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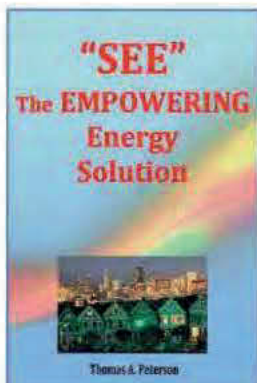
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BOOK LOOK

Back in April 2010, we ran a special Earth Day Issue where we featured an article by visionary environmental home builder, Tom Peterson. Now, his money and energy saving strategies are published in his book *SEE: the EMPOWERING Energy Solution*. In this edition of Book Look, we asked Tom some basic questions about SEE and how people can benefit from it.

What is your background that makes you an expert in this field?

I have been designing and building evolving Passive Solar and SEE (Super Energy Efficient) homes and buildings since 1979—33 years. Over that time period, I evaluated and tried several different methods to achieve ever higher levels of energy efficiency. I also researched ways to reduce labor and other costs necessary to construct SEE buildings.



What exactly is SEE?

I came up with the word SEE in 2006 to describe two passive solar super energy efficient homes that I was building and marketing. To qualify for the Federal ENERGY STAR HOUSING Program, they were required to undergo a HERS (Home Energy Rating System) analysis. This is when I found out that the homes I was typically designing and building were "Five Star" Energy Star homes (the highest rating). Those two particular homes were projected to use 74% less energy for heating and cooling than if they were built to NBC (National Building Code) insulation standards. As I had already planned on making some energy saving improvements for future projects, I felt that simplifying the SEE standard to use "at least 75% less energy" than an identical NBC home was an easily achievable goal.

Upon further evaluation of the two homes' energy usage, I realized that energy cost savings would easily cover the added financial costs of building new homes to SEE standards. The cost of ownership (mortgage + energy costs) for a more expensive SEE home is less than that for a less expensive NBC home. That was when I realized that EVERY new home or building being built should be built to SEE standards.

I then also took a look at existing housing and realized that the energy saving building techniques that I was using for new construction could easily be adapted to most existing homes and buildings. In addition, the energy cost savings for most would usually be enough to cover the financing costs of doing the SEE conversion. Rising energy costs will make the potential savings ever greater in the future.

Upon further review of the benefits of SEE, it was also obvious to me that our environment, our economy (both short & long term), our geo-political situation, and the comfort levels of our homes & business would also be greatly benefited.

Promoting SEE then became a movement that I felt compelled to lead. The culmination of that leading, to this point in time, has been the writing of the book, *"SEE" The EMPOWERING Energy Solution*. This book briefly, but compellingly explains why we need to convert our existing homes and build our new homes to SEE standards.

Who should read your book and why is it important that they do so?

Literally every adult or near adult should read this book, for one simple reason—SEE is at the least a partial answer to many of the problems that we as citizens and our governments currently face and we all need to be informed.

SEE addresses:

- ▲ high and ever increasing energy costs,
- ▲ our ability to save money now & in the future,
- ▲ the creation of well-paying jobs,
- ▲ both short & long term economic stability,
- ▲ world geo-political issues,
- ▲ and, perhaps most importantly, environmental issues.

The book lists in detail how average citizens, construction workers, building materials suppliers, building material manufacturers, the transportation industry, bankers, realtors, politicians, governments, and environmentalists would all greatly benefit.

I wrote the book in a simple and brief manner to facilitate the most people's reading and understanding what SEE could do.

Thomas A. Peterson grew up in Plymouth, Mass. He graduated from U. Mass., Dartmouth in 1971 with a BSBA in Business, then with an MBA in Marketing from Tulane University, New Orleans in 1973. He initially did marketing research at the corporate headquarters of Northeast retailers: Hannaford, Grossman's & Zayre. His work included economic and population demographic research as well as field research. Detailed written and oral presentations to top management followed.



Interest in solar energy began in 1975 after the first "energy crisis" of the 1970's. In 1979, after the second crisis, he left corporate work to begin designing and building solar and energy efficient homes in Southern Maine, first for himself, then others. He formed SD&C (Solar Design & Construction) and began building active & passive solar as well as increasingly energy efficient homes. His designs have always emphasized cost containment. Paralleling his construction career, he began teaching Marketing and Management courses at St. Joseph's College in Windham, then at the University of Southern Maine. As a professor, he honed his oral presentation skills. He also developed Marketing Export Seminars for Canadian Federal and Provincial Governments for experienced businesses in the Provinces of New Brunswick & Nova Scotia. As his knowledge of solar and energy efficient housing grew, he wrote SD&C pamphlets and newspaper articles, and conducted seminars at home shows. To promote two SEE homes, he researched the cost of ownership for such homes as well as information on government and bank programs that were available. Once amassed, he was amazed at how compelling an argument could be made for building or converting every home to SEE standards. Initial energy savings usually could cover the cost of financing SEE standards in new or existing homes. He soon realized that no one had ever compiled these facts and written them down. Society was ignorant of the fact that a simple solution could help solve many of its problems. SEE can pay for itself, save people money, create countless jobs, assure a vibrant economy, significantly cut pollution, reduce foreign energy dependence, and make homes more comfortable.

Given our environmental and economic problems, he feels what he has learned about SEE needs to become public knowledge. Economic vitality could be assured, and hundreds of thousands of jobs could be created immediately with more to follow. That is why he wrote this book.

To learn more go to: <http://seeglobalorg.ning.com/>
This book is available on  amazon.com

FROM US TO YOU...

The white veil of winter has lifted to reveal the rosy cheeks and peach complexion of springtime. This issue we add a garland of fresh literary sprouts with flowery poetry, lush fiction, environmental articles, photography and artwork in honor of Mother Earth and down-to-earth mothers and grandmothers for Mother's Day. Once again, we cultivate the works of talented writers and artists and present their growing aspirations to you.

To do this, we continually need your continued support in purchasing of our magazine in print, PDF download, or Kindle™ and in passing the good word for others to do the same.

If you have a story, poem, photography, or artwork to contribute, please submit it to: ideagems@aol.com.

As always, thanks for reading!

-- Laurie Notch, Managing Editor

This issue continues our 7th year in publication! IdeaGems continues to be a stepping stone for writers on the arduous climb up the steep path to publication. It has been our honor and privilege to be the first opportunity for many writers to get their start as well as to help promote the books of up-and-coming writers.

Although we are but a small piece in the publishing puzzle, we have contributed to the careers of dozens of writers to date. We're always looking for stories, articles, poetry, and artwork for upcoming issues. So send us your submissions now and get published very soon! (For guidelines, go to www.ideagems.com.)

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THE FIRST TIME

by Rosalie H. Contino, PhD

Each of us has a memory of the “first” of something, whether it’s a kiss, a job, a first marriage, a first divorce, etc. What if it was the experience of a lifetime of being the first time to take part in a “wake” at a Jewish gravesite? Well, truth be told, Jewish people don’t actually hold wakes in any way, shape, or form. As a Catholic, I was used to going to a funeral home first and then the burial plot on the last day. But this would be my first Jewish burial.

From the beginning, it was a long hard month from the nursing home back to the hospital for Mrs. P, my good friend, Anna Sue’s mom. She was dehydrated, and her system was infected. Anna Sue was devastated. Who would have thought this was the end if the line for Mrs. P? The nursing home was very well-known and had a very good reputation. I had just reached the hospital as Anna Sue’s daughter and Mrs. P’s granddaughter, Elise, was holding her Nana’s hand and saying, “Open your mouth, Nana, and I’ll feed you. Okay?”

Mrs. P opened her eyes slightly, nodded and smiled. She held Elise’s hand tightly.

“Hi, Mrs. P!” I yelled. “It’s me, your other child.” She smiled as I touched her hand, and she gripped mine. No matter what, she always showed her winning smile.

Anna Sue motioned for me to come outside. Yvette, Mrs. P’s aide, said hello as she came back from a lunch break. Anna Sue started to cry in the hallway.

Anna Sue murmured, “Thank God, the stomach tube was installed in her system. She’ll be fed again. I’m having a hospice set up for her here, and if she gets better, she’ll have it at home. I want to make my mom’s last days as comfortable as possible.”

“Of course, that is wonderful. What else can you do?”

“I called you-know-who, my self-important sister, and she refuses to answer the phone.”

“What about the rabbi?”

“He was here. What a wonderful man. Want to eat out?”

“Of course. Let your daughter finish feeding your mom and then we can all go out, okay? First things first. Know what I mean?”

My dear friend gave me a gentle, affectionate bop on the head, which I had gotten used to over the years.

What seemed like an eternity wasn’t. We arrived at a nearby diner, were seated, and ordered a late lunch. Anna Sue ordered her usual spinach pie. Elise, her daughter, had a bacon-beef burger, and I had bagels, cream cheese and lox, and lots of coffee. Anna Sue was in hysterics. It was so hard to believe how we had all hoped for the best and everything got worse. Tears streamed down her face as we ate or tried to at least.

“Mom, don’t worry. Everything is going to be all right,” Elise said, “Nana’s is in good hands now.”

“She’s right. It’s all in God’s hands,” Anna Sue repeated sadly.

“My idiot health-proxy person doesn’t understand that Mom’s time is running out. She has to come!”

“I don’t know what to say. I’m so sorry,” I commented.

We finished our meal, and I drove Anna Sue to the BMT station to get the train to the LIRR in the City.

Two days later, the phone rang at 9:30 AM.

“We’re sitting here Starbucks having a wonderful breakfast of coffee, juice, and some Starbucks specialties.”

“You’re in Brooklyn again? Why?”

“The doctor wants to talk to me, and the rabbi is coming to pray for my mother.”

“Oh, okay.” I knew what I was thinking but didn’t say anything more. “Call me when you meet with them.”

“Will do.”

Hours later when the phone rang again, I knew it was Anna Sue.

“So,” I said, “what’s the story?”

“They removed the tube from my mother. Her system is breaking down.”

“I am so sorry. Is that why the rabbi was there?”

“No, I wanted him to say some prayers with my mother and to check if it was okay to do the procedure... you know... Jewish law. Mom was elated. She opened her eyes and smiled as he spoke.”

“For the Jewish law or the prayers?” I asked.

“Don’t be a wise ass.”

“Wise ass? Me? Never!” I knew that the tears must have been flowing down her cheeks as they were down mine.

“Forget it. It’s nothing. Russell is calling her today again. Let’s hope she picks up the damn phone.”

“Okay, I’ll pick you up again. How much time did the doctor say your mother has?”

“It depends. Could be a week or two. That’s it.”

I dropped Elise and Anna Sue at the BMT station in Sunset Park and drove over to the Alpine Movie Theater in Bay Ridge to cheer myself up. I purchased a ticket for *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, thinking it was a fairy tale. Why I thought that I do not know, but I did. I sat there dumbfounded and mesmerized by the sex, violence, and crazy personalities in this movie. To top it off, it was a long movie. When I came home, I waited until I figured Anna Sue and her daughter would be home. The phone rang. It was them.

“You’ll never believe what I saw to cheer myself up! *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. I thought it was a fairy tale!”

“You gotta be kidding?” She howled. “That movie, a fairy tale? Didn’t you see the ads? That’s a good one. Elise, listen to this.”

We all laughed because it was so funny to think this movie was a fairy tale.

“So what’s on the agenda tomorrow? Coming in?”

“Yes, Elise wants to see her Nana and feed her. We’ll go as long as she feels she can.”

“I can’t make it tomorrow or the next day but call me from the hospital.”

“Okay and thanks.”

Three days later the phone rang.

“We didn’t go yesterday as I had to take a break. It’s all over. The ‘Golden One’ showed up yesterday afternoon. Yvette said she held Mom’s hand, and Mom gripped her hand like she did with each of us. She made it just in time. Mom died early this morning.”

“I am so sorry. We knew that was going to happen, right?”

“I know. At least she’s at peace.”

“What are you going to do about funeral arrangements? A funeral parlor? Are you going to sit shiva?”

“I’m following Mom’s wishes—a gravesite ceremony. No shiva.”

“Need my help?”

“Pick us up at 11:00 AM in front of my mom’s house on Sunday, okay?”

“Sure. Will be there.”

“The others will be coming from the city. Let’s face it, Mom led a useful and a productive life. She was 96, and there are not that many people around, or if they are, they are now living in Florida or Baltimore.”

“Sure. And lucky to have lived that long.”

I picked up Anna Sue at her mom’s house. She and Elise and Mrs. P’s aide Yvette, and her daughter Eva, greeted me with tears in their eyes. Russell came flying over to the car.

“Hey! You were supposed to save a spot for me. Move over.”

“Forget it. She’ll get a ticket. There are too many in the car,” an unfamiliar voice spoke. “We’ll take my car.”

“This is Joel, the next door neighbor,” said Russell.

"Pleased to meet you," Joel said to us. "Are you going to follow us, or do you know how to get there?"

"To Staten Island and shopping on Richmond Avenue—yes, but to the cemetery—no. How do we get there?" I asked.

"Take the Verrazano Bridge to Staten Island, get off at Victory Boulevard, make a left to Richmond Avenue, make a left at Richmond for three lights. It's right there. You can't miss it."

"Fine," I said, and off we went. There was hardly any traffic through Brooklyn and onto the Verrazano Bridge. We cruised to Victory Boulevard, took a left to Richmond Avenue, and made a left after three lights to the cemetery. We had plenty of time. We drove up and down Richmond Avenue several times. No matter whom we asked, no one knew where this cemetery was or had even heard of it.

"Mom, see, here is where it is," Elise called from the back seat. She showed us on her Blackberry.

"Yes, but we're still out of the loop," Anna Sue said and called the cemetery on her phone.

We still had the wrong directions. The phone rang. It was Jolene, Anna Sue's longtime friend.

"We can't find the cemetery. Are you guys there yet? We're not!" I could hear her yelling. "The GPS had the wrong cemetery listed."

"Call the cemetery office again," I yelled. "That's what we're doing."

The phone rang again.

"We have to. No time to talk. Get the directions first."

"It's the rabbi," she whispered. "Yes, yes, thank you," said Anna Sue and hung up. "He's so sweet."

"Did you ask him how to get to this mystical cemetery?"

We drove up and down Richmond Avenue once more. I drove to Florida from New York City once, and believe me, it took less time than finding this cemetery in Staten Island! I opened the car window and looked up in the sky.

"What are you doing? What are you looking for?" asked Anna Sue.

"Remember that Woody Allen movie when his mother was in the clouds? I'm looking for your mother to steer us right. Capice?"

Everyone in the car howled. It was a pause that refreshed. We needed that.

"Is my Nana there?" asked Elise.

"No," I sighed and closed the window. "I think she wants us to find it on our own."

Anna Sue called the cemetery office once more.

"At Victory Boulevard and Richmond Avenue, make a right on Richmond, go five lights. You can't miss it. You'll see a flagpole on the left." She repeated it twice as I drove back to where we started.

Okay, it wasn't five lights. It was more like seven or eight, but we arrived. I was glad we started early knowing my track record for getting lost two minutes from where we were supposed to be. We had finally reached the BB Jewish Cemetery. Russell was already there with Joel. How did he manage that? He had given us the directions then beat us here. Anna Sue's sister, cousins, and friends from the city were in the van in front of us. Anna Sue's friend, Jolene, was still a no-show. When she called, and forgetting that the GPS listed the wrong cemetery, I couldn't figure out why she was coming from the opposite side of the expressway.

We were given the okay to follow the hearse. So we went down one lane, turned, then followed the circle only to drive into lots of water. It had rained a few days before, and it didn't dry up.

"An interesting experience to say the least," I said, hoping not to sink in this rather cavernous hole. Anna Sue held her breath. "So.... What do you know about this place? Do you remember being here? Does it look familiar? Tell me the truth, does it look familiar?"

"Of course. My dad is buried here."

"Good girl. Just checking in case we land in the water hole and have to be rescued. You know if I have to call AAA, you have to know where we are."

We reached the plot where we were to be, got out of our cars, and walked up the small incline. As we neared the open grave, we could see that the dirt was a very, very wet red clay which we had to walk straight into. The pallbearers were lowering the simple, pine coffin into the gravesite. I held my breath hoping they didn't drop Mrs. P. Jewish people do funerals plain and simple: no flowers, no-frills coffin. Jews believe the sooner the body decays and turns into dust, the sooner the soul can ascend to heaven. We Italian-Americans, we go all out. When we went to get a coffin for my uncle, the funeral director wanted to know if we wanted a soft, tufted padding for the coffin to keep him, the deceased, as comfortable as possible. We just looked at him. "Dead is dead. Enough already." I tried to erase that conversation from my mind, but the idea of "dead is dead" rang true even here. If they dropped her, she wouldn't feel a thing. Just the family would gasp in shock and cry, "Why us? What does it mean?"

The rabbi spoke eloquently about Anna Sue's mom. We all knew was one in a million—a teacher, accountant, a fund raiser for Hadassah and UJA, a parent, a grandmother and comforter. I should know because she was there when my dad and brother were sick. What more could a friend ask for? When allowed, we each added to what the rabbi had said about her character and contributions to society.

The time came to take our turns shoveling dirt into the grave. Jolene and her boyfriend had showed up late. They were livid about getting lost but at least made it just in time to hear the rabbi. Anna Sue greatly appreciated that they were able to reach the service—late or not.

Anna Sue is pretty strong but not for shoveling. Both she and her daughter had difficulty because the ground was solid, wet red clay. She managed to get one shovelful into the grave. It was time for me to take my turn. I handed my cane to Anna Sue, took the shovel and couldn't believe I was lucky to grab an ounce of dirt. The pall bearer looked at me and motioned that that one ounce was okay. I handed him the shovel. I stepped back as visions of falling in the hole ran rampant in my mind. I could envision a scene in a Woody Allen spectacle if I fell in. "What do you think it means? And she's not even Jewish?" All was well. Woody Allen's images disappeared from my mind again.

We said our goodbyes and walked back to our cars. I really did not want anyone to go in my car with red clay feet since the car was only a year old. Green Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn has a water spout where you could get some water to bring over to the gravesites to water the flowers. If this cemetery had a spigot, we didn't see it. Joel gave me an old shower curtain that fitted across the floor of the car. I had a water bottle but Anna Sue didn't realize that it had a wide mouth not a little spout. The water spilled quickly and didn't help any of us. There was not too much grass where we could clean our shoes. This was beginning to be more dramatic than our ordeal of getting to the cemetery. Who wants to drive out with tires of red clay and passengers disembarking in clay soles? More comedy than tragedy—if nothing else, worse for those wearing open toes shoes.

Before leaving the cemetery, Jolene complained to the office staff that the wrong cemetery was listed in the GPS. We, on the other hand, stopped in the ladies' room and asked Elise to clean our shoes. God bless kids for being the most helpful when you least suspect them to be.

Finally we were on our way to the Israeli restaurant in King Highway. As Russell was orthodox, we had to eat in a Kosher restaurant. When we got out of the car, Elise looked up.

"What are you looking for, Elise?" asked Anna Sue.

"I thought maybe Nana was watching us go into the restaurant."
"She's hanging out and listening to you with your Woody Allen comments."

"Stop complaining. She was the only one who sees my brother all the time or dreams about him, right?"

"Yup, and he's always happy."

We all laughed and cried as we crossed the street and walked into the restaurant. Thank heavens for more comic relief. The restaurant was called Silvers and had a parrot greeting you as you entered. Fortunately, it stayed in the tree. Thank God for small favors. Coconut trees, of all things, stood throughout the dining area. It was a very charming place, to say the least, and the best way to end a sad occasion.

My motto has always been that food is the healer at the end of a sad event. This wonderful Israeli restaurant was located on Kings Highway in Brooklyn. The salads and Italian specialties hit the spot. It gave all of us time to enjoy and reflect on the wonderful life and contribution of Anna Sue's mom.

For me the experience has been to be part of a family that I have considered to be my own as I celebrated most of the Jewish holidays with them for years. A few days later, I called Anna Sue, to check in.

"My daughter is a riot."

"Why?"

"Every morning she goes outside earlier to wait for the school bus."

"Why?"

"Why do you think?"

"I have no clue."

"She's looking up to see if she can see her Nana."

"You're kidding."

"No, she claims she see her image and that she's smiling."

"Are you putting me on?"

"Of course. I thought you'd get a kick out of it."

"You're a riot. I'm sure you did."

I know she's watching over her favorite granddaughter who made her life more fulfilled. For me, it was an unusual experience to be part of a gravesite 'wake' that had me wondering if I was going to leave as I drove in one piece or be "clayed" over.

You know it's amazing what experiences you live through as you get older. When I was a kid, I only knew Italian-Americans who were Catholic. Yet my mother would quote from her Jewish friends, "When you're lucky, you pay it back by doing a mitzvah."

I've been very lucky in life and I feel I was indeed doing a mitzvah by being part of a Mrs. P's Jewish funeral enclave. My, how one's experiences do lead to others in life! ☺

CONEY ISLAND 2012

by Rosalie H. Contino, PhD

I remember when Coney Island was my backyard....

I remember when Coney Island was my backyard from the time I was a child until I was in my twenties. My parents took my brother and me there the very minute we were old enough to go to the beach.

I remember when my dad taught us how to swim. Mom was a good swimmer. Dad wasn't but he made sure we did. We swam out while he walked as far as he could. We swam back; he walked back.

I remember going to the beach with my friend Marie and her family. Those meatball heroes we ate were so good!

I remember when my dad took my friend Marie, my brother Bob, and me on the bus to the beach. On the way home we had Cracker Jacks. I still remember the smell and how we giggled at the surprise inside.

I remember as teenagers when we swam in Bay 15 (one of several roped-off swimming areas) because Italian-Americans swam there where my mom always said we should be.

I remember one time we walked over to Bay 14 just to see who was there. There were guys and girls but not like us.

I remember the girls were tough-looking and had tattoos from their knees down of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Strange, very strange...

I remember not telling my mother about Bay 14 (another roped-off area), because she would not let me go to the beach with my friends, but I felt I was very grown up and could handle myself. Mother did not.

I remember taking pictures with my friends. We all acted and posed like the Queen of Sheba. I wonder whatever happened to those girls from high school.

I remember slathering ourselves with baby oil and suntan lotion to see who would have the best tan for the summer.

I remember our parents telling us not to sun too much as we would get blisters all over us and possibly permanent scars.

I remember all of us racing to the water to see who could jump the highest and not fall when the waves were high and rough.

I remember swimming all the way out to the buoy to prove that I was just as great a swimmer as the guys and also to get to date the best swimmer.

I remember the first rollercoaster ride I ever took and the last I ever took because I was petrified that I would fall out and get killed.

I fondly remember going on the bumper-cars where my friends and I would zip around to see how many times we could crash into each other. The more we bumped, the merrier we were. It was always a time to yell, "Hooray!" or "Gotcha!" and not be considered loud or rowdy.

I remember the nuns always reminding us, "You are ladies. Don't call attention to yourselves." But the rides at Coney Island were the exception to the "lady" rule. Besides, how would they know?

I remember the ride on the merry-go-round. If we reached out and caught the brass ring, we got a free ride. But I never caught the ring because I was only five feet tall. Most of my friends were luckier... and taller, of course.

I remember when the father of my high-school friend Ann gave us passes to the Steeple Chase Amusement Park. That was the best. We went down the steep slide and were scared to death that we would land on our faces.

I remember when we reached the bottom of the slide. We got up quickly and ran for our lives because the "evil" man with the switch would chase us around. We could hear that snapping switch. We ran out screaming. The crowd was in awe, cheering us, laughing at our screaming... the louder the better!

I remember those wonderful horses there on tracks of steel going around and around as we hugged each other and hoped we wouldn't fall off. We didn't... nor did we ever go back.

I remember when I rode the parachute ride and reached the top. I turned around, saw my house miles away and dumbfounded, prayed that I would get down in one piece while swearing never more to ride it again.

I remember how often we went from the beach to good ol' Nathan's for a frankfurter, a hot juicy corn dog and French fries. I'll always remember the delicious smells. They're still the best.

I remember going to Coney Island in college not too many times as I was working in Macys or Gimbels or taking courses at Fordham or working in the vacation playground.

I remember that once I graduated from college and began teaching, I didn't go to Coney Island anymore.

I remember that I would go with my family and adult friends to the Hamptons, Bermuda, Puerto Rico, St. Thomas or Europe.

I remember thinking how we were "above" Coney Island because we felt it was for the unsophisticated.

I remember when we now talk about our childhood and youth, we're glad that we can always reminisce about those days. ☺



A RAINFOREST OF HERBS AND SPICES

by Gillian Scott

Blue skies, inviting waters and a coastline of white-sugar sand—this was Jamaica—a country of colliding scenery. The guidebook suggested tours that sounded both fun and interesting, and I, for one, wanted to see, do, and experience as much as possible. The botanical gardens were on my list of sight-seeing to do's. The guidebook had referred to it as a rainforest of palm, eucalyptus, banana and fruit trees set amid a legion of tropical flowers. It sounded wonderful, and I was excited to start exploring. This beautiful country, located in the West Indies, had been on my list of travel “to do's” for the longest time, and I was not disappointed by first impressions.

It was only 7:30 AM and the sun had not yet broken through the early morning haze that still lingered in the air. I was ready for the day's excursions with sunglasses, bathing suit and sunscreen. (I wasn't sure if we'd have time for the beach, but I wanted to be prepared.) Disembarkation was at 9:00 AM, and I had the entire day planned. Now all I had to do was wait for my mother and husband Richard to get their asses in gear!

It hadn't actually been a planned vacation, but the year had been pretty dismal for us all and we thought that this would be a great way to cheer us all up. I was determined that we should all have fun. We made our way down the gang plank. As we stepped onto the pier, we were greeted by a Jamaican steel band. My mother, who is English born and bred, was especially pleased because the colorfully costumed men, having heard her speak, welcomed her “home,” which left her grinning from ear to ear. Jamaica, although no longer a British colony, was still a part of the Commonwealth, and as such, Queen Elizabeth II was still their figurehead. After Mum had enthusiastically shaken the hand of each member of the entire band, we hailed a taxi and set-off on our Jamaican adventure.

Our cab driver's name was Leroy, and he was somewhat of a Chatty Cathy. He was very personable and offered to be our guide for the day. Richard and Leroy haggled over price. Once resolved, our first stop was the glorious marketplace. The ship's cruise director had advised against going off the beaten path with strangers (including cab drivers), but we were eager to view as much as possible during our short stay. Leroy didn't have the look of a mass murderer, so we entrusted our lives to a complete stranger to show us the sights. Hindsight being a wonderful thing, that could have been a big mistake.

Leroy took us to some fabulous market stalls where we haggled in celebrated tradition. It was fascinating to wander around a centuries-old British colony that was steeped not only in history but also in the mysteriously exotic. The Humphrey Bogart movies of old did not do justice to this wondrous city, but then perhaps I was thinking of other exotic places such as Casablanca or Key Largo. No matter. I was finding the whole experience thrilling, especially the hullabaloo of the marketplace. We made some great purchases then headed back to the cab for the verdant Jamaican hills.

Driving up the steep, narrow, winding roads was definitely an experience. First off, everyone drives British-style, on the left side of the road. Second, the serpentine roads never appeared to end. Leroy, however, skillfully maneuvered every curve, bend and pothole (and there were many). I was beginning to believe that at any moment I would be drawing my last breath. We did finally reach the top safely, and there we witnessed a view that was indeed impressive—a horizon of sky and ocean that was, without doubt,

a veritable Kodak moment. Returning to the car we continued on to the gardens. If we thought the view from the cliff had been awe-inspiring, the gardens simply left us gasping.

We wandered meandering pathways in a rainforest of flowering, tropical trees that burgeoned with blooms about to explode. Bridges had been constructed over flowing streams framed by an array of exotic flowers in shades of orange, blue, and yellow. Plants the likes of which I had never before or since encountered appeared in shades of greens and reds. The air was literally awash with the mystical fragrances of nature. The stillness of such silence was inspirational until, further afield, the quiet was pleasantly broken by the sound of water cascading over multi-colored rocks as it entered a lily pond. It was utterly other-worldly, an oasis free from commotion or tumult—a peaceful, calm, and spiritual haven that allowed a time out from life, an invitation to sit and meditate.

Our tour guide was a Jamaican lady who introduced herself first as Jungle Judy and later as Fluffy. She was apparently happy for us to call her either. I never did quite get the connection between the two names and didn't like to ask. Jungle Judy (a.k.a. Fluffy) was extremely knowledgeable about everything that grew in the garden. She had a melodious, poetic voice as she pointed out various “substances of vegetable origin” (a.k.a. plants)—all manner of spices, herbs, and strange foliage alleged to possess aphrodisiac powers at which we all childishly smirked, which reduced Jungle Judy to juvenile giggles. She showed us different kinds of leaves that were still used by the natives for medicinal purposes. There were so many it was amazing. There were remedies for just about every ailment! Our guide with the curious names was an encyclopedia of botanical information and left us in no-doubt as to why the Jamaican Department of Agriculture had employed her.

When the tour concluded, we stopped off at the gift shop to purchase souvenirs, and there we again enjoyed practicing our bargaining powers. Jungle Judy suddenly became conspicuous by her absence. I went in search of her to offer thanks and a gratuity for providing us with such a lovely afternoon. I finally saw her sitting alone on a bench. Her bright, yellow uniform reminded me of sunshine, her face the anther in a sunflower. An arresting smile upon her face, she was looking up at the stately palm trees. She was completely still, as if in meditation. As the sun-light cast her in silhouette, she reminded me of a beautiful painting, a work of art captured on canvas. It was surreal. Then the sun disappeared behind the trees and the moment was gone, lost forever.

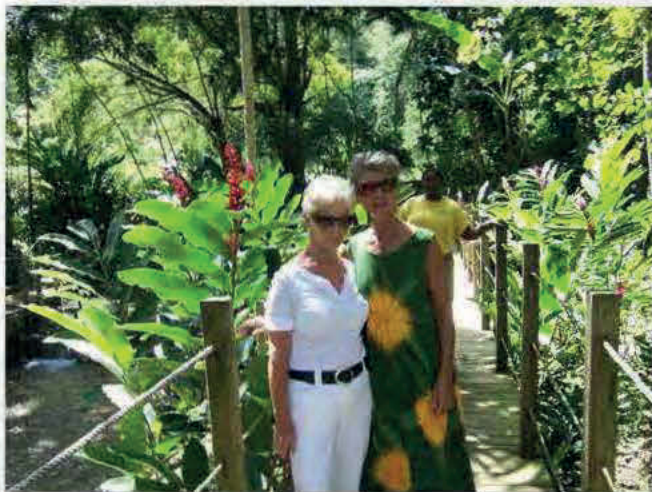
Sensing my presence, she looked up and I went and sat beside her. We started to chat and she told me about her job and her family. Suddenly, she grasped my hand and laughingly pulled me to my feet while saying she wanted me to experience something wonderful. She led me along a labyrinth of pathways that made me feel like I was caught up in some sort of massive Hampton Court maze with no hope of ever finding my way out. I would be forever condemned to the life of a garden gnome trapped among the never-ending trees and flowers! Shortly after my ridiculous epiphany, we reached our destination. There. I think I discovered what made Jungle Judy so carefree and lighthearted.

My botanical garden guide had suddenly leapt from the path and vanished into a cluster of foliage. I was a little disturbed by her behavior, as we were somewhat off the beaten path and I had no idea where she had gone. However, she soon emerged clutching a handful of leaves. *Oh*, I thought, *what now?* I began to doubt the wisdom of this so-called excursion, yet I was intrigued enough to want to stay. The leaves were herbal-smelling and not unpleasant. Jungle Judy crumpled them in her hands before inhaling their sweet aroma and encouraged me to follow suit. They certainly seemed to clear my sinuses. By the third inhalation, I was feeling great—actually more than great. I asked what type of leaf it was that

could induce such heart-felt happiness. Following a sizable sniff, I believe she mumbled the words, "eucalyptus" and "rare." Whatever this botanical jungle leaf truly was, all I knew was that I felt pretty good—so good that all thoughts of sightseeing had definitely dimmed upon discovery of this new-found herbal aroma therapy. I loved this magical place, this mystical Jamaican Garden of Eden, as it were. Hell, at this particular moment, I even loved Jungle Judy (a.k.a. Fluffy)! I had never considered gardens as much fun for they had always seemed like a lot of hard work. Quite unexpectedly, I now found myself re-considering. Jungle Judy (a.k.a., Fluffy) had unintentionally showed me the joys to be had by exploring nature. I wanted to change careers, and yes, I wanted to be a gardener!

Sunlight filtered through the upper branches of the towering trees, and I watched completely spellbound as the mist of nearly weightless particles danced their descent to the forest floor. Lounging on the blanket of soft green grass, I recalled the tale of Peter Pan by J.M. Barrie. My favorite character had been Tinker Bell, and watching the hundreds of tiny, dancing specks that swirled through the air reminded me of the animated cartoons of Walt Disney, especially the fairies and their magical dust. Such wonderful storybook tales of adventure and ingenuity, it was imagination run amok. I closed my eyes enjoying the last rays of warmth that trickled through the woods.

I'm not sure how long I remained in my state of bliss, laughing and giggling the time away with Jungle Judy, but too soon I looked up to see my husband and mother standing in front of us. By the looks on their faces, they were none too happy. They had been looking for me for some time and had even summoned Leroy to help in their fretful search. I felt just dreadful, for I had unwittingly set them on a only for them to find me in a state of herbally-induced euphoria. Obviously, I had a lot of explaining to do. But between you and me, I still giggle at the high flying memory. ☺



The author with her mother and Jungle Judy (a.k.a. Fluffy) in back at the Botanical Gardens.

BILOXI 1962 by Susan Chandel

metal blinds burn red
prefab houses in rows
shouting boys ride by.



EGGSTRAORDINARY STORY

by Claudia Aragon

Eggbert's shell was getting ever so tight, so much so, he could hardly move. He was not able to do his stretching games anymore or push his wings out to the side. The day was soon approaching when he would be able to come out and play with his brothers and sisters. He looked forward to that day with great anticipation.

He was eager to see what made all the wondrous noises he heard. Since he'd been in his shell, he'd heard music, voices and so many other sounds. Now he wanted to see what those sounds looked like.

Suddenly he felt buoyant, as though he was floating and his shell became gradually cooler. He began to feel uneasy, as he heard new sounds. The soft, easy sounds from before were replaced with loud, repetitive banging and screams of terror.

"Hurry up, Joe. I can't wait all day for those hens. They need to be cleaned and dressed so I can cut 'em up for fryin'."

"Keep your shorts on, Margie. I'm gettin' 'em over to Ruth as fast as I can. 'Sides, she can only dunk two at a time in the hot water, and the kids can't keep up with her as it is. We've already got six kids on pluckin'."

"I don't care. Just hurry it up. I have a schedule to meet for the missus. We have to get dinner done on time. All those wedding guests will be here, and you know as well as me, how much all the missus' friends complain about bein' hungry. Jenny, how you doin' on the cake and biscuits?"

"Real good, Margie. They just brought me in another bowlful of eggs."

Eggbert could no longer stand the noises without seeing what they were. He started pecking at his shell until he had a hole large enough to peek through. As he looked out, he saw the hens being held down one after another. Watching in terror as the hatchet came down, cutting off their heads, as the waiting hens screamed in fear.

Eggbert began to peck frantically. He needed to escape the confines of his shell so he could run away. The egg began to rock to and fro and then started rolling down the pile of eggs. It landed with a crash onto the table.

"What in tarnation was that?" screamed Margie.

"One of the eggs just rolled off the top of the bowl."

"Well, clean it up."

"There's not much to clean up. This egg had a chick in it."

"Then scoop him up and put him outside with all the other chicks and then get back to work."

Eggbert was gently cradled and carried outside. He was placed into the middle of a group of chicks.

"Hi. What's your name?"

"Eggbert"

"Come and play with us. We know a great place to catch worms and bugs."

As Eggbert left with his new friends, images of what he'd seen and heard still haunted him. ☺





CORN ISLAND

by Jungmin Shon

I went to Corn Island in the Caribbean Sea off the coast of Nicaragua. Want to see pictures there? Sadly, I can't show you any and I have reasons why...

It all began with my traveling from Mexico to Nicaragua. I skipped the tourist spots such as Cancun in Mexico and Utila Island in Honduras. When I saw pictures of the Caribbean, I was amazed by its beauty. So I felt I had to go to see the beautiful ocean in Nicaragua. I was told it would take two days to get to the "Jewel on the Water" unless I flew. I chose adventure over comfort and went by boat. I wanted to see the panorama of the river on a boat on the way to the famous Corn Island.

When I arrived in Lima, Nicaragua, where the boat travel started, I found it odd that I couldn't find the schedule of boats going to Corn Island easily. Though the island was very well known, there wasn't any schedule posted where I could go and check it. A man I met in a hotel told me there was no a boat until the following day. But a friend staying on the island had told me there was a boat that very day. Another man sporting a gun inside his jacket insisted there was no boat. He saw I was surprised to see his gun and told me that he was a police officer. Yet how could I know he was the person he was claiming to be? I asked staff of the hotel about the schedule. They called somewhere and told me there was indeed a boat available that day. I was happy to hear the news as I didn't have to wait one more day in that place.

I had to find out where the boat terminal was. After having left the hotel, I asked a man where the boat was to go to the famous Corn Island. He indicated the way, so I followed. Then I saw a boat dock, but I couldn't see any sign of destination and time of departure. I asked people if this was the right place I needed to wait for a boat to Corn Island. They didn't seem to know where the island was. It was another surprise to find out that people didn't know where boats docked before going out to sea. Finding the elusive boat was becoming a mystery. Another person told me I had to go to another place to catch the boat. So I went there as I couldn't see any other options. There was another dock. A man working there told me it was not the right place. Pointing to a ticket booth, he told me I had to go there. When I made it to the ticket booth, a woman told me I had to walk further to take the boat. I seriously doubted if I could take the boat that day. I walked further along the road for another 2 kilometers or so. Then I saw a port, where the police recorded the ID number of every person who entered. After writing down my passport number, a police officer let me in. When I approached a boat, a man told me his boat had cancelled leaving to Corn Island as cargo in the boat had't been loaded yet. I didn't know the boat could be delayed because of lack of cargo. I had expected the boat would be for passengers only. Neither my guidebook nor travel websites told me about it. He told me there were other boats going to Bluefield, which was on the way to the Caribbean tourist attractions.

So I decided to take the boat for an area famous for its British pirates centuries ago. Workers were delivering things to the bottom of the boat. Like the first boat, it didn't have any seats for passengers. I saw a few hammocks hung here with several passengers in them. Like everyone else on board, I occupied a hammock for the two-day. When the cargo was loaded, the boat departed. I thought the real journey had finally started. But soon, the boat stopped. It was the very dock I had been to earlier. I was astonished by the appearance of so many people at the place where I had been. When I was here, people didn't even seem to know if a boat to Corn Island even existed. As soon as the boat stopped, a lot

of people jumped onto the boat, each with hammocks to hang on board. People came and hung hammocks in the blink of an eye. It was like the scene in a city at rush-hour where passengers run to greedily grab seats in a bus or subway. Soon my hammock was taken away as it was for the captain of the boat.

I wound up sitting on the deck of the boat, which was okay with me because I never slept on a bed in Korea (where I'm from) and preferred sleeping on the floor. In addition, the air was full of swinging hammocks so it was far better to sleep on the floor.

Later, a lifevest was given to me, which was another surprise. I didn't expect the rough-n-tumble crew of the small supply-delivery boat to take care of their passengers. As the only person who was on the floor, I started to prepare to sleep. It was very dark out. I decided to use the lifevest as my pillow and put my backpack around my head. I slept through the night. When the boat arrived in Bluefield at 4:00 AM, I woke up. People started getting off. I waited at the port until the dawn broke. When it got a little brighter, I ordered coffee at a street stand near the port. I was happy to get coffee that morning. When I opened my backpack to pay for the coffee, I couldn't see my small bag which included my camera and passport. I couldn't believe it. I checked the backpack again, yet I couldn't find the smaller bag. It was gone! While I was sleeping, someone must have taken it along with my camera (why I have no pictures to show with this story) and two computer flash drives. But he did leave behind my coin purse. And the really good news was whoever ransacked my pack couldn't find out where I had put my money.

Still, frustrated, I went to the police. I explained to a police officer what had happened. He called a man who could speak in English into the room. The man served as an interpreter for me and the police officer. I had thought he was perhaps another policeman, but he told me he was actually a prisoner incarcerated there for having killed a man, which was hard to believe. He seemed perfectly nice and civil to me. He told me how a man had tried to attack his mother one night, so the two men began fighting. In the end, the interpreter ended up killing other man man. I was surprised that he told me all this.

My report of the theft made to the local authorities, I once again set out, ever determined, on my quest. I took another boat to go to Corn Island. This time, the boat had passenger seats yet rode like a rollercoaster. Many people were vomiting due to or motion sickness. I was being bombarded with splashing water sitting on the outside and wanted to go inside where I had to put up with coldness from an air conditioner, which could not be turned off. I needed a lot of patience for almost seven hours in the boat. When the island appeared in my sight, I felt like I was saved from my ordeal. When we landed at Big Corn Island, people were so happy that they cheered. But I couldn't celebrate or get my land legs yet. To go to Little Corn Island to see my friend, I had to take another boat. This one also rocked-and-rolled a lot but only for 30 minutes. Thank God!

When I got there, the sun was setting. It was so beautiful, I almost forgot all that I endured that day: trying to find the right boat, my passport, camera, and flash drives being stolen, and the long rough-water journey. Now, I could forgive and forget all of it. When I arrived at the bungalow on beach, my friend, Incarma, was already dining while looking out at the sea. We were happy to see each other again after having spent some time together in Granada, Nicaragua.

For five days there, I swam every day and ate fantastic island fare while sitting by the sea. The scene was picture postcard perfect with striking contrasts of aquamarine and cobalt blue waters. The colors were beautiful and surreal.

The contrast of colors reflected the dramatic experiences on my journey. I got robbed, yet I enjoyed swimming in the beautiful Caribbean Sea. It was a long, tiresome journey, yet I was able to meet an old friend again. Going to Corn Island may have felt like going to the moon, but it was well worth the effort.





WELL, MY 50TH BIRTHDAY SUCKED, BUT THANKS FOR ASKING

by Christine Miller

What's that? You didn't ask? It's alright. You probably knew it wouldn't exactly be the highlight of my life. But truthfully, even I was unable to fathom how bad it could be.

Allow me to preface this account by telling you something about myself in relation to health and aging. I'm generally pretty disciplined in taking care of my body – not psychotically so, mind you, but I do run well over 20 miles per week, take vitamins and herbal supplements, keep an eye on what I eat so my weight stays roughly the same, even use Swiss botanical skin formulations on my face and neck. Oh, and as long as I'm being honest, I get regular Botox treatments (not to mention I've tried wrinkle fillers a couple times and use an off-shoot of Miracle Grow for my thinning eyelashes).

So perhaps I'm a bit fixated on staying young, or at least looking young... It's all healthy stuff, right?

I don't know who let it slip to my boobs that I was about to turn 50, but low and behold, almost to the day of this egregious event, they decided to develop "symptoms" noticeable on my yearly mammogram. Uh-oh, what was up? Of course, one is dragged over this particular bed of nails via an agonizing, drawn-out process: first the routine mammogram, then a "call-back" for a closer look at the offending breast then another mammogram, followed by a week of internet-research-fueled obsession before finding out I have to have a "needle biopsy." Just one of these words—"needle" or "biopsy"—is ominous enough, but put them together in relation to your boob, and obsession turns into contemplation of impending death.

How irritating that I couldn't be allowed even a few months, much less a few years, of being "over the hill" before my aged and decrepit body started its downward spiral! Shouldn't there be some grace period wherein I can get used to my new senior citizen status? But nooo... I'm practically having my 50th birthday party in a doctor's office! This is the thanks my body bestows on me for trying to be health-conscious? So glad I bothered... NOT!

I must say, however, I am blessed indeed to have three beautiful children – two of whom are even out of the house – and the world's greatest boyfriend. Knowing I would be having a celebratory dinner with these loved ones, I was completely content to spend the evening of "my real birthday" with my 12-year-old daughter. Of course, this little plan was upended when she got a better offer from one of her middle school friends. The mere fact of my reaching a half-century milestone was an obvious no-contender for an overnight with Melissa. This was still fine, though, especially since I managed to make last-minute dinner plans with a close girlfriend. I was really in the mood for prime rib anyway, so *perfecto*. We would meet at a place down the street where they had it on special.

After confirming with my friend, my little one's overnight fell through, as so often happens when 12-year-olds commandeer their own social events. In the end, I guiltily left her by herself for a couple hours so I wouldn't disappoint my girlfriend, who seemed very excited herself about the prospect of dinner out. My prime rib turned into a chicken salad, however, when the waiter told us they had already run out of the special. (Probably I had been beaten to the punch by those early-dining old people who would be in bed by eight!) I resolved to arrive before five next time. At least, though, it was an occasion for that ever-precious girl talk. After a light-hearted run-down of my breast issues and upcoming biopsy, I listened as she confided about her current marital difficulties. Since I had been in her position not that long ago and a veteran of divorce, I could understand her feelings. We parted after dinner, me wishing her luck

with her lazy, selfish husband, and her wishing me luck with dodging breast cancer. Oh, and Happy 50th!

I don't mean to sound ungrateful, really. Who can deny all the birthday perks? For me at 50, they included all of the above, plus some little extras... A pathological ex-boyfriend, who had ransacked my condo four years ago when I broke up with him, decided to text me a friendly "Happy Birthday," making the little hairs on the back of my neck stand up as I realized that sociopathic stalkers, like elephants, never forget. Oh, and my \$10 birthday coupon from Victoria's Secret – I'm still trying to figure out how I managed to drop \$50 on one bra even with their special "gift" – and so many solicitations from the AARP that I'm going to join just to make it stop!

At this point, I maintain that the number one best thing about turning 50 is when it is over. Thank heavens that I can return to my normal life of successes and problems without having them backlit by the gloriously blinding glare of my mortality. I am positive big ol' 60 will be much better—especially since I have vowed to book a cruise to Cabo for that one. Of course, I'll have to look into the onboard food poisoning situation beforehand. ☺



SOMETIMES IT'S ROSES, SOMETIMES IT'S NOT

by Pearl Hoffman

She mentioned, with transparent intent, that she hoped someone would give her the newest fragrance from C'est La Vie, Impetuous, for her birthday.

He recalled a casual remark she made three years earlier at the Home Show, and on her birthday, surprised her with a new-age vacuum cleaner. The Dirt-Grabber.

He hoped she would come to bed wearing a transparent bit of fluff from the Naughty Lingerie Boutique. If the night was chilly, he would wrap his warmth around her.

She wore sensible pajamas most of the time, but on cold nights she came to bed in a flannel gown and sweat-socks. It would have taken an x-ray to reveal what her nightwear concealed.

She wished that, just once, he would agree to see a movie that had soul, feelings and insight. She commented that sometimes it does the heart good to cry over problems that are not your own.

He wished that, just once, she would agree to see a movie that had absolutely no intellectual, moral or social justification. He suggested that if she wanted to cry over problems, she could cry over the ones they had.

He declared, rather patronizingly, that it would be nice if, on those rare occasions when she made his breakfast, she would use greater care separating the grapefruit segments and removing the pits.

She countered, archly, that if she wasn't preparing the grapefruit properly, it was because her degree from Queens College was in Philosophy, not Fruit Preparation and Citrus De-pitting.

She enjoyed exotic foods with strange names from countries too remote to be shown on a map. He'd shake his head and say, "Just what one would expect from a liberal."

He preferred very ordinary foods with familiar names that he could eat without fear of internal combustion. She'd roll her eyes and say, "Just what one would expect from a conservative!"

He was a three-piece-suit who seldom took a stand, even for a righteous principle, or engaged in a battle of the heart.

She was an easy mark who answered every call, rose to every need, and never said. No. Ask someone else for help.

Although their relationship was a happy one, in their secret hearts they wished it could had been a bit more fun. But marriage is, more often than not, perfume and vacuum cleaners, universal truths and grapefruit pits, memorable encounters and B-rated movies.

Shirley and Robert lived within the perimeters of their Incompatibility-content, secure, and un-divorced—a plain case of reconcilable differences.





MY "AHA!" MOMENT

by Melodee K. Currier

There are many reasons people go to high school reunions. Some want to catch up with old friends they haven't seen in years, some want to see and be seen, and some are looking for closure with a former friend or love. I wanted closure.

This story begins forty five years ago in Pompano Beach, Florida when I left my high school fiancé to attend secretarial school in New York City. Since he was a year younger than me, he still had his senior year of high school to complete. Our plan was that he would attend Penn State after he graduated from high school, I would join him, get a job as a secretary at Penn State and we would get married —and live happily ever after.

They say long distance romances are usually destined for failure and ours was no exception. Soon after arriving in the Big Apple, I started dating, and I'm sure he wasn't just watching TV waiting for me his senior year of high school. And so our relationship drifted in different directions.

After he graduated from high school, he went to Penn State as planned, but we never saw each other again. I called him once while he was there and talked about coming to visit him, but within days of that call, I met my first husband and never spoke to him again.

When I heard that our high school classes were having a combined 45th reunion, and he RSVP'd that he and his wife would be there, my husband and I decided to go too. I was apprehensive about seeing him after so many years (after all, I wasn't 17 anymore), but I had so many questions and wanted to hear all about his life.

Soon after arriving at the reunion, I caught a glimpse of him and was surprised to see he looked very much like he did in high school. As we passed each other on the walkway, I called his name. He stopped, looked at me and said, "Melodee Leven....wasn't it?" I was stunned and offended at the same time. Is this the same guy that didn't want any other guys to sign my yearbook and cried like a baby the night before I left for New York City? His reaction was so unexpected, it caught me off guard. I couldn't figure it out. It didn't seem possible he could forget a former fiancé. Hadn't he told his wife about me? Did he have a memory problem? So many thoughts went through my mind.

Although he and his wife spent a lot of time with my husband and me during the reunion weekend, most of the time we didn't talk, and what little conversation we did have was superficial. The funny thing is, I recall that was the way he was in high school too, but it didn't bother me then. When you're a teenager and all you want is a guy who wears madras and Bass Weejuns and is a great kisser, it should be no surprise that they're not talkative.

I left the reunion disappointed. There were so many words left unsaid. And there was no going back.

Several months after the reunion, I had an "Aha!" moment while telling a friend this story. Hearing myself whine, I suddenly realized that I alone had the power to create the closure I wanted by letting go of my expectations. Just seeing him again at the reunion after all those years was enough. I didn't need to know the details of his life. It might have been interesting—or boring—but it didn't happen and it wasn't necessary. You can write the endings to your own stories—any way you want to—and that's empowering!



MARCH

by Marion Schoeberlein

A slap in our face..
The wind is making each tree
An old rocking chair.

THE HARPS OF SUMMER

by Marion Schoeberlein

I hear the harps of summer
Everywhere I go today.
In silver rivers singing and
Children laughing as they play.

The wind makes music, too, in trees,
And in the woods it seems
As if the angels pluck their harps
And leave their lovely dreams.

EASTER WISHES

by Marion Schoeberlein

I wish you a lily on Easter Day,
A basket of eggs for the child in you,
A time to be quiet, a time to pray.
And wonderful friends to share the day, too.

I wish you poems in your heart to keep.
The music of springtime in the trees,
A faith in God that is strong and deep,
A book full of happy memories.

MY BEAUTIFUL DAY

by Marion Schoeberlein

I borrowed a poem from the sky,
and music from a bird;
I stole a chime out of the wind,
and from the rose a word;
I borrowed a song from the hills,
A psalm from the silver rain;
I took the footsteps of angels
out of a cobwebbed lane.
From each little thing, I fashioned
something in my own way.
With God's help, I put in my heart...
a wonderful, beautiful day.



Art from the Heart

by Kym Cohen

I have taken only one class in photography in college but have a real love of Nature. My attention to details and background in wanting to be an animator contribute to my sense of curiosity within the smallest parts of everyday things. I believe that if you take the time to look, Mother Nature gives us gems. I feel blessed to have the gift of finding special moments to share with others who take the time to view my work.

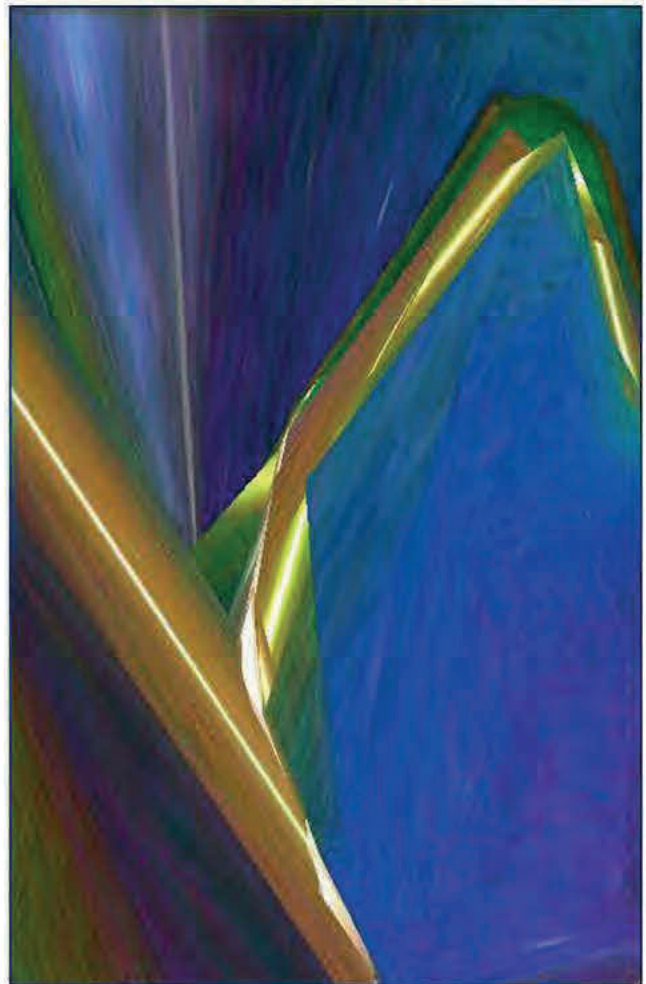


"Abstract Beauty in Ice Water" was taken on a whim, as an extreme close up of ice cubes, while I had dinner at a local diner. These ice cube formations caught my attention. I love creating abstract photos, so I grabbed my cell phone, placed the camera within half an inch of them, and had fun creating the extreme close up which gives viewers entry into a unique realm of ice. I'm big on stopping to notice the details of life. There is such joy hearing what people see within my abstract work. I've been told some people see this as from inside a tent, others see a night sky on the top right, and I see a tiny "unicorn" type creature at the bottom point of the dark line, at the left edge of the photo about halfway up the photo. What I find fascinating is that there was so much more to the simple ice cube that even I never noticed before this moment in time.



"Some Enchanted Evening" was taken on my drive home on a secondary road in Philadelphia days ago, in late March. When I passed it, there was a magical feeling that pulled me back to this simple field that sat right at the edge of the road. The traffic zoomed

past, oblivious to its enchanting beauty! Immediately, I made a U-turn, came back to the spot in the opposite direction, pulled off to the shoulder, ran up with my cell phone in hand, and had seconds before the sun set on the horizon. I was elated to have witnessed this because my creative mind sees two trees with outstretched "arms" with so much happiness! Looking at the photo, to the far right is one tree with its one "leg" bent and the other tree is to the left and behind the center tree. The perfectly placed, pink petals and soft sunshine enchanted my heart! I was so grateful to Mother Nature for giving me this opportunity to share with others through my photography. It was a fluke that at that very moment, no cars came from one direction and another car had stopped to turn left prior to the field so it was holding the cars back from blocking this shot. As a romantic at heart, these trees made my soul smile.



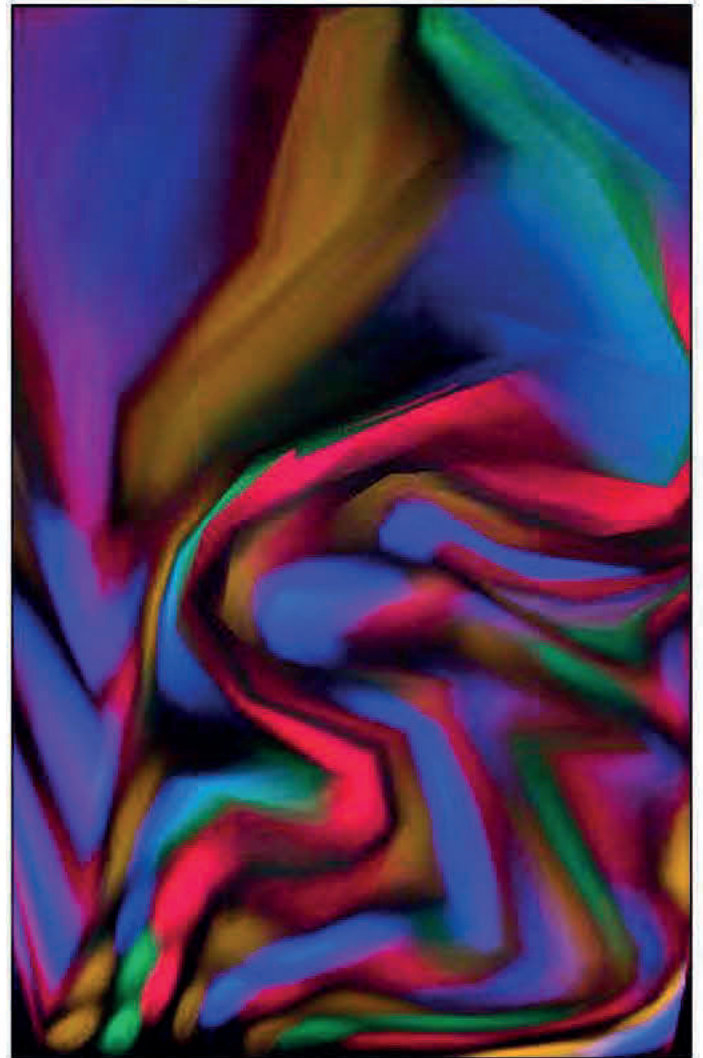
"Cornstalk at Dusk" is an original digital abstract piece, created using my phone and computer, that was inspired by the colors of the day. Bending certain colors and creating textures excites me as I explore unseen areas and blend the colors. I like to play with boldness and then soften other areas for contrast to let the viewer feel the energy and movement. I find an inner enjoyment exploring the colors inside the colors by allowing the art to grow with a sense of freedom of expression.



"Forever in My Heart" is an original digital art piece, inspired by the love I felt after my cat, Gatsby, passed away in 2012. It reminds me that the love shared between each of us and animals remains in our hearts forever. The spirit of some souls nestle into a special place within the heart.. He was a special soul. Born completely deaf, I used sign language to communicate with him. (See poem *Unconditional Love*, bottom of next page, with picture of Gatsby).



"Dancing with the Petals" (lower left) is a close up photo of a flower on a perfect stranger's lawn. I pulled into his driveway and started snapping away with my phone. I went for an extreme close up and then felt this angle showed two "dancing" petals. It's abstract so not everyone can see it, but I see a "female" with a yellow and white dress with a purple skirt area bent back upon a supportive "male" grass "arm". The "male" face is above the lady as they both look upward into the sunshine. Other people have said they see a bird. What inspired me on this shot was the sense of relaxation and exhilaration of the flower to have its photo taken at this moment in time. The owner ran over and expressed how happy he was that I took interest in his garden and smiled when he saw this photo.



"A River Flows Through It" began as a photo of a bush decorated with strands of Christmas lights. Using my own technique, I created this original digital art. The colors inspired me and while designing this piece, it gave me a sense of being near a flowing river in the fall season.

Kym Cohen is a Philadelphia writer, artist, and actor who appeared as an extra in *The Sixth Sense*. Her motto: "At first our dreams seem impossible, then improbable, but when we summon the will, they become inevitable." – Christopher Reeve

Find more of Kym's artwork and photography on

facebook



MY GRANDSON

by Jeanne Mineo

To watch him run across the field, wind blowing in his face,
To see his eager effort, his ease and private grace,
To check out his team's line up as the whistle blows,
To marvel at his quiet calm as the tension really grows,
To sense his presence, waiting each time a play begins,
To hope he understands the losses as well as the wins,
To feel the magic of his skill as he waits his time and chance,
To make a perfect winning score and quiet victory stance,
To hear the crowds that loudly cheer, their spirits seem to roar,
To know that they are with him, still wanting even more,
To feel my own heart racing as he runs to make each play,
To know that just to watch him brings pride in every way,
To catch that secret winning smile and feel his special joy,
To know he's blessed with such talent even though he's just a boy.



UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

by Kym Cohen

Unconditional love, a gift to the soul
Requires nothing more than honesty to the core
Remember the simple and joyous moments
A laugh at a silly moment or tear that pulls on the heart

A love that cannot be bought or won
It is earned as both souls freely give and take
For it's this true love that enters us as a warm embrace
Leaving feelings of love and comfort without fear or judgment

How beautiful that within our hearts lives a special peace
A comfort knowing that love stays in our hearts forever
Thank you to the special souls who teach and grant us this love
No time, no space, no miles apart can break this special tie
A silent warmth comes from loving unconditionally

Dedicated to Gatsby (1998-2012)



A MAN AND A WOMAN

by Larry Kampey

I saw them walking side by side.
On a Turkish road where they abide,
Their slow gate matched stride for stride.
Their lives linked to the country side.

They carried their story deep with in
In the country of Turkey their lives had been,
Mixed with the soil to which they were akin
Their stride told the story of where they had been.

They walked together at a practiced pace.
Their age had given them a struggling grace.
Visiting places where they had toiled
Spending their youth tilling the soil.

Funny thing is I had seen them before.
Not in Turkey that's for sure,
It's my first trip to these shores
But still I know I've seen them before.

Suddenly it came to me,
In a whirlwind of my memory.
As a child visiting my Grandparents farm
Watching them walk arm in arm.

In Iowa my Grandparents worked each day.
As this couple toiled half the world away,
For each they lived where they would stay
Not knowing the others so far away.

I suppose it is the same the whole world round
Where ever those who work the soil are found.
For tillers of the soil belong to a fraternity
A common bond that binds all humanity.

THE UNKNOWN

by Becky Samet

I am not an animal nor human, though it meets the eye.
You may stick a knife through my heart, though I will not die.

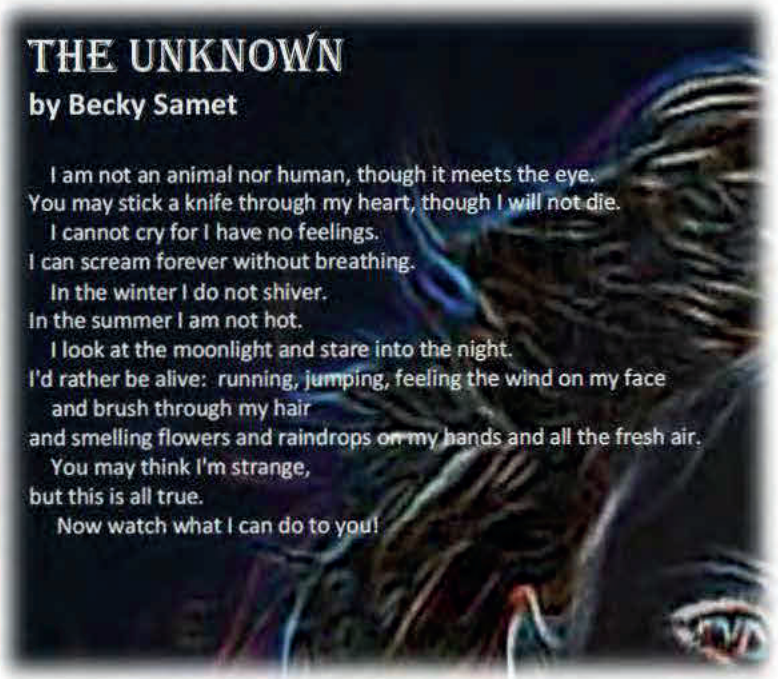
I cannot cry for I have no feelings.
I can scream forever without breathing.

In the winter I do not shiver.
In the summer I am not hot.

I look at the moonlight and stare into the night.
I'd rather be alive: running, jumping, feeling the wind on my face
and brush through my hair
and smelling flowers and raindrops on my hands and all the fresh air.

You may think I'm strange,
but this is all true.

Now watch what I can do to you!





THE LITTLE THINGS

by Daniel C. Roche

I remember the last day I saw my sweet little girl, Arianna. It amazes me how even the tiniest of things can send my mind wandering back to that day, bringing back the bitter sweet memories of both Arianna and my father. A cigarette. A teddy bear. Even an elevator. All of them remind me of that peculiar and sad day.

I stood outside the hospital inhaling deep drags from the first cigarette I had smoked in over five years. Looking back I suppose I should have felt some sort of guilt at having picked up that nasty habit again, but in the aftermath of the news my wife and I just received, guilt may have been one of the last emotions coursing through my conscience. I couldn't help but laugh, thinking that the last cigarette I smoked was on this very same spot five years earlier. Cigarettes are what killed my father all those years ago.

He died right in that same hospital, and I swore I would never smoke again. A promise I kept.

Until Arianna.

A sharp February wind tugged at the loose flaps of my trench coat and the heavy snow flakes which flung violently from every direction slapped my hands and face. The frigid cold made me feel alive. More alive than ever before. Lord forgive me, because in that moment I hated myself. I took another long drag of my cigarette hoping this would be the lungful that gave me cancer. I wanted to die.

How dare I feel so alive-so human, while my darling daughter lies in her hospital bed awaiting the exact opposite of life. Awaiting death.

A sharp pang of sorrow erupted from deep within my chest. I could hold it no longer. I wept right there in front of the entryway. I made no attempt to conceal my tears.

People came and went. Some stared. Most understood what goes on within a hospital's walls and left me to my sorrows. Either way, they all made me angry.

How dare they go about their lives? Don't they know what has happened to me?

A young woman walked across the parking lot. She held hands with a little girl as they made their way towards the entrance. The girl pointed at me and said,

"Mommy? Why is that man crying?"

The woman walked a little faster, making protective glances toward me. "I don't know, honey."

I'll never forget that little girl. We only shared a moment of one another's lives, but she touched me in a way I had never felt before. The little things I guess. The sound of her small voice. The way her pony tail bounced back and forth as she trotted along.

Thinking about it brought out another wave of despair. I remembered when my Arianna was that small. She was so innocent. So full of energy. She had her whole life before her. Who could have known her life would only last seventeen years.

The thought of it was maddening. Like being trapped in a recurring nightmare.

I've heard that the definition of hell is constant repetition, and on that day I knew it was true, as the last words the doctor spoke to me kept repeating themselves over and over in my head.

My wife, Maureen, and I stood in the hall outside of Arianna's room. Maureen's head was buried in my shoulder. I can still remember how warm her tears felt against my neck. I brushed my cheek against the top of her head, losing myself in those blonde locks

which fell so easily from her head like gentle sunbeams drifting down from the heavens.

I always loved that hair. So beautiful and long. I liked the way it had a slight curve at the tips. I especially liked the way it reminded me of my daughter. Arianna had her mother's hair. The little things will remind me of her. I inhaled deeply, allowing her essence to fill my lungs.

I felt the urge to tell my wife how much I loved her. After all, we were about to go through the worst part of our lives together, and I needed her now more than ever. I tried pulling her away from me so I could look into her eyes.

"Honey," I began.

She thrust herself into me and pressed her head even harder against my shoulder. She shook her head back and forth mumbling something inaudible. But I didn't need to hear. I knew what she was trying to say. She was telling me it hurt to think. Hell. It hurts to be alive sometimes.

The door to our daughter's room opened from the inside. Maureen lifted her head and we both watched as the face of Dr. Richards emerged from the darkness. He acknowledged us with sad eyes. I could see many things in those eyes. I could tell he noticed how much we aged in the last two months. I could tell he hated his career. And I could tell he had bad news. I could tell because the droop in the corners of his mouth were lower than usual. I could tell because a glimmer of light reflected off the moisture in his eyes. I could tell because all the little things in life suddenly made themselves more apparent.

Maureen stepped away from me in a way that let me know she too noticed all the little things that were going on. I didn't have it in me to ask, but Maureen has always been stronger than I. So in a small broken voice, she asked, "how is she?"

"It's not good," he began.

"May we see her?" I asked.

He nodded and stepped aside to let us in.

The shades were up, but the room remained dark. The clouds outside were too thick to allow much sunshine. Dozens of floral bouquets decorated the tables and floor, along with several large balloons, each one with a hopeful saying on it. I swear I could hear those balloons laughing.

I wanted to pop them all.

Maureen approached the bed first. "Hi, honey. How are you feeling?"

"I'm okay," she said. Her voice sounded weak, and as she held out her arms to hug her mother I couldn't help but notice they were shaking.

As they embraced one another I stood in the doorway unable to move. The lump in my throat felt like a magnet pulling me away from Arianna.

Paralyzed with fatigue, her arms fell back onto the bed. She saw me in the doorway. "Daddy?"

"Yes, darling, I'm here."

"Come closer, dad. I can barely see you." It took all the strength I had, but I did as she asked.

"I'm so glad you're here, Dad."

"Where else would I be?"

She held my gaze for a moment, maybe to take in all the little things about my face that she hadn't noticed before. Maybe she just wanted love to be the last emotion she felt before she left us for good.

She shifted her gaze past me, toward the far corner of the room, and a look of confusion replaced the pain in her eyes.

"Dad?"

"Yes, sweetie?"

"Who is that? Is someone else here with you?"

My wife and I turned around. We saw nothing but two seats surrounded by flowers. One seat was empty, and the other had a small blue teddy bear on it, but there was no one there. No one at all.

I turned to Dr. Richards. He hunched his shoulders and fumbled with the equipment surrounding Arianna's bed.

Earlier in the week Maureen and I were told the cancer spread to Arianna's brain, and now she appeared to be hallucinating. It was too much for me. I loved her so much, but I couldn't let her see me cry. There was no sense left in the world.

So I ran. I ran from the room and down the hallway, past the elevators and down the stairs, through the lobby and across the parking lot, all the way to the drugstore across the street.

I reached out my hand to push open the door and was startled by the frightening reflection that stood before me. My hair was a tangled mess and my coat collar stood up straight. Emptiness and despair caused my eyes to sink into my face, and my skin was almost as gray as my hair.

Is this how I want my daughter to remember me?

I entered the store and fixed my collar. My first purchase was a comb. My second was a pack of cigarettes. Screw my health. What good is a healthy lifestyle when all you want to do is die anyway?

I lit a cigarette and walked across the parking lot, hoping the smoke would help me lose the terrible thoughts I had running through my head, but it was no use.

"It's not good," rang Dr. Richard's words.

My fingers tingled and my stomach felt nauseous. I forgot how sick a cigarette can make you feel. It's not good.

I pulled out another one and lit it. I took one drag when my phone rang. I reached in my coat pocket and removed the phone, holding it up so I could read the name across the screen. It was Maureen.

I flicked the phone open. "Hello?"

"Where are you?" asked the frantic voice on the other end.

"I'm out front," I began. "I um... I just needed to—"

"You need to get up here, David. She's leaving us." I could hear her start to cry.

"Just get back up here."

"Of course."

"Please," she whispered. "We need you."

I closed my phone and tossed the cigarette. I felt ashamed. This could be my last chance to be a father and I was blowing it. So I ran.

I ran through the lobby, taking notice of all the surprised faces I passed along the way. I ran past the elevators, even though I noticed the little light above the one on the right indicated that the door would soon be opening.

But not soon enough.

I ran up the stairs taking in the smell of fresh paint. I noticed the sheen of the stairs from where the constant footfalls rubbed the surface clean. I ran through the hallway and noticed all the little things I wouldn't have noticed a month ago, way back before I realized it is all the little things that make life so precious.

I burst into my Arianna's room and held onto the door handle as I tried to catch my breath. "I'm ugh...I'm... uff...." I took in a deep breath. "I'm here for you baby."

Dr. Richard stood by the bed gawking at my daughter with an odd look that I couldn't quite place. My wife looked at the corner of the room where the little blue teddy bear sat. Then she looked at Arianna, then back to the teddy bear again.

Arianna, however, looked directly at me.

"Daddy," said Arianna with an excitement I hadn't heard in weeks. "Dad!"

"What is it baby? What?"

"Look," she said, pointing to the empty seat next to the teddy bear. "Don't you see?"

"See what, honey?"

"Remember when I asked you who was here?"

I nodded my head. "Yes, honey. Of course I do. Why?"

"It's Grandpa," she said. "Grandpa is here!"

Not sure what to make of Arianna's words, I looked back to the empty seat.

"Don't you see?" she asked. "He said he's gonna teach me how to float. He's gonna show me how to walk on air."

I stared at the empty seat remembering all the little moments I had shared with my father, back before cancer ripped him away from me—the smile on his face when I brought home a good report card, the disappointment when I broke a girl's heart, and the pride he had on my wedding day. I wanted to tell my daughter how happy Grandpa was when she was born. How we had celebrated by painting the nursery pink, but when I looked back at my sweet Arianna, she was gone. It was at that moment I noticed the sun breaking through the clouds.



PETALS OF LOYALTY

by Matice Trowske

Anya bent over, her dark curls covering her tear stained cheeks. Shining blue eyes still peaked out from behind the locks. The same eyes that stole the sympathies of so many people. The same blue eyes that watched from a distance. Watched the life slipping away from the figure on the bed.

The doctor straightened up, a look of regret on his crooked face. He gave her a weak smile, showing his rotten, yellow-stained teeth. His breath smelled foul.

She reached up and tucked one lock of her hair behind her ear. Her gaze lowered still farther until it fixed on her dreary black dress. She ran her fingers over the fringed lace. Over the designs and patterns. The lump in her throat grew up once again.

"Anya," He said gently, "She's..."

She didn't hear it. Her fists clenched. This couldn't be happening. Her mother. Dying. With difficulty, her eyes squeezed shut.

"Anya." The firm voice rose.

She turned. A hand caught hers and held it tight. She looked into the face. "Doctor, please," She said softly, chocking to get the words out. He didn't care a fraction for her.

Why did he even try?

Her eyes wouldn't give her the relief of tears. She was far past them. A thought hit her harder than a physical blow.

She was alone.

With the conflicting emotions that followed, one presented itself more clearly than the others. Fear. And even more so, loneliness.

"Anya, there will be people to help you," The man clearly ignored her request.

At twelve years old, she knew she wouldn't be okay. She didn't even bother trying to tell him that things would be fine. She couldn't keep going. She was an orphan. Her father having been murdered when she was five (not that he cared for her anyway. He spent most of his time away from the house and drinking in the bars). Her mother raised her. Cared for her. The only person in the world who knew who she was.

She turned.

"Anya, stay here." This time, he snapped at her. She couldn't leave. She was his responsibility now until he could turn her in to a caretaker.

He didn't want to keep her any more than she wanted to stay with him. On a sudden impulse, she turned and flew out of the room. Down the hall, slid down the railing of the staircase (something she hadn't done since she was a young child). Once at the front door, she came to an abrupt halt.

Where would she go? Where could she live? She didn't have any family. No friends. No one in the world who wanted the little orphan girl whose mother had just died.

"Anya!" Came the gruff voice at the top of the stairs. The doctor was already out of breath from the short jog down the hall. He was horrendously overweight and completely out of shape. "Get back here!" He huffed from the top of the stairs, apparently not wanting to attempt the climb down them unless absolutely necessary.

She swallowed around the knot in her throat. She couldn't leave. As much as she despised him, the doctor was still the last 'hope' she had to a normal life. And getting a new family.

She hesitated a moment longer. Then turned the knob. The world outdoors was wet. Raining. The sun didn't dare peak out its large round eye. Being an hour after dusk, it was pitch-black.

The door slammed shut behind her and she pounded out of the house. Her dress and curls blew out behind her, and she ran as fast as she could. At least make the fat old man have a good run for what he'd said to her in the past. They'd never gotten along. This was just one little way of telling him that he wasn't in control of her actions.

She threw herself, breathless, at the huge oak tree in their back garden. She gingerly ran her fingers over the thick, rocky trunk. It sounded ridiculous, but she would miss it.

Anya sighed. Her life was upside-down and pathetic. She would miss a tree? Absolutely pathetic.

She leaned against the trunk, and eyed the roses at her feet. She would miss them as well. She knelt in the wet dirt. Make the man buy her a new dress as well because she spoiled it by splattering mud all over it in the garden during a storm. She ran her bare finger tips over the roses' bright petals. Red, pale pink, salmon-colored, a dull yellow; the list of colors was endless. The bed of flowers stretched out in front of her.

Her hand made its way towards the stem. She encountered a thorn. Make him pay to have her hand bandaged as well because she was foolish enough to play with the roses without gloves on.

She plucked the thorn from her palm effortlessly. She didn't even register the pain.

However, the blood gushed from the spot. She stared at it dumbly and without recognition.

In her recklessness, she pulled the other hand out of the bushes without any heed. Her wrist had a cut running some length down her arm. Blood seeped out. She didn't care.

Her mind was fuzzy. She couldn't think straight.

Why am I mad at the doctor?" She couldn't remember. 'He's a nice man. He's in love with mother,' She recalled vaguely, smiling a little. 'Mother is so beautiful...I want to be just like her when I'm old enough to move out of the house. I'm glad I still have her with me.'

"She won't be very happy with me when I go inside again." She looked down at her dress in dismay, 'It's ruined!' She looked helplessly at the ground and flowers before her, the rain still pelting her relentlessly.

"Perhaps I'll bring in some flowers for her. That will make her so happy," She lunged forward, plucking the roses from their stems without taking a second to think. In no time, her hands were raw and bleeding with no signs of stopping. She didn't feel the pain. She only looked with satisfaction at the bouquet in her arms.

She then turned, jumped up, and started to run back inside. The doctor met her half way. He was cursing and yelling across the lawn. She nearly plowed right over him in her haste.

"Doctor!" She giggled in ridiculous delight. "Look what I brought for mother!"

"Anya, when I get my hands on you--" He stopped abruptly, at her words, eying her with some skepticism. His face paled slightly, "Anya...?"

"I brought them for mother!" She repeated, laughing merrily, then running past him and into the house. "Mother!" She called, running into her mother's bedroom. "Mother, look what I picked for you!" She shushed herself when she saw her mother on the bed, "Oh, I'm sorry. You're sleeping. You need your rest. I'll leave the flowers here." She rested the bundle on her mother's chest.

Her mother's eyes were closed. Her body limp and lifeless.

"Don't forget," She continued in a low whisper, "I have something to show you when you wake up. I'll meet you in the garden," She waited a second, then nodded, satisfied that her mother had heard her.

"Anya, you're going mad!" The doctor roared when he stormed into the room, "Your mother! She's dead!"

"She's not dead," She corrected with a dazed smile, "Only sleeping. Now hush! You'll wake her."

"Anya, you foolish girl!" He cried, "She's not going to wake up! You and I—we can shout all we want! She won't hear us!"

"No, no," She put a finger to his lips. "You're being much too loud and grumpy. She's going to meet me in the garden tonight. I told her to. You'll see. She'll be there."

She walked out of the room, humming merrily to herself.

He closed his eyes, feeling more pain for her than for himself.

"You'll see," she told herself out-loud on her way back to the garden. "Mother would never leave me. She would never die. She's only sleeping." ❀

MY TURN

by Donna Krause

When will it be my turn?

To face the world.

To do what's best.

Without the eyes of another.

People taking me by the hand.

Telling me to go in different directions.

As if I was a child.

The need to break loose of this heavy mood.

That consumes me know.

Wanting the Lord to take me away.

Could I soar amongst the clouds?

And choose my destination?

If only in a dream?

Wanting to be whole.

And put the scattered pieces of my brain.

Back together, again.

Reality is where I have to live.

Though, something is sitting on my soul.

There is a glow in the distance.

Called hope.



SANTUARIO GIALLO

by J. Patricia Henkin-Bookman

Up in the hills of Avellino, Naples, Italy stands a well-known sanctuary, Monte Vergine. Every year at Christmas, *crèche* of the Nativity are put on display for those who are able to make the dangerous trek up the long winding road which is God's way of testing the stamina of those who make it. Passengers often hold on to rosaries, afraid to look out their windows lest they be torn from their seat and thrown over the numerous precipices thwarting each car all the way up, and the driver, all the way down.

Each year, Isabella accompanied her parents on their annual pilgrimage to this church to view the Nativity scenes, one older than the other, antiques, worth... well... priceless. It was just such an occasion when Fate felt she might intervene.

Giovanni, too, made such pilgrimages, but usually not on Christmas Eve. This year, his father had been hurt in a construction accident and his broken leg was healed enough for him to drive his small car up the treacherous pathway to redemption. He knew, in his heart, that such a visit, under such strenuous conditions (for it had snowed the night before and he had no money to buy chains for his car), would surely get him at least one benediction from the *Madonna*.

Giovanni and his family entered the church from the side entrance which was where all the *crèche* were on display. They, too, stretched up into the cupola of this part of the church, long winding roads peppered with shepherds and the three kings and the best of all, at the end of all of their journeys, the baby Jesus. Mary stood guard with Joseph and the Star of Bethlehem guided the rest to the baby's manger.

Though all the same, all were different. The *crèches* came from all over Europe to be on display, but the most famous of all were the Neapolitan which the church had been collecting for years. Most were donated by wealthy families anxious to leave a legacy in their name in such a virtuous place, also hoping for those special blessings to fall upon them.

Others were bought from antique dealers, or willed to the church upon the death of an orthodox Catholic.

Still others had come from America, from Italian-American families who had discovered them perhaps amongst their dead grandmother's attic storage, or a deceased spinster aunt who had come to America from Italy, who had left special instructions for the nativity set to be sent back to Avellino. But from wherever in the world they had come, not one was worth more than another, especially in the holiness of Monte Vergine. There, each one was a star.



Midnight Mass was being held in the main part of the church and, as always, there was standing room only. After viewing the *crèche*, each of the two families made their way to see the baby Jesus carried down the aisle exactly at Midnight to herald his joyous birth and the promise of salvation once again in the New Year.

Having to stand for such a long period of time taxed Giovanni's father heavily. Isabella's family had found barely three places, but her father stood and offered Giovanni's father his seat as soon as he saw the anguish on the poor man's face. He thanked her father profusely and the children looked at each and quickly glanced away, almost embarrassed to have met each other's gaze.

The spring came early that year and the weather warmer than seasons in the past. Business for Isabella's family was going well and a sudden thought occurred to Isabella's family: they decided to give thanks to the *Madonna* and have a picnic at the top of the mountain where the church maintained tables and benches for just such outings. The family had splurged on prosciutto and mozzarella di buffalo, fresh bread and wine from last September made by the father. It was to be a feast.

And actually, it was a feast day, it was *San Giuseppe*, 19 March.

And they had stopped in a local *pasticceria* for *zeppole*, the symbolic pastry for that day.

Life had not been so kind to Giovanni's family. His father's leg had healed, but not properly, and he now his paces were possible only with the aid of a hand-carved walking stick which he, himself,

had carved while praying to

recover the use of his

leg. True, he was not completely healed, but God had at least allowed him the use of the tortured leg and for that, he wanted to give thanks. For that, he was still able to squeeze out the necessary money to keep his family with a roof over their heads, and food on the table.

Yet, on the feast day of *San Giuseppe*, Giovanni's father deemed it a necessity to give thanks to the *Madonna* for the half-restored wellness of his leg. Planning this albeit a bit beforehand, but not telling his family, he had fashioned a

leg made out of silver to hang on the wall of healing in the church. He would be hard pressed to find a spot to attach it to, inasmuch as the wall was covered in such silver homage. Legs, arms, prayers, other body parts hung by the hundreds on this wall, such a wall common throughout the churches of Italy when the unwell had been *miraculously* healed.

Isabella's mother laid out the festive table with all of the special occasion foods and they sat down to the afternoon meal. Giovanni's father stepped outside the church to his waiting family, limping toward them, a look of pride that he had, indeed, found one solitary space to place his own tribute. They passed by Isabella and her family and suddenly her father jumped up in recognition.

Both men embraced each other, exchanging kisses on both sides of the cheek. They remembered the night of the *Vigilia* when Isabella's father had given up his seat for Giovanni's father. They were as old friends now and Isabella's mother insisted they join them for the meal and the special dessert of *zeppole*.

At first, Giovanni was embarrassed by the offer, and even more so, by his father's eager desire to accept. They did not have spare coin to pay for such a treat and it did not seem like any sin was being committed in the accepting of such a gracious offer. And then, there was always the *zeppole*.

And so they dined together, and together with other families who had come to the mountain for whatever reason on this day. They laughed too hard, the men nearly coming to tears, after several glasses of the recently-made wine. Their cheeks were ruddy and red and the women watched their men with a cautious eye. The children made friends after some initial awkward moments and then went off to walk around the church to the well-known butterfly sanctuary.

It had happened by accident. Years ago, monks had planted a special garden in the back of the church, all with the hope of enticing butterflies to come and aid in pollinating the beautiful flowers they had planted. And their prayers were answered and, over the years, there were more and more butterflies each year. And the flowers grew wildly but only in that small patch behind the church; they never strayed too far from the butterflies, each dependent upon the other, as a child is upon her mother.

The men had decided to walk around to offset the alcohol's effect and watched from a distance as their children chattered and laughed at something the other would say. They looked at each other and smiled. Too bad they lived too far from each other. Too bad they were in different economic circles. Too bad, just too bad.

At the end of the day, the two families made their way down the mountain, Isabella's father's car the more stabile of the two and therefore the one to lead. At the bottom of the mountain, one went one way, and the other went the opposite way, hands and kisses waving wildly out half-open windows.

But Fate was not through with these two families yet, and the families had agreed that every feast day of San Giuseppe, weather permitting, they would meet each other and that, in the future, Giovanni's family would bring the *zeppole*.

But as years went by, one feast day Giovanni's family did not come. Isabella's mother chided her husband for worrying so about them. They, too, had brought their own *zeppole*, knowing how expensive they were at this time of the year. They always brought extra of everything, and, at the end of each picnic, would give it to Giovanni's family to bring back home. It had become a tradition. To refuse would have been *maleducato*, and far be it for such a long-time friendship to be marred by such a faux pas.

But worry Isabella did and she would not let mother alone until she promised to try and phone them when they went back home. If only to know all was well. If only to know if Giovanni had missed seeing her. She had grown quite into the *signorina, bella*, blonde, with huge blue eyes. Isabella had come to anticipate the annual pilgrimages and she and Giovanni had become good friends.

They spoke on the phone as often as they could, their parents always nearby, always listening. Their conversations were benign but their parents suspected there might be more to them. One evening, several years ago, when Giovanni's father's disability prevented him from making the Christmas Eve drive, Isabella and her family had come to them. They brought all sorts of goodies-panettone, biscotti, café, zucchero, all things families brought each other on special occasions, and also for funerals, except for the panettone-that was a Christmas cake.

And so, after the day was done and Isabella had sat there the whole time worrying about Giovanni, they departed for home. Isabella rang immediately to the phone. There was no answer. Although they traveled in different circles, there was a custom in Naples that had not yet died: the posting of someone's death on large pieces of paper glued to anything that even remotely resembled a pole. The next day, when Isabella's mother went to buy

some fruit and vegetables, she stopped dead in her tracks. There was just such a posting announcing the death of Giovanni's father. She was grief stricken. She didn't know what to do. She would have to tell her daughter, but how.

When her mother returned home, the deed had been done. Isabella's father had just come in from town and had seen the announcement himself. Isabella was sobbing in his arms, making him promise to take them to Giovanni's house as soon as her mother returned.

It was a somber encounter. Giovanni's eyes were reddened from hours of crying and his mother fared no better. As soon as he saw her, Giovanni fell into Isabella's lap and cried yet again. The death had not been unexpected, but true death is always unexpected. He had not been well for a while and had almost completely lost the use of his dying leg. But he had died in peace, and for this, his family was eternally indebted to the *Madonna*. He had died in his sleep.

The young couple went outside, Isabella trying desperately to comfort her friend. The bond they had been hiding from their parents now openly apparent. There were too many people in the house for anyone to watch them and in the back by the garden, they exchanged their first real kiss.

And a yellow butterfly alighted on her hand.



THE GETHSEMANE GOSPEL BAND

by Lucy Tharp

There is no doubt but that early pioneers like Jimmy Rogers, Roy Acuff, the Carter Family, Vernon Dalhart, Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers and many others of their era paved the way for the country music industry to be what it is today.

On the other hand, there were literally thousands of musicians playing in small bands entertaining in rural schools, street comers, medicine shows, music halls and country barbecues who made their own special contribution to making country, bluegrass and gospel music acceptable to a cross section of American society. These relatively unknown troubadours also paid their dues.

As a child, I was a member of such a musical group.

I grew up on a hard scrabble mountain farm in Cumberland County, Tennessee. We were a poor family (mother, father, and ten children) and like so many others during the depression, we enjoyed few luxuries.

We were the Davenport Family and we later started calling ourselves the Gethsemane Gospel Band. We played a lot of gospel music but we also played traditional country songs like The Wreck of Old Number 9, Careless Love and The Death of Floyd Collins.

We never called our music bluegrass. I never heard the term "bluegrass music" until Bill Monroe made it a household word around the late 1930s.

General Davenport was my father. General was not a military title. It was his Christian name. Dad was a farmer, but his first love was music. He started playing the fiddle for square dances when he was a small boy.

Every member of our family played a musical instrument with the exception of my mother, Gertrude Davenport. Though mom was not a musician, she was very supportive of her musical family who struggled to put food on the table.

Our band consisted of dad, who played the fiddle, my sister, Jean, and I played guitar, Woodrow played banjo, Cordell was on mandolin, and Talmadge slapped the big doghouse bass.

We started out playing locally in churches and schools. Sometimes we would travel to surrounding towns like Crossville, Cookeville, and Kingston, and set up and play in the courthouse yard.

Mom would sit on the running board of the car with a cigar box. People would drop in pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters. Occasionally, if someone had a special request for us to play, they might contribute a dollar bill. There wasn't much hard money floating around in our neck of the woods during those times.

Logistics posed a big problem for us. Even a twenty-mile round trip was a challenge for Dad's old 1926 Whippet sedan. Just finding room for the musicians was problematic.

We would lash the bass securely to the top of the car and most of the other instruments had to be tied to the running boards.

One day, Dad was in Crossville and paid a visit to Floyd Motor Company. Setting there on the lot was a Ford panel truck which caught his eye. Dad felt that if he could get the truck, we could travel around and get some bookings further from home.

Seth Floyd was a man who would go to great lengths to make a trade. He also drove a hard bargain. Dad agreed to pay fifteen dollars a week until the three hundred was paid. The payment would be due and payable every Monday at 8:00 AM sharp. This was when Floyd opened for business.

Dad felt that he would have no problem in meeting the payments since he expected to book more playing dates with the new transportation. But as the old saying goes, the best laid plans of mice and men sometime come a-cropper.

At first dad was able to pay the weekly payments on the truck promptly. There were only four payments left outstanding. Then our fortunes took a sudden downturn.

It was 1934 and the depression was taking its toll throughout the country. Like ourselves, most people in our area were farmers. Unemployment was at 25% of the labor force. For those who were fortunate enough to have a public job, the minimum hourly wage was 44 cents.

My whole family pitched in to help mom gather garden produce, wild fruits and greens to preserve and can. Store-bought fruits and vegetables had become too expensive for our meager cash flow. To add to our burdens, my Uncle Milo was laid off from his job at the chair factory and had to move in with us.

Monday morning came and dad was unable to meet the truck payment. We expected any moment that Seth Floyd would make his appearance to repossess the truck. During the following week, Dad drove around east Tennessee searching feverishly for a place to book our band.

On Friday evening he came home with some good news, he had booked a show at the Nemo Community Center in Nemo, Tennessee, which was over in Morgan County, an adjoining county.

There was no time to waste. The show was scheduled for 7:00 PM, on Saturday evening. We had only hours to get ourselves and our instruments prepared. We had almost forgotten about the overdue payment on the truck.

Dad remembered. "If Seth will just hold off until Monday morning," he said, "we'll be all right. I'll be able to clear the board with him. I don't think he'll jump before Monday morning."

Dad was wrong. It was around ten o'clock the following morning when Bob Bess, the Cumberland County sheriff rolled up with a warrant. We had just finished packing and securing the last of our instruments in the back of the truck. Bess had come to seize the truck. He was accompanied by a deputy who was to drive the truck back to town.

"Mr. Davenport, I've got a warrant here," Bess said. "Unless you can come up with sixty dollars, Seth Floyd says he wants the truck. You're a week behind with the payment."

Dad objected. "That can't be right, Sheriff. The payments are only fifteen dollars a week. I don't even have that on me. I'll have the

money in full if you can wait until Monday morning. We've got a show to play over in Nemo tonight."

"Sorry, I can't do it," Bess replied sharply. "Seth Floyd says according to the contract if you miss a payment, you are obligated for the unpaid balance in full. Seth means business. He's pretty riled up."

"Sheriff, our instruments are loaded and we're ready to go. Can't you just give me until Monday?"

The sheriff shook his head. "I wish I could, General. But I can't. The law is the law. I've got a warrant and Floyd wants his truck or his money. I'll give you time to unload your music boxes."

"I have an idea, Sheriff," dad pleaded desperately. "Nemo's just over in the next county. If you could get in the truck and drive us over to Nemo, you could leave us and let us do our show. You can take the truck and give it to Seth."

Sheriff Bess seemed confused. "I don't know if that would be right or not," he said. "Besides how are you going to get back with all them string boxes?"

"I'll figure something, sheriff," replied dad. "But I've got to play that show. I have to feed my family. Can you drive the truck and deliver us?"

Sheriff Bess walked around shuffling his feet as in deep thought. "Alright, General," he said after a few minutes. "I'm going to do this, but I want you to understand. When you unload your boxes, I'm going to bring the truck back to Seth Floyd."

The ride to Nemo seemed endless. The sheriff sat in the front seat but allowed Dad to drive. There was little conversation on the way. Everyone obviously had reservations about how things would turn out. I must admit that the long trek home on foot from Nemo was not something I cherished.

As soon as we arrived at our destination and unloaded the instruments, the sheriff stepped forward. "I'll need the keys to the truck. General," he said.

But instead of surrendering the keys, Dad stood his ground. He looked the sheriff in the eyes. "I believe you're overlooking something, Sheriff," Dad said. "It looks like you're out of your jurisdiction. This is not Cumberland County. This is Morgan County. You don't have any authority over here."

Sheriff Bess looked stunned. He was speechless, he was irate but helpless, knew Dad was within his legal rights. At one point I believe he seriously considered pulling his pistol and taking the truck. Fortunately, common sense prevailed and the sheriff left the truck in dad's possession.

We learned later that Sheriff Bess had hitched a ride home from the Morgan County sheriff who happened to be his friend.

We made enough money playing the show that night to pay off the truck and even had money left over to buy some much-needed food and farm supplies.

After that our fortunes seemed to take an upturn. We started playing regularly at Radio Station WXVL in Crossville. It was a 15-minute show five days a week. We also started getting regular bookings at the Palace Theater, a local movie house in Crossville.

We even had dreams of going to the Grand Ole Opry. But our delusions of grandeur came crashing down, however, with the outbreak of World War II. William and Woodrow both were drafted into the army and served overseas for most of the war.

They came home, but like the country itself and society in general, they were never the same. Music also changed. Country music lost its innocence and the pure sound was gone. People were no longer satisfied with the downhome sound of guitar, banjo and fiddle. "It just don't fit," I'd heard Dad say many times. "You just can't play Wildwood Flower on them old bugles."

Dad died in 1982. He never adjusted to rock music. Every time I hear it," he would say, "I keep hoping it will turn into a tune." ☺



JOHN DYLAN

by Donna Krause

Blond hair,
Glistening in the sun.
One could see tomorrow,
In your crystal blue eyes.
A babe so sweet,
Bringing tiny tears,
As I watch him sleep.
His smile lights up the morning sun.
Three cradles rocked,
My babies so precious.
Singing to them, throughout the night.
Hoping that John Dylan is soothed,
By my loving voice.
Nonna reads to you,
Feeling joy by your touch.
"Where is your carriage?
Longing to show you to the world!
Awaiting happy times,
As you grow so tall.
We will skip to the park.
Up, up you'll go,
Touching the clouds so white,
Down, down you'll go,
As the wind colors your cheeks.
Loving you until the blue jays,
Fly up and wake up the moon.

CARRY MY HEART

by Donna Krause

Carry my heart,
Won't you please?
Blackened by rejection,
And heartache.
Burdens are heavily laden.
As carrying a sleeping child.
Depression brings tear drops,
Dried by gale force winds.
My soul resides in hell.
Trying to break through,
These chains.
God are you listening?
Let me feel balanced.
A land where anguish is amiss.
I'll rest on new clouds.
Wanting to fly away.
Like sparrows take flight.
I look at the sky.
The colors are brighter.
I can see the sun,
As it kisses the horizon.
Can I have my heart back?



REFLECTIONS

by P. K. Allen

The day's last ray of sunshine
reaches out across the water.

Colors fade into deepening
shades of brown and gray.

Thoughts of you
our love
life shared
our happiness
our sorrows

These are the reflections that linger
in the portals of my mind.

THREE CHEERS! FOR MOM

by P. K. Allen

Cheers!
For the one who changed my diapers
For the one who gave me life
For the one who fed me breast milk
For the one who likes my wife

Cheers!
For the one who clothed my body
For the one who taught me Right
For the one who nursed my wounds
For the one who held me tight

Cheers!
For the one who loves me dearly
For the one who tickled my palm
For the one who I'll love always
For the one who I call ... Mom

THE RHYTHM OF THE RAIN

by P. K. Allen

The rhythm of the rain,
like a dancer's feet,
clatters on the roof,
tapping out a beat.

Thunder joins the solo,
like two kettle drums,
rumbles in the background
beating distant hums.

Wind accompanies the melody,
like voices in a choir,
whistles through the trees,
singing with desire.

Bolts of lightning arc,
blinding with a flash,
like cymbals in a band,
ringing as they clash.

Playing its sweet rhapsody
that doesn't have a name,
like an orchestra without musicians,
that's the rhythm of the rain.





GPS WORLD HEALING 101

by Susan Chandel

The dimple I crouched in seemed like a quarry, shards of feldspar everywhere with a faint smell of gasoline. I could make out roads along the grid over the lip, but I dare not venture too far.

Coordinating dreamscapes with GPS marks was only a decade new and I could not afford to miss my rendezvous... The dark misty sky slowly became paler. I felt damp and somewhat impatient. I could hear the kids in the distance as the sky started to reveal its true color. Smells began to shift gingerbread, jalapeno, and tar in varying values. There was often a bite to the mingled scents. It was never immediately sweet or homey... A few bugs were left to work out with this new system. I had only found out about it a few years earlier in a hospital waiting room. A young man was talking about reenlisting as there was no other choice. Lots of people were feeling the same way. There was just no money. As we talked and waited, some video screen flyers were distributed. They were the new ones about the size of a quarter-inch thick plastic placemat. *Are You Visually Attuned? Spatially Perceptive? Join us.* An older guy recognized the program. "Heal the world with your dreams."

He was brought into the program in its early experimental stages.

On the pretense that he was indeed a risk to himself or others, they took him to the initial labs and validated his fears that he was on to something. The presence of snipers in the trees on the edge of his yard was more than a delusion. So he had signed up for the gig and reported that he and his crew had started on agriculture, reviving barren apple orchards and turning deserts into wheat fields. "Yes sir, wonderful landscapes from the mind's eye to the ground." So he was glad to see that the program was expanding and that there was perhaps a new peaceful goal for the armies of the world to focus on. When you can imagine abundance and create that sort of love everywhere in your mind's eye, what need is there for war? Most of us signed up for the program that night. We thought, *Might as well. We had nothing to lose, really. Houses in foreclosure, no career but the Army.*

We had no weapons. Last night, when the wild boar ran through the bivouac lit by the embers, we were startled. My fear vanished, as she seemed to smile over her shoulder. It is good to leave a trace of the past behind. The complex fabric of GPS World Healing 101 was laid on a soy gauze base. The new course of study—a melding of art, science, and spirituality—fell under biochemistry in most university catalogs. The primary function of coordinating individual dreams lined up with satellite codes was elusive to all but a few. It was however one of the greatest innovations of the century.

Sometimes the instructors would wait for hours in dead zones where the faint grids rolled over the dimples to coordinate "picnics"(a term for revived war-torn areas)—skies, the unbelievable blue of a June day. You never know what can happen when restructuring the world in such remote areas.

We have learned to move beyond the past. It is getting better and better every day. New picnics are sprouting up worldwide.

HAVEN

by Susan Chandel

For Mofle

"...the ones whose homes were destroyed
-who were stranded under the sky."

Fresh spring snow
Cream of Wheat.

Warm coffee,
hot chocolate
white dollops of fluff on top
brown speckles seeping through.

I did not see the ones whose homes were destroyed
who were stranded under the sky.

I did not want to see it.
I did not want anyone to see it.

The maple syrup pools
in the crevices,
the sweet steam
sweeter than plaster dust.

The refugees come here again
from the south.

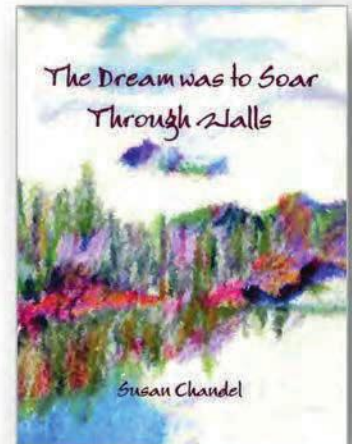
They say even with the cold
It is warmer and safer here,
though the same stars
pierce the heavens each night.

The wood fire softens our home.
The chickadees dance.
I cannot grieve.
These were not my losses.

The birch beacon
at the edge of our field
sings.

Read more of Susan's
poetry and prose in her
book *The Dream Was to
Soar Through Walls*
available for sale at:

<http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/sugarhousepress>



AUTHORS' BIOS

Dr. Rosalie H. Contino is a regular contributor and generous sponsor of *IdeaGems Magazine*. A second generation Italian-American, Rosalie resides in Brooklyn, New York, where she writes stories, poems, and plays. She received a BS degree in Elementary Education from Fordham University and PhD in Educational Theater from New York University.

Gillian Scott was born in the United Kingdom and emigrated to the United States in 1981. She currently resides in Tamarac, South Florida where she is married to local attorney Richard Entin. She has one daughter, Farrah, who currently attends University majoring in Criminal Justice. Gillian's book, *Island People* can be found here: <http://www.publishamerica.net/product91624.htm>

Claudia Aragon is an outstanding storyteller, capturing the nuances of family life and the difficulties of a hard-scrabble existence. Her writing has appeared in *The San Diego Reader*, *The Paper*, *The Sacramento News and Review*, and *Green Prints* magazine. Claudia has finished a fantasy novel and is currently working on an adaptation of *Frankenstein*. She is ghost writing the family history of a well-known resident in her area. She loves writing poetry and is inspired to write every day.

Jungmin Shon is a South Korean national with a B.A. in English. In 1997, she obtained her Master's degree in Journalism from a university in London, England. Now, she writes about her travel experiences all over the world.

Christine E. Miller, M.S. has been a professional writer for over 15 years, during which time her expertise has evolved from composing marketing and business copy to writing articles/blogs and creative non-fiction. Combining her marketing experience and writing talent, she also assists new authors in publishing their work by researching and composing effective and compelling Book Proposals to sell their non-fiction book or book idea to literary agents/publishers. In addition, Christine enjoys working with authors on ghostwriting and copyediting projects. To learn more and see some of her writing, check out www.tellmewhatyouwanttosay.com.

Pearl Hoffman, a retired violinist, writes short stories and poetry. A native of Chicago, she now lives in Los Angeles with her husband.

Melodee Currier lives in Dublin, Ohio with her husband, Doug. She left corporate America in 2008 where she worked as an intellectual property paralegal. Since then she has devoted her time to writing and has had articles published on a wide variety of topics. Her published articles can be read on her website, www.melcurrier.com.

Marion Schoeberlein has written and sold poetry since she was 12 years old. She has just celebrated her 85th Birthday on February 28, 2012. She has been widely published, especially in the June Cotner books which are available in local libraries..

Jeanne Mineo is a native of New York and retired from that great public school system in 2004. She is a recipient of four *WHO'S WHO IN AMERICAN TEACHERS* citations. She received her Bachelor of Science degree from Fordham University and her Master's Degree in Education from Adelphi University. A proud mother and grandmother, she has always enjoyed writing creatively. Jeanne is currently a volunteer docent for the Huntington Historical Society of Long Island, where she continues to work and educate children.

Larry Kampley (a.k.a. **Larry Montgomery**) is a retired Accountant/Chief Financial Officer who began writing poetry as a lark in inter-office chit chat. He spends most of his time writing prose. He has written several short stories and completed his first novel last year and is working on a second. Larry lives and works in San Diego, CA with his wife and nephew.

Becky Samet is a young poet and writer at the tender age of 13. This is her writing debut in *IdeaGems Magazine*.

Daniel Roche was born in Sturbridge, MA and still resides there with his brother and 3 nephews. He was educated at Becker College in Worcester, MA and currently writes fiction in a variety of genres, including literary fiction, horror, and humor. He has held many odd jobs while chasing the writing dream, including: mover, chimney sweep, plumber, fork truck driver, factory worker and drummer for punk band 'Coffee Inc.' Email Dan at: danroche@charter.net

Maria Citrowske (pen name **Matice Trowske**) is a high-school student, and the oldest of nine children. She's been writing for about three years, and particularly enjoys historical fiction. She lives in the Midwest, and is usually reading in her spare time.

Patricia Henkin-Bookman is originally from New York City but has lived in Europe for thirteen years, as well as visiting Japan. Her book, *As Long As You Believe* was published in 1995 as a Collector's Edition. She served as Rhode Island State Poet for two successive terms in 1992 and 1994, as well as winning writing awards in fiction and poetry. She also served as overseas Editor for *The Entertainer Magazine*, published in Italy, and contributed to European and American national publications as a freelance journalist. Patricia now enjoys living in Virginia.

Lucy Tharp grew up in Cumberland County, Tennessee during the 1930s. She came from a family of musicians and they had a small family musical group. They never made it to the big time, but they made their living playing locally. They made pennies compared to the money some of the bands make today. Lucy had some interesting experiences, some humorous, and some near tragic. This is true story about how Lucy and her family musical group almost lost their transportation and thought they might have to walk home carrying their instruments which would have been about a 50-mile trek.

Donna Krause resides in the suburbs of Philadelphia, PA, with her husband and cat. She is a proud mother of three. Donna attended Gwynedd-Mercy College and graduated Cum Laude, in Sociology and Social work. Donna has experience in the mental health field as a therapist. She is in tune with others' needs, as she is a spiritual person. Donna is well-read in psychology and spiritually based books. She writes poetry that centers on what inspires her in life. Donna is also an avid movie buff.

Paul Karwowski (pen name **P. K. Allen**) started writing in the early 90's, but then golf and work took much of his time until his retirement from Bath IronWorks in 2010. He then joined People Plus, where he enjoys the Write On! group and ping pong, along with his golf and family activities.

Susan Chandel was first published in *Seventeen Magazine* in July 1974. Her work has also appeared in *The Cafe Review* and the online collection *iPeace: 15,000 stories*. Susan received a B.A. in English from the University of Massachusetts, and promptly traveled North America in search of a reason not to settle down. She returned to New England, raised three children, and has worked as an advocate in mental health, rape crisis and domestic violence for over 20 years.



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