fine until camp counseling
in Stockbridge, Massachusetts where,
I sought a doctor for the next tech.
Waiting room ringed
with Norman Rockwell portraits,
a GP taking temperatures,
giving shots, fitting glasses,
opened to the exam room
where the artist's model waited.
My first diaphragm doc
was on magazine covers.

VII

At 23, I joined my consciousness-raising
group holding stapled newsprint
Our Bodies Ourselves, mirrors,
flashlights, and clear plastic specula.
There were joyous cries all over the room:
“I see my cervix,” “I see my cervix.”

VIII

I thought nothing of rinsing a blood-filled
diaphragm and loved having a lover
who hardened when washing my stained
underwear with cold water and Ivory Soap
in his wife’s sink.

IX

They were just some of the adventurers in those days
going beyond monogamy – how could there be
too much love in the world? How did we escape
the STDs of the ’70s, some banishable,
some lifetime badges, hiding
in the ganglia

X

or the deadly badge
of the ’80s? Some luck loosed us
to our curious quests.

XI

One night in Maine, desire drove me
out on frozen roads
to a lover's house
seeking the dark spark,
nether fireworks,
I spun out
on a hill but front wheel drive and radials
pulled me up the next one. Dad had urged the make
and model, so
a different
danger dodged.

XII

At 38, I finally tried monogamy
after we both admitted being scared.
Nice to have a cock at my beck
and call. After he left
the sight of his hands
in a meeting could still turn me on
from across the room.

XIII

After meno-stop, my doctor said
“Don’t dry up and blow away,”
handing me an order
for another smooth cylinder, this one
delivering a magic estrogen elixir,
formula for staying silky inside.

XIII

Now, gratitude that the heyday
in the blood is not tame. The playwright
knew better than his prince
about older women.

MR. MENDENHALL'S QUESTION

On the train from New Haven to Northampton,
my high school friend met
the president of my college,
who promptly invited us
to his grand presidential house for a butler-served dinner,
my first. When he heard that I was taking biology,
President Mendenhall asked me why vegetables grown
 in night soil
don't make people sick.
He used the quaint old term
for the contents of chamber pots.

Did the butler overhear our conversation
about excrement over dinner in the grand house?
He must have been used
to the direct Mr. Mendenhall. I said I didn't know,
but I've been thinking about his question
ever since, bothering biologists
about the way plants take up water
and nutrients filtering out cholera bacteria
and E. coli, too big to infect plants, evolved
without the keys to unlock us, stopped
from making peppers and tomatoes
toxic. Clean lettuce rises out of muck
like the Buddha's lotus, pure and equally edible.
I wonder if Mr. Mendenhall
kept wondering, too.

THE BRIDE'S TEARS: EXCERPT

Margaret Dennis (formerly Peggy Woodbridge)

Peggy asks: "How did I ever get myself immersed in this project, melding mid-19th century Jamaican history with the story of Mr. Rochester and his insane wife, Bertha, as first described in Jane Eyre?" On a Smith College Alumnae Association cruise through the Leeward Islands, sociology professor Ginetta Candelario led a discussion of Wide Sargasso Sea, Jean Rhys's 1966 prequel to Jane Eyre. Peggy enjoyed rereading the book, but it left her with questions about the four years between the Rochesters' honeymoon and their departure for England. "I wanted to know what their marriage was like," she writes. Was Antoinette (later called Bertha) certifiably mad with a mental issue that we would recognize today? What did Mr. Rochester do with her £30,000 dowry? "My questions must have hit a nerve because one of my fellow Smithies piped up and said, 'Why don't you write that story?'"

"Fat chance!" Peggy thought to herself. And then she started looking at the history of Jamaica during the mid-19th century. "There was so much economic and social turmoil! After 1838 when the slaves were emancipated, labor was in short supply and workers were being brought in from China and India. Modern farming equipment was being imported to try to make sugar cane and other crops less labor intensive and more profitable. The first railroad in the Caribbean was built, along with steel lighthouses. Private companies were created to provide municipal water supplies. Opportunities to modernize and invest were abundant."

Peggy's novel, The Bride's Tears: The Rochesters of Spanish Town, is a complicated dance of conversations: between husband and wife; between the novice investor Rochester and savvy Jamaican businessmen; among people of different races, struggling and exploited and – in the case of women – kept ignorant by men who knew best and even by their own mothers. In the happiest days of her marriage, preparing a soon-to-be-married friend with advice on what to expect in the marriage bed, Antoinette compares it to "a dozen butterflies with very strong wings doing a dance inside you." What kind of a dance? A waltz or a polka? "Oh, I think a fandango. It's quite exciting!"

In this excerpt from Chapter 13, Annette is accosted by a stalker whose machinations will help destroy her:

"Psst! Psst! Mrs. Rochester," hissed a voice from the thick greenery close to the abutment of the iron bridge. It was a morning when Antoinette had no one to accompany her on her morning walk and chose to go out alone. "Mrs. Rochester, come here and listen to me!"

"Who are you, and why should I listen to you?" she replied to the man seeking her attention in such an unorthodox manner.

"I am Daniel Cosway. I am your half-brother."

"Nonsense! You're no relation to me."

"Hah! You do not believe me, but I am the son of your father, old Paul Cosway."

"No, that cannot be. I've never seen or heard of you."

"No, your father took little pride in his offspring from his slave women. Except for Alexander. His first wife gave him no children, no sons. But Alexander Cosway was born very fair skinned. Old Cosway did fancy that boy! He gave him every advantage, just as if he were legal by law and church. My mother, Mailotte Boyd, was also a slave, but black black. He gave her nothing but orders and beatings. And two children, myself and my sister, Tia."

"You're Tia's brother?" she exclaimed with astonishment. She remembered the little negro girl who had been her fast friend at Coulibri for several years, almost like the sister she never had. The friend she had spent every afternoon playing and swimming with at the bathing pool until the day Tia stole her clothing and left her with nothing but her own cast-off rags to go home in. The friend who had later taunted her and called her, "white cockroach." The girl who had joined the crowd of jeering negroes and hit her face with a well-aimed stone as she and her family fled the burning house at Coulibri.

"Yes, I am your half brother. And Tia is your half sister." Antoinette thought about this for a moment. She had an unpleasant feeling about the man, so turned back and started to walk away.

"Don't go," he called out. "I have much to say to you."

"I'm sure you have nothing of the kind," she replied with an air of arrogance. "Nothing that I care to hear."

"You will be sorry if you do not listen to what I have to say."

"Well, speak quickly, then. I have much to occupy myself with when I get home."

"No. No, Missy Rochester. I know you too well. I know that you go walking along the river every morning. You walk for a long time because you have no work to do at home, at your Aunt Cora's house. You walk sometimes alone, sometimes with your husband, and sometimes with your son. You walk sometimes with Sandi Cosway, Alexander Cosway's son. That man is not your husband, and when you walk out with Sandi, you go without a chaperone. You see, I know your habits very well."

"Well, so what? I like to walk, and my husband knows Sandi."

"But does he know that you walk out with Sandi without a chaperone? Does he know that you are talked about as a lady who does scandalous things?"

"I'm sure that no one says such things about me, and that I have done nothing wrong. Besides, everyone in Spanish Town knows that Sandi Cosway is my cousin and a reputable man."

"Reputable he may be. But how reputable do they think you are? I have observed you at the Governor's balls and entertainments."

"Impossible! Men of your kind are not present when the Governor entertains us."

"Ah, Madame! You are so very wrong! Who do you think passes the wine and champagne and lovely food at the Governor's entertainments? Who are those dapper black men dressed in fine livery, powdered wigs and white gloves? I and my friends often work there, and we have eyes. We see what goes on. I have seen how Lord Dudley and Mr. Marlow flirt with you and flatter you. I've seen Captain Smith pull you away into the corners and behind the palm trees to make love to you. I hear how people talk about you and joke about you behind your back. Your reputation is not as pure as you think. Only your husband is kept in the dark. And how long do you think he will love, honor and respect you if he is the last man in Spanish town to learn of your scandalous behavior?"

"But these things that you say of me are not true," she exclaimed, becoming increasingly agitated.

"Maybe true, maybe not," he said, cocking his head mischievously. "But maybe false is just as dangerous as maybe true. That's the way scandal is. You wouldn't want your dear husband to learn anything that would lessen his love for you, would you?"

"No, certainly not. But these things you're saying are nothing but lies. Pure fabrications and falsehoods."

Antoinette had heard enough. She turned to leave and as she was hurrying back up the river bank she heard him call out, "We shall see."

REHOBOTH BEACH

Mary Stewart Douglas



Watercolor

SEX, ART, AND OTHER EXPERIENCES

Jan Kornbluth

Here I was in a well-lit room removing my flowered panties, having shed every other stitch of clothing already. My heart was pounding as some twenty-four eyeballs trained on my chilled pink flesh.

“Darling, you don’t have to undress in front of us.” This from the older woman who had hired me and who seemed to have been around the block once or twice.

I was nineteen at the time, meaning that none of the twelve people eying me could have been arrested for misconduct with a minor. More’s the pity was what I felt in that moment. My current employer had spotted me at my real summer job, waitressing at a mid-sized resort. I’d accepted her offer partly for the money, but mostly because experience guided by intelligence, the mantra of my family and in particular my father, told me it was time I shook my life up a bit.

“Normally, models undress behind the screen,” she continued, gesturing, “and emerge in their robes.”

My mouth dropped open into an o. So. Ignorance guided by panic. Not a favorable combination.

“You did bring a robe?” she added. “Never mind, dear. You’ll know next time.” I inwardly determined there would be no next time.

“Just throw your clothes behind that screen. Wait, I think I have . . . ah yes. Here.” She tossed a paint-stained lump of cloth in my direction. It felt as stiff as the screen I was supposed to stand behind. “You can cover yourself with this apron once we take a break. Now,” she continued in a no-nonsense tone, “we’ll begin with a 20-minute pose, followed by a 10-minute break.” She gazed around at the assemblage, all of them poised behind their easels. “Everyone OK with that?”

Artists, start your paintbrushes. Interior monologue. Lame humor. Useless.

"All right, dear, take a pose." After several hours (seconds), she suggested, "Why not sit on that stool over there? Something simple. Something you can hold comfortably for 20 minutes."

Without pausing to think (cluelessness guided by terror; would my dysfunction never quit?), I planted my butt on the smooth wood, placed my right foot on the rung of the stool, and extended my left leg with my heel on the floor.

"A classic," my employer said.

Whoa! Wait. An undiscovered aptitude? "Everyone good?" she asked.

One of the male painters came forward and gently adjusted my left elbow back. I sucked in breath. He paused, startled. "Did I hurt you?"

I gave my head a mini-shake. "Sure?" I could feel his eyes on me.

I opened my lips as narrowly as I could. "No. I mean yes."

He coughed . . . snorted . . . hard to tell. "Look, I should have asked before I touched your arm. Sorry." He made the sound again. "From my angle, your elbow was hiding your lovely breasts."

I gasped and heard him chuckling as he returned to his easel. My arm still tingled where he'd touched me.

"Armand! Stop tormenting the poor girl!" my employer scolded. The others emitted bleats and murmurs. "Trust me, we're a harmless bunch. Aren't we, people?"

"You're doing wonderfully so far," piped up another male whom I caught from the corner of my eye, a diminutive middle-aged painter with a shock of reddish hair and blue-framed glasses. He

appeared quite mild-mannered, though I later learned that his wife, who outweighed him by a good fifty pounds, compensated for any weakness on his part by promoting his work as relentlessly as a shark scents blood.

Someone put on a recording; Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. After several minutes during which the only other sound was the tinkle of brushes hitting water jars, a feeling of tranquility washed over me until my left elbow began to twitch. I wiggled it slightly, hoping no one would notice.

"Five more minutes," my employer announced. Damn.

It felt so good when I could release my clenched muscles and stand, I almost enjoyed the paint-stiff apron chafing my skin.

We did two more 20-minute poses and finished with three fives. By the time we got to the fives, I felt like a natural. I did an odalisque on their scarred leather couch that practically had them panting.

After several summers at the resort, I got to know the artists pretty well and my confidence improved steadily. The exception was Armand. For me, his long sinewy frame; his dark hair, its mussed tendrils as shiny and stiff as though he had oiled them; his half-teasing brand of cynicism were all total turn-ons. He was considered a womanizer but also respected by the others as a major up and comer on the art scene.

His style was distinct. Mild-mannered scary-wife guy painted in a more or less cubist manner so that when he finished, I resembled a pile of flesh-colored, black-outlined blocks. Most of the others were more or less traditional/classical, a few employing varying degrees of impressionism. In their work, I ended up looking like a normal human being with a normal human body. Or as normal as I get.

Armand's work, by contrast, was almost brutal. He began as hyper realistic but superimposed a thickness of paint in bright colors that were not naturalistic and served to distort the images. He used

shadows to clarify the shapes but at the same time darken and mystify. His work had a melancholy decadent glamor that drew me because I found it complex and therefore fascinating. I once heard him tell my employer that he admired the German Expressionists. I looked them up afterwards and it made perfect sense, though his subject matter seemed more of the moment and more modern. Or do I mean postmodern? Whatever. I think all of us saw him as a bad boy painter destined for fame, someone we could say we knew back when. Heady stuff.

In consequence, I was never totally comfortable around Armand and ever conscious of his eyes on me, feeling more and more unappealing whenever I imagined how he might be seeing me in my poses. At the end of the final session of the final summer, he shook my hand and told me I was the best model he'd ever worked with. I sent him a weak smile and wondered what was wrong with me. Most of the others gave me pieces they'd done of me as farewell gifts. Not Armand. I had mixed feelings about that. I didn't want to see myself the way he'd painted me or even be reminded of it. On the other hand, there'd no nest egg for me if he turned into a household name.

I finished school on schedule and started working at a publishing house in Manhattan. My mother had passed away, and my dad was vice president of a mid-town ad agency. Lovelife-wise, I'd given up on the danger vibe in favor of an editor from work whose receding chin-line didn't prevent him from being extremely good-looking over all. Howard had a nice body of medium height, no excess fat. Clothes hung well on him. He was obsessive about his health and jogged six times a week, purchasing a new pair of expensive sneakers every six months without fail. Using a step by step plan he'd discovered online and religiously adhered to, he was helping me establish my own jogging routine. It will come as no surprise that our discussions commonly centered around books.

My dad, despite a tendency toward self-importance, would sometimes interrupt his busy life to spend a Saturday afternoon with me. Once we decided to go to the Met; the art museum, not the opera. The scandal about Harvey Weinstein had just come out, so in the taxi on

the way to Museum Row, Dad asked if I'd ever been sexually harassed at work. I told him I hadn't, and I admit this made me feel slightly inadequate. I knew it shouldn't, but I also felt a French woman might have understood. I realized I'd never entirely moved past Armand's indifference towards me as a sex object. Still, I'd dated a lot since. Plus, as I kept reminding myself, Howard was crazy about me.

My dad said, "Lucky for you, the people you work with are aware that you're smart enough to say no. Not like some of these women."

Smart over sexy. Excellent! Though again, I suspected that if I were French, I'd have pushed for both. "Dad, experience guided by intelligence tells me the issue is a lot more complex than you'd like to think."

"They try. You refuse. That's complex?"

To change the subject, I asked how his life had been at the agency that week. Suddenly, to my horror, I heard myself adding, "Did you come on to any secretaries?"

"Carla!"

Well. At least that shocked him out of his complacency.

The taxi pulled up to the museum, and, as luck would have it, the subject got dropped.

After viewing the main exhibition of recent color block paintings that neither of us cared for, we headed to a smaller one entitled *Rethinking Painting from the Model*. I was interested for reasons obvious to you but which I chose not to share with my father. As we walked into the hall, we were confronted by a painting so large it took up the entire wall in front of us. It depicted a standing female nude saturated in raw color that exaggerated every wart and wrinkle, striking if somewhat grotesque. Her face, precisely rendered though also shadowed, wore an uninterested expression that read as disdain for whatever she was looking at. Her eyes slewed left.

She was leaning against a red wooden stool, the paint chipped. In the background was a double-hung window, the view of spiky evergreens and a dirt road.

I gasped at the familiarity of it and stalked over to the painting. A tiny photo of the artist appeared at the side of the work, along with a description. I felt a flutter beneath my ribs as I gazed at the title of the piece: _____ *at* _____ and a date. So. Armand certainly had noticed me. Every pore. A shiver of gooseflesh rippled through me.

“Carla!” My dad’s sharp voice made me turn. “Do you see that?” How could I not?

“This is some coincidence!”

So the title was *Carla at _____ in _____*. Go to the Met if you want to know the rest.

He was frowning and squinting at the painting, as if by narrowing his eyes he could make it come clearer, or possibly disappear.

I stared at my father.

“You actually worked at that place.” He jutted his face toward the title card. “At that time.” He scowled from the card to me and back again. “That has to be you! Except it can’t be!”

“You really think I look like that?”

He scrutinized me. “Maybe not the expression, but I’d swear that artist has seen you someplace.” His attention shifted back to the painting. “In fact, it appears he got to know you quite well.”

I took a breath and threw up my palms in surrender. “OK, OK. I worked as a life model in my youth. At that time and in that place. He was one of the artists. I admit everything. Mea culpa. Mea culpa.”

He glanced at the date again and lowered his brows at me. “You claimed to be waitressing!”

"Look, I had an opportunity to earn some extra money. It was actually fun. It paid well," I added hopefully.

"So you were alone with that . . . weirdo in his studio?"

"He is not a weirdo; he's a painter! It was a woman's studio, Dad. With at least a dozen other artists. Many of whom were female."

"Nice of you to tell us about it!"

"Look at yourself! You wonder why I didn't tell you about it?"

"Oh, for . . ." He stopped, the mauve that had suffused his face paling to the faintest shade of baby pink. "Judging by your reaction, he never bothered telling you."

I frowned. "Who? Tell me what?"

"That he was displaying you in this museum."

"I haven't seen or heard from him in years!"

"You don't think he could have sought you out and asked permission?" Dad eyed me sharply. "What would you have said, Carla?"

"I . . . would have said yes!"

"I don't doubt it." His tone, excessively mild, brought back a recollection of being caught kissing Eddie Shultz beside the garbage chute in our apartment building when we were twelve. My dad had thought the Shultzes beneath us.

"Armand was an exceptional artist," I informed him. "It was obvious even then. I mean, he's here, right?" I gestured at the wall.

"A museum does not an artist make."

"What?"

"Experience guided by intelligence tells me your fiancé might not be so pleased with this," he continued.

"Howard would never be that bourgeois!"

My father shook his head at me, then abruptly took hold of my arm. I started pulling away until I noticed him eying a museum guard who had edged up behind us. The gleaming gold buttons on the guy's uniform were fastened all the way to his too tight collar, causing a well shaved doughy skin-fold to emerge along one side of his neck. A hint of some strong, unpleasant smelling aftershave wafted off him. From behind a pair of thick black glasses, the museum's recessed lighting glinting off the lenses, he leered at me.

My father snapped at him, "Shame on you!" and hauled me through the archway and around the corner into the next exhibition hall. He stood us in front of a much smaller nude than the one of me and dropped my arm. Motionless now, he sent me a solemn gaze, clearly expecting me to talk so I obliged.

"I feel OK about this, Dad. Maybe it's not a typically beautiful painting, but it is an incredible one. I'm obviously not the only one who thinks so." I waved my arm vaguely around me. "I'm flattered. Why wouldn't I be?"

"Hmmm." A cavernous wrinkle appeared between his brows, his lips drawn into a thin straight line. The very image of skepticism, he gazed back at me.

"You are a closet chauvinist, aren't you?" I erupted. "I never knew. I wouldn't be surprised if you did come on to your secretary!"

"Enough of this," he declared. "Let's get out of here."

"No," I said, pulling away from him. "No, I want to see the rest of the paintings." Behind him, I caught a whiff of the guard's aftershave. I moved on to the next piece and took a breath. "So what do you think of this one?" I asked, pointing to it. "Do you like the way it catches the light? Or is it too pretty?"

“THE MINUTES” AND NOT “THE HOURS”: ANOTHER FORM OF LITERARY ACTIVITY

Maureen Kilfoyle

Most people look away when the call goes out to take notes at a meeting, but I usually volunteer. It seems that I can do the impossible – listen to what is being said, distill it in a few phrases in long-hand, write it up later in narrative form, and actually feel free to speak up at the meeting if I need to. Probably the whole point of taking the minutes is that it is assumed I will keep my mouth shut, but that rarely happens. (I almost never spoke a word in the dining room in Lawrence House for four long years, but I seem to have made up for that speech deficit in subsequent decades.)

As a result, I have taken notes of monthly meetings of various boards – the parish Women’s Group (one year), the Twigs thrift shop that benefited the local hospital (four years), my family’s business meetings to manage our inherited beach house (twice a year for about twenty years). This is not even a complete list. Everything went pretty well, and I rarely received any corrections of fact or spelling.

A year after I joined the Westchester Choral Society in White Plains, there was a major reshuffling of management, since our new choral director had weeded many members out due to their inability to sing, including some who happened to be serving on the board. When the longtime president, Numa Rousseve, asked for a volunteer to take minutes among the newly elected board, I happily raised my hand. My minutes were speedily approved at the start of each meeting after I had previously circulated them by email. I actually began to suspect that nobody even read them, since they trusted me to get it right all the time.

Numa had served for many years as president as well as on the search committee for the new director. He made it clear that he wished to step down. Nobody could really believe him, and we

still wanted to keep him as “President for Life.” When the time came to select a new president, the board members sat around and hemmed and hawed. Finally, Numa agreed to stay for one more year if someone would agree to take over later. Another longtime board member, who clearly wanted to hang on indefinitely, nominated a new board member, Judy, who had just transferred in from another chorus. Evidently, her main qualification was that she had served as president in her former chorus. The nomination was weakly seconded, and we all said “aye” because we were all so relieved to be keeping Numa in charge. The minutes stated that Numa was nominated and approved as president, and they were approved with no changes at the next board meeting.

After our summer hiatus, we resumed rehearsing with our still relatively new music director. Out of the blue, Judy arranged a board field trip to a church far away from our centrally located rehearsal space. She also invited the minister and his staff to attend our holiday concert. They all seemed to be on a very friendly footing, which made me wonder how Judy had become so friendly with this team, based so far away from her own residence. I wondered why she kept acting as though she was going to be the next leader of the chorus without ever bringing up her ideas at a board meeting. When the board met in the spring to affirm new board members, it became clear that Judy was not going to receive the nod to be new president. She was outraged. We checked the minutes from the year before: there was no mention of her becoming president-elect for the following year. However, when I revisited my notes, I found out that I had indeed jotted down that she had been nominated and affirmed. I just never put it in writing.

It turns out that many people on the board were strongly against her candidacy, and if they noticed the omission in the minutes, they kept their mouths shut. As another longtime board member said to me afterwards, “It wasn’t your fault. There is a reason they are called ‘the minutes’ and not ‘the hours.’”

In the end, I came away thinking that I was both devious and dumb, because I really did not recall the awkward nomination

“THE MINUTES” AND NOT “THE HOURS”

of a disliked board member by another disliked board member. At the end of the meeting, we recruited a new president who was very acceptable and who proved quite effective. She kept us rehearsing at our central location. My lapse with the minutes turned out to be a boon for us all. (Except for Judy, who quit the chorus immediately.)

POEMS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Paula Hendricks

OLD HAND

time takes its toll
our surfaces
become mottled
and worn

our hands become
gnarled
our skin loose

but an old hand
knows things
and
has stories to tell



DESIRE

I thought it was just me
wanting to stay in
wanting to stay home
not interested
in clubbing
or late nights

Not like when I was
younger

I thought it was just me
preferring Netflix
to happy hour
meeting friends
while it's still light outside

I thought I'd turned
into my grandmother
teasing myself
about making early bird
dates at Dennys

then I talked with others
admitted my changing
desires
and found out it's
not about age
or gender
others feel the same way
some don't even go out
after dark

I no longer
want to drown out
the quiet
the soft voice
the non-verbal

I'm more interested
in talking
listening
hearing what's said
I'm more interested
in intimacy

THE FRONT DOOR

I go in and out of this door
every day
I know the weight of it

In and out

I seldom stop
and look through it
I'm usually in a hurry
to get somewhere else

It's not that I'm unaware
I see the door
I see the ironwork
I see the lobby
and the mirror

It's that I want to take more time
to look, to see
to appreciate
this gateway
this view inside

how beautiful it is
 how functional
 how glorious

I wonder
what else I'm not seeing



LIFE DRAWING

I stand in front of an easel. Newsprint pad attached. Charcoal in hand. Drawing the curve of his shoulder. You know . . . that lovely sloping curve, that fits the palm of your hand, with shadows between his chest and his arm.

I want to see his whole shoulder from the front. I want to touch the curve, feel the bone, the skin, the density of muscle. I want to settle my hand around it, to know the hardness, the softness. I want to see the pores of his skin, the fine hairs, his freckles. To see if there are any scars. Mostly though, I want to capture shape, the substance of the shape, the volume, the sensuality of the curve.

I want to communicate what I see, what I feel. The strength, the kinetic energy, the coiled spring, the potentially fluid movement, the beauty, the beauty and the function of this piece, this one piece.

He sits on the stool naked. Life drawing.

I look at his left shoulder, the smooth skin, just like mine. The skin and muscle wrapped around bone, the stretching, the moving, the limits. I want him to raise his arm, to see the skin wrinkle, the muscles bunch, as they are pushed into a different position. Perhaps not so beautiful, but equally fascinating to my eye.

I'm learning about charcoal, about pressure, about darkness and light, about seeing.

The teacher comes by, looks over my shoulder, and tells me I am doing it all wrong.

PRIMER

there's something about
primer
some in-between
something
some sense of purpose
an image of hands
working

there's something
about chains
that hold
things together



WHO KNEW I COULD WRITE A NOVEL?

Lynn Slaughter

I spent decades as a professional modern dancer and dance educator. I was passionate about my work, and if you asked me who I was, right after the words “wife and mother,” out would come “dancer.”

I felt fortunate to dance into my fifties. In fact, when I turned fifty, I created an autobiographical concert, “Flying at Fifty,” with my husband and other dancers in our company to celebrate. One of the places we performed it was Smith for our 30th reunion.

Eventually, however, age and injury caught up with me, and I retired after my first hip replacement.

I was grieving for the loss of dance in my life when I got an idea for a story about a young aspiring ballet dancer determined to unravel secrets her friends and parents were keeping. In retrospect, I think working on this project was a way to cope with my grief. That story ended up becoming my first young adult novel, *While I Danced*.

Who knew I could write a novel? Definitely not me! While I was still dancing, I moonlighted as a freelancer writing articles, mainly for regional parenting magazines. But although I’d been a voracious reader, I’d never thought I had the fiction gene. Now here I was, suddenly hooked on writing fiction. I ended up returning to school to earn my MFA in Writing Popular Fiction from Seton Hill University.

While I was in grad school, I had a terrible bout of impostor syndrome. It seemed as though every writer in the program, except for me, had known they were destined to become writers the minute they could hold a pencil. From early childhood on, they’d penned stories, poems, and plays.

That wasn’t my story at all. From the get-go, music made me want to move, and my lifelong passion had been dance. But thanks to

some amazing faculty mentors at Seton Hill, I got lots of help developing my craft as a writer and just as important, I got encouragement and support to develop a creative process that works for me. I usually start out with a wisp of an idea, often drawn from something I've experienced or witnessed and then expanded upon by asking "What If?" For example, one of my adult dance students once shared with me that in high school, her twin had been murdered, and the case had never been solved. Her tragic experience stuck with me. Years later, it inspired the premise for *It Should Have Been You*, in which the twin of a murdered piano prodigy starts receiving messages from a cyberstalker, the first of which says, "It Should Have Been You."

Once I get an idea for a premise, I do a lot of work on character development before I start drafting. I pay particular attention to characters' backstories. What has shaped their personalities, fears, and goals? Out of that pre-writing work, I get tons of ideas for plot complications. I guess my philosophy could be summarized as: Character first. All else will follow!

Since finishing my MFA, I've kept going as a writer. *Missed Cue*, which came out from Melange Books, is my fifth published novel, and I'm currently working on my next one.

As a dancer, I treasured those times on stage when I'd be "in the zone," totally immersed in the movement and the moment. Now, I get to experience those times as a writer.

I'm amazed to have found a second act in my life which has been so rewarding and meaningful, especially doing something I'd never imagined I could do. One of my favorite quotes is:

"It's better to look back on life and say, 'I can't believe I did that,' than to look back and say: 'I wish I did that.'" — *Unknown*

ANGELS

Katherine Martin

5 MARCHING ANGELS



Mixed media, 6 x 9 inches

The process of my watercolors is a contemplative one as so much art is. I begin the drawings using my non-dominant hand and the angels are upside down so I don't actually see them until I turn the paper over. They started out as merely line drawings and have evolved into colorful renderings that change as angels do. I use metallic watercolors and hence the shimmer may not be transmitted in the scans. The color seems to be true to the originals, however.

BLUE ANGEL TRIO



Mixed media, 8 x 6 inches

FOUR ANGELS DANCING



Mixed media, 11 x 8 inches

RAINBOW HALO



Mixed media, 11 x 8 inches

TRIO OF GOLD ANGELS



Mixed media, 8 x 6 inches

ROSE ANGEL



Mixed media, 10 x 8 inches

SAVED BY EACH OTHER

Denise Germain Rabinowitz

An earlier version of this essay was published in 2014, in *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*, 8 (3), 7–11.

My path from Smith to the World Trade Center was challenging even before September 11, 2001. I worked at a foster care agency and then at maximum security prisons before going back to school for a law degree.

In 2001 I was working at Fiduciary Trust Company International, a small investment bank with offices on the 90th to 97th floors of Tower 2. I arrived at my office on the 90th floor that morning at about 8:20, my usual time. My colleague Oscar Montes was there and he and I went to the cafeteria for coffee. Oscar had left Cuba with his family when Castro came to power, but kept a law school picture that showed the two of them as classmates — and a fondness for Cuban cigarettes. At 74, Oscar was in no shape to flee down long staircases. He had lung disease.

We had our coffee and headed back to work. I picked up a package in the reception area, turned on my office computer, and was about to access my voicemail when there was an extremely loud “sonic boom” that sounded strangely muffled — like dynamite from far away — that caused Tower 2 to shake slightly. When I looked out my window, which faced southeast with a view of Brooklyn, the Brooklyn Bridge and Queens, I saw thousands of swirling, glittering pieces of paper that looked like a snowstorm or a weird Wall Street promotional event with large amounts of paper being dropped from the sky. I learned the next day that the “glitter” was actually blown out glass from Tower 1.

Not being able to comprehend what this loud, unusual noise and this glittering, swirling paper were, I rushed into Susan Garcia’s office which faced north and seemed to be where the noise was coming from. Looking out her window, I saw a huge ball of fire

exploding out from Tower 1 and, about parallel to where I was, a line of intense fire – like looking into a ceramic kiln – going across one side of Tower 1 to the other. I also smelled a strong odor of gasoline (later learning that it was jet fuel).

Upon seeing a fireball, I believe that I went into shock thinking that a bomb had somehow been detonated inside Tower 1 and, trying to process what I was seeing, hearing and smelling, I heard Anna Lavery, Carol Demitz's secretary, whose desk was in front of my office, yelling "I'm getting out of here, I'm getting out of here" as I ran back to my office to call my husband. I remember thinking his recorded greeting was interminably long and that I should just leave the building. I left a message saying "Hi, Jon. It's 8:45. Building 1 in the World Trade Center just blew up. Everyone is okay here. I'm just going downstairs now. Bye." When I listened to this message about a month later, I had no idea that I had said Building 1 had blown up and could not believe the terror in my voice. Tragically, many people who reached loved ones when the plane hit Tower 1 stayed on the telephone not knowing that would cost them their lives.

I stood in my office another fifteen or twenty seconds looking in disbelief out my window and deciding whether or not to take a bag with my work shoes, cell phone, sunglasses, newspaper, etc. I left the bag there thinking it would be a hindrance if I had to walk down ninety flights of stairs. I left my office as Oscar was coming out of his office. Anna was gone and we assumed she was on her way out of the building. We checked the office in between Oscar's and mine and saw no one in the trust and estates area or in the corporate area of the Legal Department as we went out to the main corridor on the 90th floor. Unknown to us, six employees out of the eighteen in Fiduciary's Legal Department were there that morning and three of them, Carol, Anna, and Mary Melendez, died. Oscar and I think that Anna went to find Mary, who was in an interior, windowless office. We did not see either Mary or Carol that morning and later learned that Carol had been in a meeting on the 94th floor when Tower 1 was hit.

It was now two or two and a half minutes after the plane hit Tower 1. There were about thirty to forty people on the 90th floor corri-

dor but I only remember seven of them. I was quite aware of Mike Jacobs and Sherry Bordeaux on my left and Chris and Anne Cramer on my right, all of whom were from the Tax Department, and Oscar right behind me. I also remember seeing David Fodor, the Tax Department employee who had volunteered to be the 90th floor fire marshal, Robert Mattson, the head of the Trust Administration Department and Alayne Gentil, the head of Human Resources. I learned the next day that all of them, together with approximately twenty-five other employees from the 90th floor, perished. Although I knew most of the other people, I do not remember who they were as my mind seemed to be blocking out much of what was going on around me. I felt quite puzzled and anxious about what was happening—but not afraid—and I focused on listening for instructions from the Port Authority Command Center as fire drills had instructed us to do.

There was no panic or yelling as people waited for information to come from the fire alarm box. Many people felt that the people in Tower 1 were in great danger but that “fortunately” they were in Tower 2 and could wait five, ten, fifteen minutes for an assessment of the situation before deciding to evacuate or return to their offices, not knowing that they had only two or three minutes to make telephone calls, find friends or wait in a corridor—that is, do anything other than leave the building. About one minute later, Alayne, apparently seeing that the local elevators were already filled with many other people waiting to get on them, said that if people wanted to take the stairs to the 78th floor, she thought the express elevators were still working.

Oscar and I happened to be standing opposite one of only three stairwells for the building and immediately decided to take the stairs. I assumed that at least the four people standing with us would do the same. When I learned late the next day that they were missing and presumed dead, I could not believe it. I had assumed that, if Oscar and I, who had “wasted” several precious minutes, had escaped, everyone at the Trust Company had as well. In the next several days, as I learned that 95 friends and colleagues (this number includes the seven people who worked at Fiduciary but

were on different companies' payrolls) had died, I felt the attack was a bad nightmare from which I would awaken and be back in my office with everyone there. I still cannot completely believe that 10 of the 12 people I remember seeing that morning died and that I will never see these 95 people again.

I often feel guilty that I did not urge the people around me to take the stairs. Unfortunately, everyone was acting in a total vacuum of information or on misinformation after seeing and hearing things that made no sense and were completely out of the realm of anyone's prior experience. I think in many instances the decision to stay or leave was a group decision (even if the group was two people) revolving around the people with whom you worked who were there that morning. Oscar and I had immediately formed our own "group". Although we did not talk about it at the time, each of us had independently determined—and continued to reinforce that determination—that the fire in Tower 1 was a significant threat to people in Tower 2, that we had to get out of the building as quickly as possible, and that we were not going to wait for official instructions about what to do. Nevertheless, I feel it was random luck, timing, and access to office windows with views, that enabled me to escape when 95 out of approximately 175 employees there that morning did not. I was shocked to see how dark and narrow the stairs were. There seemed to be room for only two people at a time to descend the stairs and, except for knowing that Oscar was in back of me, I had no idea who was in front or in back of me. For instance, I had no idea that Henry Udell had passed me on the stairwell until he told me so when we met at Comdisco a few days later.

It was about 8:57 a.m. when we got to the 78th floor sky lobby where about 200 people were coming out of local elevators, talking about what to do, or waiting for one of the express elevators to take them to the Concourse level. Again, there was concern and confusion but no panic, yelling or people pushing into elevators. Fortunately, the stairwell Oscar and I had been in opened near the bank of express elevators rather than on the other side of the sky lobby where we would have been behind many people. The only person either of us saw on the 78th floor from Fiduciary was Tom Martin from the Tax

Department. He had left his office as soon as he heard the “sonic boom”. Shortly before we arrived on the 78th floor, he had offered money to Carol Demitz, who had left her purse in her 90th floor office, and suggested they go to the Concourse to discuss what to do. She decided to go back and, of course, perished. Several times a week I still wonder if I could have changed her mind if Oscar and I had gotten to the 78th floor before she left.

Tom suggested that the three of us continue taking the stairs to the Concourse since it made no sense to take the elevator, if one should happen to come, with Tower 1 on fire. He also felt that too many people would get on, causing the elevator to get stuck or the door not to close. Oscar said he could not go down seventy-eight more flights. Less than a minute later, as we were trying to decide what to do, an elevator near where we were standing opened. Consciously or unconsciously, Oscar and I had decided to stay together that morning. Without further discussion, the three of us got on the elevator, which turned out to be a life-saving decision that only five minutes later — when Tower 2 was hit — would have been a life-ending decision. Again, the total randomness of living or dying that day, based on decisions being made in a total vacuum, is something I think about every day for which there are no answers. Had we taken the stairs, which was the “smart” thing to do, given the information we had at the time, Oscar and I would have needed to rest at least every three or four flights and we would have been in the stairwell when Tower 2 collapsed at 9:59 a.m.

We did not see any other Fiduciary employees on this elevator, which had about twenty-five people in it. At least ten more people could have gotten on this elevator, but I think many were taking a “wait and see” attitude, possibly having heard the Port Authority message over the public address system — which, for some reason, neither Oscar nor I heard — to the effect that Tower 2 was secure and that people should go back to their offices and wait for further instructions. I am certain that many people, who were trying to decide whether to leave or stay awhile longer, decided to stay in reliance on this official message. It is infuriating and incomprehensible to me that this message was sent from the Port Authority

Command Center, when so many “lay persons,” seeing and hearing the events that morning, knew they had to leave as quickly as possible. In the elevator I was fixated on the door, thinking the two- or three-minute descent was taking forever. Again, no one seemed panicked, just tense and concerned. Ironically, not knowing the life-threatening danger all of us were in was a great help to people who could focus their minds on getting out and a fatal hindrance to those who decided to stay or were ambivalent about leaving.

We got to the ground floor about 9:00 a.m., in probably one of the last two or three elevators to get to the Concourse before the plane hit the 78th floor, which would have either severed the elevator cables or caused jet fuel to pour down the elevator shafts, killing people still in the express elevators. The closest exits, leading out to Liberty Street (on the south side of Tower 2), had all been blocked off. Looking out the glass revolving doors and floor-to-ceiling windows, I saw many cars on fire and chunks of concrete and other debris falling and on the ground from Tower 1. As I had twelve minutes earlier, I tried to process what I was seeing without being able to do so. For the first time that morning, however, I felt in imminent danger in a surreal, unbelievable situation. The police, many of whom probably died that morning, told us to go through the Concourse to Building 4, a small building connected to Tower 2 that faced Church Street. Hundreds of people were running in many directions and in the confusion Oscar and I got separated from Tom who went through the lobby of Tower 1 and, fortunately, made it to safety.

Holding on to each other, we began walking fast as others ran by us, since Oscar could not run. About three minutes later, as we got to the top of an escalator and were about to go out the glass revolving doors of Building 4, the plane hit Tower 2. There was another deafening “sonic boom,” the building shook and debris came raining down on people who had just run by us and were already outside. Again, there had been a completely random combination of timing and luck. The next day I realized that if Oscar and I had been separated after leaving the elevator, I would have run out of Building 4 and probably been hit with debris or burning jet fuel.

Completely terrorized, thinking that bombs were going to go off all over and that there was nothing I could do to protect myself, I felt I was going to die within minutes. It was as if, with no warning at all, my place of work had turned into a combat zone with nowhere to hide or way to defend myself. Everyone screamed and ran down the stairs next to the escalator we had just come up. There was complete pandemonium in the Concourse with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people trying to escape. While Oscar and I gripped each other for dear life, another group of police directed us across the Concourse, past the elevators leading to the Path trains, to stairs and escalators leading to revolving doors out of Building 5 on the corner of Church and Vesey Street.

When we got out of Building 5 at about 9:06 a.m., the police were yelling that this was a terrorist attack and that we should leave the area immediately. There were dozens of fire engines, emergency service vehicles and police cars on Church Street and some injured people being helped or waiting to be helped. It felt like being in a horror movie, yet knowing the horror all around was terrifyingly real. There were thousands of people on Church Street, the side streets leading to the Trade Center, Broadway and coming from the subway looking in disbelief and shock at these two massive buildings on fire. In contrast to all of these people, we just wanted to leave the area as quickly as possible. I suggested to Oscar that we try to take the subway at the Brooklyn Bridge stop to Grand Central. As we walked north through the crowds, I found myself continually turning around, mesmerized by the sight of these buildings on fire, yet not believing what I was seeing. As we went into the subway, we passed people coming out and took the train with people who had no idea what was happening, which added to the surrealness of what I had just experienced.

We needed to call our spouses, and since I worked with some attorneys who had offices in the Met Life building, we thought they'd let us use their phones. By the time we got to Grand Central, however, all the offices were evacuating. Oscar took the subway to Queens where he lived.

I couldn't get a train home to Westchester County. The trains were not running. Nobody's cell phone was working, either, so I stood in a very long line to use a pay phone. Not knowing how to reach Jon, who was in a meeting in midtown, I called my twin sister Adrienne. She told me to take the subway back downtown to Union Square and walk across town to the Village where Jon and I had a pied a terre. As I got to the apartment, Tower 1 fell and it was then—about 10:30 a.m.—that I was reunited with Jon and learned from him that the two Towers had fallen and that two planes, not bombs, had hit the buildings.

What I lived through on September 11th will be with me forever. I shudder inwardly whenever I think about how close I came to dying that day. Every day I think about my friends and colleagues who died and their families, especially those ten colleagues I remember seeing or being with that morning. Every day I also think about how extraordinarily lucky I am to have survived because of a random combination of factors that particular morning, including: where my office was located; my husband not being in his office; being with Oscar, who confirmed my sense that we had to leave the building as soon as possible, rather than being alone or with others who felt there was time to assess the situation; being near a stairwell on the 90th floor and an elevator on the 78th floor; not hearing the Port Authority message; and helping Oscar, who could only walk—not run—when we got to the Concourse.

I hope that, with the passing of time and support from my family and colleagues, I will be able to put most of the enormous sadness, guilt at surviving and anger at what happened on September 11th that I feel every day in a corner of my brain to be visited only now and then in the years to come.

DRAWINGS FROM THE PANDEMIC

Amy Finley Scott

ANGST (ORANGE) 10.29.20



Pencil, watercolor on paper, 7 ¼ x 7 ½ inches

During the early months of the pandemic I played around with drawings containing words that were pertinent to the strange new situation we were all experiencing. (See “Lawn Sign,” reading STAY PUT!) In other drawings I wrote words with continuous lines. “ANGST” is comprised of two continuous lines. The “ANG” turned out to hold a bird!

FIELD HOSPITAL (DAY) 4.1.20
& FIELD HOSPITAL (DUSK) 4.2.20



Pen, watercolor, gouache on paper, 9 ½ x 7 inches



Pen, watercolor, gouache on paper, 9 ¼ x 8 ¼ inches

In March 2020 all construction in NYC was put on hold and my design projects were tabled, giving me uninterrupted studio time. My days alone in my studio matched the protocol perfectly. My work in those months was reflective of the fears / messages / reality of the pandemic.

Seeing the canvas tents of the field hospital going up in Central Park was startling and sobering. The tents were in sight of Mt. Sinai Hospital, but, amazingly, were completely independent of the hospital for all equipment and power. The only city-supplied illumination was from the street lamps, coming on at dusk, lighting the park's pathways.

LAWN SIGN 4.6.20



Pen, watercolor, gouache on paper, 7 x 5 inches

THREE POEMS

Gale Eaton

Poetry stopped coming to me in the 1980s, when my mind was taken up with social science research and accreditation reports. Retirement has lured it back with leisure and sorrow.

SHE IS GONE

I make your oatmeal as she always did
you shake fresh grounds into the percolator

light streaks onto the windowsill
hits scattered beach glass quartz pebbles mussels
tipped at random
breaks through spiky gray shell to inner spiral
still pink luminous remembering life

I always thought I would go first
you say

and you pause

I wait as I always have for you to go on
sometimes you will and sometimes not

light trembles into the kitchen
hits dust motes falling rising

we tremble in the light
waiting

THINKING OF YOU

Are you well? I hope the floods
we see on the news aren't coursing
down your street. Here, another
sweet day of solitude lies ahead.
Nothing happens, and I do little.
The oven doesn't need cleaning, and
the cupboard where I keep my pots and
pans won't get tackled today.

I have not been working on
that novel, either. Its people drift
free of my outline and linger in
the guest room, where I can almost
hear them talking with you and
other absent friends they'd like. My
gentle ghosts. I hope the violence
we see on the news has not hit
anyone you know and love.

It's odd that I've inhabited this house
for half my life, so far from you
and the places we grew up. Odd too
that our families had not always lived
there. That our people took the places
of others who had been there. The peace
we were born into felt, to a child, like
how things always were and would be.
Who could have imagined we would live
years enough for history to happen?

It still astonishes me that you
are old. These days I see your face
as I remember it through your face
as it is now, lined by times
and places we didn't share. Odd
to know you so well and not at all.

I cannot invent you into clarity, cannot
do that even for the characters in
the novel I do not write, and yet I know
how you and I will talk when
for a day or two we meet again and
look out at the harbor, unrippled
by history. If only it were fiction, all
we see on the news. Take care,
my friend. Be present in my world.

SONG, EBBING

I'm losing words to quote
What once by endless rote
 I knew: the roar,
 Cold against shore,
Of uptossed stones, the pull
And drag back down, the lull,
 The rush at speech.
 To ear, the beach
Hauls particular voice
Into a surge of noise
 And rubs each word
 Into absurd
Smoothness. Thoughts lie broken:
Glass and pebble and shell,
Consonants worn by swell
And battered by ocean,
 Lost in the om
 Our tides intone.

THE PARTY'S OVER

Jill Metcoff



IN THE SHADOW OF NATURE'S GLORY

Susan Bangs

When the sky is scrubbed to picture book blue,
what is this body to me that I should love it?

Caress with familiarity and wonder
the compression of bone and skin
the unbearable whiteness of age.

As I disappear, inching smaller and smaller, will
someone sound the alarm? Will they dust

under the couch to find me with the bunnies,
screaming to be heard

like the Incredible Shrinking Man?
(How that terrified me when I was ten, and now.)

I tack memories to my brain; they flutter off.

I say to myself "don't fall" just before I slip,
"hold on" as I drop a glass; my fingers won't

print, whorls faded to nothing. I slide
through a wall and disappear, erased.

I should laugh about shrinking. Take it simply
as a prelude to no-big-deal disappearance.

Envy for what might have been If I had been
a beauty, tall and slender,
instead of short and cute.

Inconsequential.

On a good day, an optimistic day, I would sink into a pile
of leaves, crimple and crunch, only tufty white hair

revealing an odd old woman
dressed in autumn oak and an acorn cap.

I would be wild as a murmuration of sparrows
swirling like teenagers at a roller rink

leaving a hum in my wake.

Erasure/preservation an incomplete formula.
Once erased to the whiteness of bone and reputation,
what is left but imagination?

LUMBER YARDS AND PALETTE PAINTINGS

Marcia Schenk Steckler

Whenever a funeral procession drives by, people usually pause whatever they are doing to recognize the figurative and literal passing of a life shared and honored by unknown others. I do the same whenever a lumber truck labors past, grinding through its metal gears toward its ultimate destination where these arboreal lives well-lived will be forever stripped of their identity. In the painting of the grapple resting on the truck bed, only some sawdust remains. Both the humans and the trees are nonetheless present through their very absence. When I was working on that piece, someone remarked that the color of the buildings wasn't right. I answered, "Do you know what happens in there?" I intentionally chose spring green to express resurrection and the promise of a new and different life awaiting these fallen giants, a destiny beyond the forest. They enter as tall white pine, majestic oak, proud maple or graceful birch and emerge as numbered planks or wood chips. Some, however, may have the good fortune to become a child's toy or highchair. . . . Renaissance happens every day at the lumber yard.

I am constantly surprised by the female figures which take shape on my palette at the close of a day spent painting – visions of women whose strength edges spontaneously to the surface from beneath a blunted blade of steel. They arrive unexpectedly in the smeared whorls of paint. I cannot lay claim to them. They beckon me to give them form, and I am drawn to them with a sense of urgency, curiosity, and respect. It is as if they have only one moment to tell their story, whispering through the palette knife as it scrapes and blends the pliant colors, pausing to breathe only with the rhythm of each mark, each gesture. I find it both humbling and sacred, this place of contact between the seen and unseen.

DESDEMONA'S SCARF



Oil on canvas, 30 x 24 inches

Lumber truck seen near the intersection of Routes 4 and 100 in Vermont. I titled this one *Desdemona's Scarf*, because the tension between the spike in the flag and the peeled strip of bark reminds me of *Othello*. The space between them seems to ache with longing, and the lumber truck's obligatory red flag feels to me like a tangible reminder of Desdemona's fate.

MILL BOUND

The cortège moves from High to Main,
ponderously majestic,

cold metal torn from the groaning belly
of the land
cradling centuries untold that rose above
earth's garment
of mingled mountain and leaf,
touching the sun and prying apart
deep granite

seams of life-giving water

where upland winds carried their scent along steep slopes,
bearing the snow that embraced their final arc toward earth,
enshrouding still
their journey
toward the river's edge.

Skin upon skin, life upon life,
man in the middle,
the lumber truck breathes
slowly away

bearing a crescent cross.

BACK AT THE YARD



Oil on paper, 30 x 24 inches

A grapple (like the crescent cross at the end of “Mill Bound”) rests on the bed of an empty lumber truck at the Cersosimo Mill in Brattleboro.

WISTFUL



Oil on waxed palette paper

“...LIKE THE FIRST MORNING...”



Oil on waxed palette paper

The title is taken from lyrics composed by Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965).

FOUR POEMS

Susie Patlove

Susan Allen Patlove (of Capen House) says of these poems, "They are all from a manuscript I am working on which is made up of poems written during the years I took care of my husband, who had Lewy Body Dementia. He died a little over a year ago."

PLAIN SIGHT

i.

Yesterday as we walked up the hill
to the long abandoned red house
you suddenly gasped
I thought perhaps bear or owl
but you pointed to light
on the forest floor
glowing below the wet black
column of pines

I live under the weight
of things to do
while your sight
expands the daily world
you fly in the space light makes
and sometimes
when your eyes see me
I am lit by you alone

ii.

Out of the arbor
flew a small sparrow
a grape leaf rose on the wind
leaf and bird flying
momentarily together
until leaf became earth
and bird became sky

iii.

Our long years lived
in the time it takes
one leaf to fall

THE LANGUAGE BETWEEN US

You start a sentence but omit the final, crucial word.
Meaning asks for itself. Then ceases to matter.

Eavesdropping at the door of your mind, I gaze
at a space between your pause and my loss.

Silence, the guardian of thought, looks at the evening.
Together we greet the host of twilight.

You whisper as if vocal chords had become
too boisterous for the green and sainted world.

I lean in close to the chamber of your body.
A paper-thin voice passes through me.

Speech drifts away. A seed of myself cracks open.

GIVING THE SHEEP AWAY

for Jody Stewart

Once the wether was loaded, the ewe
jumped willingly to the truck bed.

I rode to Tregellys Farm on a hard bench
behind bucket seats, feeling cramped

but able to see the two of them, calm now
head to tail, crunching hay.

Jody met us in her open barn,
and ewe and wether leapt to the floor.

Before leaving I caught the wether's eye,
and in his odd rectangular pupil

I saw the clear end to our years of
hay making, cow milking, sheep shearing.

As we drove away under orange leaves, wet
with a misty rain, Jody's pigeons

lifted from a shed roof, hundreds of them
angling together in one perfect arc. A shaft

of sunlight caught the slant of their feathers
and the fluid cloud of them turned suddenly blue.

GATE

The fenced garden
lit by last night's moon
has ripened inside us.
On a wind that was passing
went the pure grace
of design and fulfillment.
Today he wants to build a gate,
a new entrance from the east
but that clock stopped years ago
and what ticks now is unknowable.
I want to step inside my blue heart
and be the eyes of the world.
Surely out of all the skills that perish
more are being born.
I will remember how he wished
to build a gate for us,
a gate to the white city
where all that is built true
is built in the garden of loss.

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM *FIRELINES*

Jill Metcoff

Jill's art is where she lives. Each of her books—*Along the Wisconsin Riverway* (1997) and *Firelines* (2017)—distills decades of observant artistic practice. At her website, <https://jillmetcoff.com/>, she describes more than a process:

Feelings about Place center me as photographer, family member and landowner. Place is a geography of rock, river, field and woods. Place has a history, natural as well as human. Place is a home, be it homestead, henhouse, town, nest, den or cave. Place is renewal. It is history and hope for those who dwell there.

My film cameras have been focused on southwestern rural Wisconsin and rural Illinois for more than forty years. At first, my observations included the woods, river and prairies outside my door; then the closing and division of almost 10,000 acres and more than a thousand structures of the nearby Badger Army Ammunition Plant; even the ravages wrought by highway projects. All of these describe this place.

"Place" in this same region expanded photographically to include moments when people and nature intersected, as seen in my portfolios of controlled fire in prairie and woodland, and sandhill cranes.

The archival silver gelatin prints shown here—shot on film with the unusual negative size of 6 x 17 cm. and handprinted by Jill in a wet darkroom—are all from *Firelines*.

Now engaged in a creative collaboration with four other artists, she's exploring biological cycles and seasonal events on the Driftless, the stretch of prairie that escaped ice age glaciation (or drift) and still survives, a fragile "biodiversity hotspot."



Saving the Fence



Fire Run



Three Oaks Endure



Waiting

BARN MUSINGS
AN ODE TO SAM

Susan Hall Mygatt

Most of the stuff is gone now,
Four dump trucks full—
The girls' old school papers and kindergarten pottery projects,
Old wire fencing, rusty and bent,
Scraps of wood you might possibly have used some day.

Some items escaped the purge—
An old dial telephone with an external bell,
A dirt encrusted bottle of harness dressing,
Horseshoes, a small two-handled saw and a broken plow shaft,
A yellowed Valvoline calendar pinned askew on the wall—
April 1948.

But you are still here—
Beams you sistered, new wood against old,
Hardwoods you might have turned into tables and stools,
Skil saw and yard machines, some tame enough for me to use,
Stairs you built to the loft,
Held in place, counterbalanced with gym weights
 which clatter into lopsided metal trash cans
 when the stairs rise from the barn floor.

Not everything is old.
Fresh bat guano dots the floor, like rice thrown out for threshing,
Just dead bugs, digested, eliminated,
 fertilizer for the garden.

You are gone— but you are here.
 This was your space.

CONTRIBUTORS

Jen Jabaily Blackburn's most recent work is forthcoming/has appeared in *SIR*, *Arkansas International*, *Palette Poetry*, *Salamander*, *Fugue*, *Banshee*, *On the Seawall* and *Couplet Poetry*, and her work has twice been included in *Best New Poets*. Her first book of poems, *Girl in a Bear Suit*, is the winner of the 2023 Elixir Press Annual Poetry Prize, forthcoming in 2024. She lives in Western Massachusetts with her family, where she is Program & Outreach coordinator for the Boutelle-Day Poetry Center at Smith College.

A prize-winning poet, **Susie Allen Patlove** is the author of the chapbook *Quickening* (2007). Her poems have been featured in *Crossing Paths: An Anthology of Poems by Women* (2002); on Garrison Keillor's *The Writer's Almanac*; and in former US Poet Laureate Ted Kooser's syndicated newspaper column, *American Life in Poetry*.

After 20 years of teaching AP English and British Lit, and serving as a consultant for the College Board, **Jane Baker Holt** reinvented herself as a travel photographer and writer.

Susan Bangs Munro is an avid reader, traveler, volunteer, and poet. She was a book editor for 30 years and a consultant to non-profit organizations in her second career.

Gesine Brueckmann Pohl reports from Europe.

Marcia Carroll Peterson has been a lifelong educator, worked for several non-profits, Smith, and in the political sphere. Her mountaintop experiences include teaching in prison, time with her grandchildren and deepening friendships in our class.

After graduate studies in comparative religion and jobs in everything from waitressing to youth theater, **Jill Daubenspeck Zifkin** found teaching, the career that called for all the intelligence, empathy, creativity, humor, organization, spontaneity, and relationship-building she thought about in Dr. Derr's ethics class. Glim-

mering takeaway from her retirement walks: We need all the hope we can muster, Buster.

Mary Stewart Douglas has been a teacher, editor, journalist and, for most of her career, an environmental lawyer specializing in the Clean Air Act. In retirement, she volunteers for the League of Women Voters and the Sierra Club, reads, paints, hikes, and shuttles back and forth between her condo in Washington DC and her home in Lewes, Delaware.

Gale Eaton was on the editorial board of the *Grécourt Review* in the 1960s. Since then she has written puppet plays, syllabi, accreditation reports, mission statements, departmental websites, letters of recommendation, class notes for the SAQ, four books, an unpublished novel, poems, and annual holiday letters.

Judith Ferster is a retired English professor, self-described science groupie, and lifelong political activist. Her first book of poems, *Songs of the Ovenbird*, was published in 2022; her three poems in this issue have also appeared in e-journal *Literary Yard*.

Amy Finley Scott has maintained an art studio in NYC since 1970. Current materials in use: various drawing tools, water base paints on paper, oil base paints on paper or canvas or wood. This last: 1/4-inch 5-ply birch plywood, for one of a kind jigsaw puzzles which she cuts using a scroll saw. Also since 1970, she continues to work in residential architectural design, re-shaping NYC apartment spaces (often small) for optimal function and flow.

In Germany essentially since Junior Year Abroad, **Deanna Gaunce Nebert** taught English and history in a private boarding school. In addition, she worked with a team writing history textbooks in English. Her days now are filled with swimming, playing the flute, and practicing bar piano.

After earning her MS in social work, **Denise Germain Rabinowitz** worked with children in foster care and maximum security prison inmates. She then went on to earn her JD and worked as a trusts

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and estates attorney, first in law firms and then in banks; 9/11/2001 caught her at JPMorgan Chase Bank. Shortly after retiring in 2017, she joined the board of directors of Visions, a not-for-profit serving blind and visually impaired adults and children, where she also volunteers.

Linda Guess Farris wrote throughout her careers – tour brochures, TV listings, press releases, newsletters, client communications and feature articles in the *SF Chronicle*. And for fun, she’s officiated eight weddings and six memorial services, and emceed dozens of events, including four appearances as Dame Edna. Her books include *Television Careers: A Guide to Breaking and Entering* and her memoir, entitled *My Life is Based on a True Story, as near as I can remember*.

Susan Hall Mygatt is a retired lawyer. She began to write verse when her husband was first diagnosed with cancer, and found she enjoyed putting in words the experiences of living in the moment and expressing the sadness and tenderness of daily activities that would not last forever. Most of what she wrote is too private to share with her daughters and friends. Now 14 years after her husband’s death, her muse is silent.

Paula Hendricks writes, takes photos, designs books. She also manages an apartment building in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco.

Ellen Kierr Stein. As an art history major at Smith, Ellen’s interest in the visual arts began in an academic setting. Professors were her heroes; museums were her landmarks; artists were her celebrities. But it wasn’t until 40 years later that Ellen took her first class in studio art. As her interest in the visual arts grew, she focused on volunteer work within the Atlanta arts community. In addition to organizing and installing numerous art exhibits, Ellen has also served as a judge for local art festivals. She has been an active member of several art organizations, and has held board positions in the Artists Atelier, Atlanta Collage Society, Art Partners (High Museum), ArtsATL.com, and Oglethorpe University Museum of Art.

Maureen Kilfoyle. We found Maureen Kilfoyle's name on the masthead of the old *GR*, but she claimed she had nothing worth contributing to this revival. "At the time I was affiliated with the Review, I felt like a fraud." (As many of us can attest, we actually had an undiagnosed epidemic of impostor syndrome on campus at the time.) "I only was involved," she told us, "because my suite-mate, Andi Rosnick, asked me to join. The manuscripts piled up under my bed, and if an issue was ever published that year at all, it had nothing to do with my efforts. Also, apart from minutes for various organizations, I have had no literary output at all. Sad but true." But, we asked, haven't you found that writing minutes is an art form – and secretaries wield unsuspected power?

After many years busily seeing patients, writing hospital and clinic notes, mental status reports, and psycho-social evaluations, **Rosa Leader Smith** left all that behind and began to write poetry and memoir. Her work has appeared in several anthologies including *Take Care: Tales, Tips and Love from Women Caregivers*, edited by Elayne Clift, and *Telling Our Stories*, produced by Dartmouth Cancer Center's Complementary Care Program.

Katherine Martin's life is a tapestry woven of teaching, motherhood, service, and art. Dark threads give it depth, colorful ones make it vibrant, and gold shines through all of it. As Julian of Norwich said, "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well."

Holly Menino, editor of the April 1969 issue of *Grécourt Review*, has always been a writer. She's done proofreading, copyediting, and book acquisitions; she's written radio scripts. She's worked in scholarly publishing, in radio syndication, and in public relations. And she's published six books of her own, both fiction and nonfiction, all featuring animals. For more information, see her website: hollymeninobooks.com.

Mandy Merck was a member of the *Grécourt Review* editorial staff in the 1960s. She is Emerita Professor of Media Arts at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her last book was *Cinema's Melodramatic*

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Celebrity: Film, Fame and Personal Worth. Her next is *Downsizing: Film and the Miniature*. "Davy Crockett" was first published in the Historic Passions series of *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 40, Issue 1 (Autumn 1995): pages 184–189, and is reprinted here by permission of Oxford University Press.

Jean Merrill is a retired neuroscientist and immunologist, whose 35-year professional life at UCLA School of Medicine and in the pharmaceutical world was focused on investigating the cause of and treatment for Multiple Sclerosis. In her retirement, she has turned her writing from scientific papers to publishing an ABC book on wild animals as a collaborative effort with her husband Doug Munch and *National Geographic* primatologist, author and illustrator David Bygott. The book, entitled *The Wild Life of Limericks*, is a fun read for the entire family. Her love of photography has become a serious endeavor in retirement with a special emphasis on environmental portraits of women from around the world. She has had a number of exhibitions of her work at galleries in New York City, Durango, Colorado, and more recently in Vienna, Austria. Examples of her portfolio can be viewed at www.jeanmerrill.smugmug.com.

For more than fifty years, **Jill Metcoff** has photographed the rural landscape, the places and people connected with it. Her widely exhibited work freeze frames the processes of change. Her current project, *Driftless Prairie Visions*, explores twenty years of bloom times and other data from ten acres of reconstructed prairie above the Wisconsin River. She and husband Jeff Jahns have homes in Chicago and Spring Green, Wisconsin; the youngest of their three daughters is a Smith graduate.

Jan Piper Kornbluth has been dabbling with writing since she wrote and published the *Grand Lake Times* with her cousins in northern Maine at a family summer camp ("cottage" if you're not from here). She was an English teacher for 20 years and earned her MA from the Breadloaf School of English. As part of their program, she wrote short stories and a play, in addition to studying literature. She has published several poems and a story. She writes poetry as part of a group of brilliant female writers on Monhegan Island

where she lives for half the year, but her first love is fiction. She has been trying to complete a novel to her own satisfaction for longer than she cares to remember, but things keep getting in the way; in life, in her head, in her book. Maybe before she dies...?

In retirement, **Marcia Schenk Steckler** has been actively engaged on behalf of numerous nonprofits, has continued to ski, play ice hockey, and row – and has discovered oil painting. Her first solo exhibit was scheduled in 2019, in time for our 50th reunion. She and Philip relocated from Vermont to Newmarket, NH, in 2021. They have three children and seven grandchildren.

Mary Seibert Goldschmid has no literary accomplishments worth mentioning, although she did write some compelling notes to teachers when her three sons failed to turn in their homework on time. (Written by MSG prior to her death in January 2024.)

Lynn Slaughter is addicted to the arts, chocolate, and her husband's cooking. After a long career as a professional dancer and dance educator, Lynn returned to school to earn an MFA in Writing Popular Fiction from Seton Hill University. She's been writing ever since and is the award-winning author of five published novels. When she's not writing or reading, Lynn loves creating original music with her husband and singing with a community choir, as well as serving as a volunteer comprehensive sexuality educator. She is the ridiculously proud mother of two grown sons and besotted grandmother of five.

A second-wave feminist with a Ph.D. (Dortmund University, 1996), **Christine von Prümmer** has fought for abortion rights; co-founded and helped run a refuge for battered women; and conducted ground-breaking research on how working-class women could empower themselves through distance education. As Senior Researcher and Head of the Evaluation Unit at the German Fern-Universität she advanced feminist causes through international networking and scholarly collaborations, and in retirement she continues to nourish international friendships with colleagues – and fellow Smithies.

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Mary Ann Welch Ericson has had a life rich in family, travel, and meaningful work. Dean Russell's unexpected invitation launched her on a 42-year career in academic administration, from a Columbia University MA to eighteen years as registrar at Saint Anselm College in New Hampshire.

Margaret Wittigschlager Nareff is a retired nonprofit executive and education administrator, whose volunteer work is a lifelong undertaking extending well beyond her beloved Smith. She and her husband Jonathan met before she arrived on campus and married in Helen Hills Hills Chapel three hours after graduation. They have traveled to five continents and lived in many places as well, surviving parenthood (so far) of three children, two children-in-law, and two grandchildren.

Margaret Dennis (Peggy Woodbridge) spent three summers in Mexico, two with the Amherst Amigos, then got her MA in Latin American Studies from UCLA. She married Robert Dennis, an Oxford educated economist, and joined the U.S. Foreign Service as an administrative officer. She served ten years including tours in Mexico City and London then resigned to become a full time mother. She designed (no, she had no training as an architect) her post and beam home in Potomac, MD, and in 1990 became one of the earliest residential adopters of an earth-coupled heat pump. Then life became more interesting, taking on land use battles and becoming first a civic then a political activist. She served for three terms as president of the Montgomery County (MD) Civic Federation. The novel she has just finished is yet another "big and novel challenge." Her life has been filled with interesting changes.

Pearl Yau Toy, physician and musician, has always balanced professional achievement and art. In retirement she's found rich new ways to lift the spirits of others. She's the one who told us about Lamorinda Village and the Helpful Village Movement—an inspiring way to embrace our futures. (Is there a [Village](#) near you?) So we urged her to share her insights in this essay.