

FALL 2022

LITERARY TEA



**STONY BROOK
UNIVERSITY**



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Cover Photo by Bob Stone



Life on the Canal

Patricia Ballan

It's morning here now and all is blessedly quiet as I look out onto the water. The wind is south/southwest which I can tell from my neighbor's brave flag.

Friends who've stayed with me overnight have commented on the peace and the silence; so different from the hubbub of the city they left.

Occasionally, geese honk overhead or gulls cry as they sweep across the sky. Fish jump out of the water, mallards and swans glide by noiselessly. Terns wheel and plummet down to catch fish on the fly. The terns are my favorite. They are so aerodynamically perfect as they dive like white-winged darts. Cats prowl the dock, sniffing under the boardwalk, hoping to capture a muskrat.

Even in winter, sweet songbirds trill a good morning to me and I call out my response, hoping they can sense my intent.

Before global warming when winters were colder, ice would build up on the canal to a depth of 4 inches or more. A neighbor would test the thickness of the ice, and if he deemed it safe, he'd allow the children to play ice hockey.

A scalloper, whose livelihood depended upon his access to the Great South Bay, would break the ice to gain passage out of the canal. He also shrouded his duckboat with reeds and phragmites to provide cover as a duck blind.

In summer there were small bait fish and blue claw crabs to be caught. In fall, before his school day started, our younger son would be on the dock with his net, hoping to catch a “keeper”.

One day, he pulled an eel out of the water, skinned it, cut it in fours, and asked me to cook it for him. I put some oil in a saucepan and dropped the pieces of eel into the pan. To my horror, the pieces twitched as though still alive! I had always enjoyed smoked eel before that day; (after it, not so much).

We have room for a few boats to tie up along our bulkhead, and back in the day, we used to rent out dock space to clambers and pleasure boaters. Now we allow friends to tie up here without charge. Our own boat sits unused and shrink-wrapped on the ramp. Times have changed.



A man in a green boat motors past on his way to the open bay. He comes back soon after. This happens every day; sometimes twice. Where does he go? Why does he come back so soon? These are unanswered questions.

Because of boat traffic, much of the wildlife rarely comes to visit me. I seldom see grey herons, kingfishers and white egrets anymore. The marshes and reeds across the canal have been replaced by houses. In one of them lives my good friend, Kathy.

After work on a hot August day, she and I would jump into the canal, meet in the middle, and with rubber tires around us, chat until we cooled off. Then, refreshed, we'd paddle back to our homes to make dinner.

My husband constructed our outdoor bar in such a way that our guests could enjoy a view of the water from their chairs. He built me a kitchen outside so we could cook, bake and barbeque while being part of the conversation. His hospitality was legendary.

My chair faces the west. Tonight's sunset features cloud striations of peach, blue and pearl gray as the sun descends.

Armed with the memory of this beautiful day on the canal, I await tomorrow with optimism, serenity and thankfulness.



A Clam in a Bottle

Terrence Burke

Standing in my flat bottomed boat, I could feel each clam dislodged from the sand as I pulled my iron rake across the floor of the bay. My hands felt their vibrations through the tee-handle and long aluminum pole. All had to be set just right, the precise length of my pole according to the depth of the water, the stiffness of overlapping pole sections according to whether the wind pushed my boat with or against the current, and the length of line for the drag anchor according to the speed of the boat’s drift. When all was set just right, the teeth of the rake combed the bay bottom with the least resistance producing a rhythmic cha-ching, cha-ching vibration.

One moment the cha-chings, suddenly changed to cha-clunk, cha-clunk. I knew it was not a rock; the bay bottom at this location was only sand and silt with some eel grass. With a few rapid pulls I brought the rake closer to the side of the boat, then quickly flipped it over to keep the clams in its basket, and hand-over-hand pulled the rake to the surface, dumping its contents into a metal wire-basket.

Along with a few clams and some eel grass was a bottle that appeared to be very old. It had thick glass of greenish tint with imperfections of imbedded air bubbles. The top had a chunky neck that would have held a cork. The bottom was rounded so it could not stand upright. Around its base were embossed the names of some cities in Ireland including Dublin and Cork. Possibly it was brought across the ocean by an immigrant from Ireland sometime during the previous century.

Especially surprising was the empty shell of a fully-grown clam inside. It was a species no longer extant in the bay, a relic from a time past when the ecology of the bay was different. In its larval stage it would have looked like a tiny translucent butterfly drifting in the currents. The currents serendipitously swept the larva into the bottle where it formed its shell and lived its life safe from predators.

As I examined it, my heart yearned to know the person whose hand tossed the bottle into the bay, likely someone from the land of my ancestors. From his or her hand to mine, it connected us over a span of more than one-hundred years, two souls from two different lifetimes taking hold of the same bottle, each in our own time. In the time between, the quiet clam lived its placid life inside.



Growing Up Half Jewish

Jane Cash

I thought the whole world was Jewish. In the Bronx, where I spent a quarter of my life. Nearly everyone was Jewish. My father was. One of my two grandmothers was. There was not one, but two “Kosher” butchers on the main block near my house. At PS 64 on Jewish holidays, there were only fifty kids out of a usual attendance of 800.

I went to my Grandma Goldie’s third-floor walk-up apartment every Friday to celebrate the Sabbath. My sister and I often accompanied her to the live Kosher chicken market where she picked out the unfortunate victim which was to become the centerpiece of the Sabbath meal. Grandma Goldie also prepared gefilte fish and matzo ball soup from scratch and lit the Sabbath candles. I don’t remember any of the words of blessing, but to this day, I use her recipe for garlic dill pickles.

In those days, people wanted to be “real Americans” and spoke little about the life they left behind in the “old country”. Grandma Goldie came over by boat through Ellis Island with two of her sons, one of whom was said to have been thirteen pounds at birth as compared to a sack of potatoes. Her other two sons, including my father, were born in the U.S. As unthinkable as it is to me now, she never saw her parents again after she left. My grandfather, Itzick, whose name is memorialized in my middle name, Isabelle, died falling off a ladder while painting houses. He left his wife with four small children to manage on her own.

My favorite part of the day as a child was walking around the corner to the iron stairs of the Jerome Avenue elevated train, to meet my father as he returned from work. I waited impatiently as each train roared over my head. I would have covered my ears but I usually had a five cent sour pickle in each hand. The one with a small bite was for me. The one for my Father was still whole. Both were purchased from the pickle man whose smelly, waist high barrels were filled with cucumbers in various states of decomposition. Iris, Rebecca, Harriet, and Deborah were my friends. Not a Christian among them. I was the only shicksa at the bar mitzvah of my friend Steven Cohen much to the chagrin of his mother.

Sometimes, I rebelled against this atmosphere. At Christmas, my sister and I boldly set up a Nativity set, lights and all, in the large, first-floor bedroom window of my apartment. On the High Holy Days, when everyone paraded in the streets dressed in their finest, I incurred some disdainful looks when I dressed in dungarees.

I thought Grandma Goldie would always be there. Sadly, she moved to Florida when I was 10 years old. I saw her rarely after that. She is seated in the front row of my wedding picture



with her nylon stockings rolled up to her knees. Her last visit was soon after my first child was born. Grandma made her famous matzo ball soup which gave my Irish husband a heartburn that he never forgot. She also washed the floor in my kitchen and then put newspapers down immediately, leaving newsprint on the beige tiles.

First communion, confirmation, and years of after-school religious instruction could not get the Jewish out of me. My friend Linda tells me that I am the most Jewish Catholic person she has ever known. People routinely wish me Shana Tova(Happy New Year) in the fall on Rosh Hashanah. Ironically, or perhaps understandably, two of my three children converted to Judaism despite having been raised as practicing Catholics. Five of my granddaughters are Jewish as well. All had their Bat Mitzvahs. At 46, my son was Bar Mitzvahed too. My father and Grandma Goldie would be so proud.



No Percipient Witnesses- The Death of Rabbi Meir Kahane

Joel Cohen

Rabbi Meir Kahane z”l , was murdered on Monday November 5, 1990 in NYC while speaking at the Marriott East Side Hotel – Lexington Avenue 48th-49th Street. He addressed an otherwise friendly crowd - 70 members of Zionists Emergency Evacuation Rescue Operation, in a second floor conference room. His remarks began at around 7PM for roughly an hour and he then began taking questions from the audience.

A gunman then walked up to a table where Kahane had just sat down and fired at him at point-blank range.

The gunman fled the hotel on foot, then attempted to commandeer a taxi at gunpoint. A postal police officer from the U.S. Postal Service returned the gunman’s fire and brought down and arrested the gunman- El Sayyid A. Nosair.

Rabbi Kahane was pronounced dead at nearby Bellevue Hospital at 9:57 PM.

Nosair was charged with Kahane’s murder, but was acquitted of such charge; he was convicted on assault and other lesser charges. According to the NY Times (12/23/1991) the alternate juror, interviewed after he spoke with other jurors, said the doubts arose because the prosecution produced no witness in the five –week trial who saw the defendant shoot Kahane (a percipient or eyewitness)

THREE POTENTIAL WITNESSES:

I first saw Rabbi Kahane in person as he spoke to students at the Bronx High School of Science. It was the fall of 1970 and Black Power was heady. I was unsure what the reaction of my fellow students would be to this Jewish radical who symbolized “Never Again” and had founded the JDL.

The Rabbi acquitted himself very well, handling all the questions he received. I don’t recall any boos, chants or shouting down. I left the proceeding proud of him and happy to know he stood behind me. I didn’t approach the rabbi after his talk.

After their own visit to Israel in the summer of 1970, my father’s Judaism waxed and he became shomer shabbat . My parents sent me to Israel- Summer on Kibbutz from June to late August 1973.

I next saw Rabbi Kahane at Baruch College in NYC around spring 1974. I was a junior pursuing my bachelor’s degree in Accounting. His message to the audience was that God hadn’t



put us on this earth just to be Accountants. I agreed with his position but didn't speak to Kahane after his speech.

My father was a dedicated supporter and correspondent of Rabbi Kahane beginning after 1970. I remember him proudly showing me “personal” letters from Kahane thanking him for his generous contributions.

Mom and Dad would attend any debates or public appearances by Rabbi Kahane in Riverdale most notably his March 24, 1985 debate with Alan Dershowitz.

NOVEMBER 1990.

At this time I had been working for a major accounting firm at its 277 Park Ave location for just under a year. Previously the firm was based at 787 Seventh Ave. 277 Park Ave has a Lexington Avenue entrance at 48th Street just opposite the Marriott East Side Hotel.

Mom worked for an executive search firm at 200 Park Ave.- 42nd Street.

Dad, a self employed CPA and non-practicing attorney, worked out of my parent's Bronx coop apartment.

Kahane was scheduled to appear at Brandeis University on or about November 2, 1990. The speech was cancelled at the last minute due to security concerns, but the intervention of Dershowitz got the speech reinstated. The speech went on without incident.

By this time another debate between Rabbi Avi Weiss & Kahane was scheduled for Tuesday November 6th at The Hebrew Institute of Riverdale (“HIR”) This is the debate my parents planned to attend, but community opposition to Kahane and the related security concerns cancelled the debate. Avi was then called a wimp by some supporters on the opposite side.

My parents sought word on a rescheduled debate/appearance in Riverdale or in NYC. HIR could not, or did not provide them with the information that Kahane would in fact speak on November 5th in NYC at a venue that was only short blocks away from my mom and me.

EPILOGUE

Knowing my father's deep admiration for Kahane and the opportunity for three of us to see him together, I am absolutely certain that Dad, Mom & I would have been at the fateful debate and nearby Kahane after his speech when he was killed.

I consider the family to have been spared by heaven from witnessing the tragedy.



Liar

Laura Colon Judge Silverstein

I am liar. I live my lie every day in a supermarket or in a theatre, riding past you on my bicycle or running in a rainstorm. Merely walking on a beautiful sunny day or watching a parade, I lie.

My biggest lie is when I first meet you. You give me a quick look over. I instantly lie. You stare at me and my lie festers like a canker sore hidden in the furthest corner of my mouth, blazing white, full of puss, a septic lie streaming in my blood. It hurts.

I am an imposter. Fake our fraudulent? You will reveal your thoughts. You always do. You cut me with your eyes, see the gag twisted across my mouth. Lunge to kick my ass. My tongue ties in a bellow of rage, searches the words of our language for inclusion, some peace from this madness, years, decades before your punch lands. It hurts. You say, “you’re a fucking thief!” I agree. Land a punch for history’s entanglement. You kick me in the gut. My womb recoils. You don’t see the ghosts shuddering in my veins, flailing not to drown in this maze of toxic lies.

You know. I hold no hostilities. I know when the moon is nine tenths full, bloody red in the sky and a comet falls when the reeds are blowing, the oranges growing, the coqui croaking, the leopard spotting his prey as aardvark sniff for a meal will you stop, hear the congas drumming, the guitar strumming in my heart and the flute piercing the sound barrier of a revolution, will you look at me and smile, wipe centuries of dust from the vestiges of my face, and know that I am Puertorriquena.

You will hold my hand with the hands of our brethren, those who can see the ghosts dancing inside my bloody maze of veins; push my belly button and delete my lie. We will dance a salsa, *como una salsa rich and flavorful, together, with the ghosts beneath our skin.

**like a sauce*



My Mother

Mike Dolber

She would have turned 100 this November 22- and every birthday since her forty-first reminded me of the cake that remained untouched the night that we watched the awful news out of Dallas. Florence Pincus was the second of three children of Abraham and Rose, immigrants from Minsk who had arrived in America less than a decade earlier. They moved from Bayonne, New Jersey to Brooklyn, where Florence attended “Girls’ Commercial High School”, a school whose very name is a testament to the stereotyped gender channeling of the 1930s. She learned secretarial skills that were to serve her well, but with no disrespect to that occupation, I wonder what she might have become had she been given a broader range of options for her education. At the age of 20, she married my father, Leon Dolber, and not very long after that he was off to war. My sister, Ellen, was born in 1944, while my father was stationed in Europe. I arrived six years later.

After the war, my parents and grandparents owned a candy store, or luncheonette, as they called it. The work was hard, and the hours were long, and Florence did not make much use of her secretarial education until after they sold the store when I was around five. She worked for the East New York Savings Bank, and later for several big firms in what we always called “the city.” She took pride in her role as an “executive secretary,” working for upper and middle level “big shots”. Despite the daily subway rides, she enjoyed working in Manhattan. The environment of the upwardly mobile and well-to-do was a real change from the counter of Pinky’s Luncheonette in Brooklyn. She became a loyal customer of midtown department stores, and we used to joke that when she died, we would scatter her ashes over Bloomingdale’s. My father and I often picked her up at the Sutter Avenue subway station after her trip home from the city. Sometimes we would have an egg cream or a lime rickey with Italian ices, often with a Mallomar, in the candy store near the station. “Do you really need that? We’re going to have dinner soon.” she would say to my father when she arrived early enough to interrupt our snack. On November 9, 1965, the night of the great blackout, my dad and I cautiously drove through the darkened streets and paralyzed traffic lights on a mission to bring her home. I can still see the relief on my parents’ faces when we finally reached her and began the journey back to Brooklyn.

My mother worked for a time in an office where Jackie Robinson occasionally had business dealings. He once gave her an autograph, which, mounted and framed under his picture, is now one of my treasures. Years later, she had a job in a building where Donald Trump had an office, and on several occasions, she found herself sharing an elevator with him and others. She would relate with disgust how he would check out the attractive young women in the elevator and then, as she put it, “grab their ass”. I would teasingly ask her if he ever approached her in the elevator, but I will leave her blunt and expressive answer to your imagination. In 1969, I became the first in my family to be involved in an interfaith



relationship. I believe my mother might have been a little concerned at first, but whatever their initial feelings might have been, I have always been thankful for the warmth and love with which both of my parents welcomed Elaine into their lives. From the day they met her, they loved her. There was no drama, no angst, and no conflict. Both Elaine and I were forever moved and grateful for that. Florence was devoted to her four grandchildren – my sister’s son and daughter, and then mine -- and later to her great grandchildren. I regret that she never knew my granddaughter, who was born six months before my mother passed away, and that my granddaughter will never know her.

When my father became ill with emphysema, my mother’s inner strength and independence became apparent. She had never driven, but in her sixties, she took lessons and got her license. After my father’s death in 1988, my mom moved from Brooklyn to an apartment in Old Bridge, New Jersey, several minutes from the home of her sister, Harriet, and her brother-in-law Mendy. She found a job a short drive away, working as a cashier in a coffee shop that had, like her, been transplanted from Brooklyn. Several years later, after Mendy passed away, my mother moved in with her sister. They were to live together for over 25 years. It was a lifeline for both of them, but it also became something of a sitcom. Golden Girls North?

The sitcom plot thickened a few years later when their older brother, Paul, split from his wife and moved into the same apartment complex that my mother had lived in. So now they were three siblings, senior citizens bound by love, loss, and circumstance. The Odd Couple plus one? The trio would often go to restaurants and diners, where the two sisters would try to arrange the seating so that neither one of them would be mistaken for Paul’s wife. They would criticize him for the way he dressed, for leaving crumbs on the floor, for allegedly cheating at Scrabble, and for making frequent but understandable escapes to his favorite neighborhood tavern.

My mother and my aunt were fanatic about cleanliness and neatness. It’s safe to say my uncle wasn’t. My mom would walk around the kitchen with a dish towel under her foot, wiping up anything that might have spilled or dropped. She couldn’t wait until we finished eating so that she could clear the table and clean up, asking “are you finished?” before the last bite was even eaten. And her food had to be hot. Lukewarm soup was grounds for instant rejection, and she would invariably ask the server in the diner to refill her coffee cup if it was less than scalding. These idiosyncrasies were part of what made her Florence.

The bond between the Florence, Harriet and Paul, though not without conflict, was real and special. Paul was the first to pass away. My wife died in January 2018, and my sister not even two years later. Harriet succumbed to leukemia in February 2020, the same week that my granddaughter was born. My mother, in her nineties, was forced to endure the death of her daughter-in-law, her daughter, and her sister all within two years, and yet she did it with strength and dignity. When my aunt was hospitalized for long periods of time, my mother moved in with



me. For a while, she was still able to balance her checkbook, and sometimes she beat me at Scrabble, but all of the losses and her advanced age were taking their toll. She avoided COVID, but she contracted an infection, and ended up in a rehab and then a nursing home. She passed away in August of 2020, at age 97. We had always thought that if anyone could make it to 100, she could. But it wasn't to be. Her funeral was outdoors, attended by about nine people, and lasted fifteen minutes. She deserved much more. Her long life was a testament to love, strength, and family, and I miss her greatly.



Womb with a View

Len Farano

Boy it’s dark in here! Kinda humid and squishy too. How the hell long have I been in here? Must be at least eight or nine months. Ever since one of Dad’s swimmies made it to shore. There’s no one to talk to but I can hear voices. If one more person decides to place their ear on this wall I am going to give them a substantial zetz with my little leg. And who is the clown that thinks he should be singing through the wall? And in a language I don’t understand. What’s “O Sole Mio” mean anyway? I must say they feed me pretty good although some of those early combinations of pickles and ice cream were a bit much but the pineapple pizza wasn’t bad.

Oh, I hear a gang of them now discussing what they’re going to call me. “If it’s a girl we’ll call her Antonia or Barbara.”

I want to shout, “Hey, check THIS out!

Some of these names are God awful. For boys they are down to two. One for each of my Italian grandfathers. Luigi and Leonardo. Are you kidding me? Do you want me to be mocked in school? Who knows how well I’ll be able to fight? Lose those ancient monikers. You want an “L name”? How about Lance, Landon or Lincoln? I get it. It’s tradition but this is America not Italy. Mom and Dad, I hear your logic, but cut me some slack already. Do you really think those old geezers care?

Uh oh! Somethings going on. This place is rocking and rolling. What am in, an earthquake? Steady boy. Oh, here they go again. This has got to stop I’m getting seasick. Oh, it’s quiet again. I hear some lady telling Mom she needs to push. Push what? What am I in, a wheelbarrow? Who is this “pushy” broad anyway? Here she goes again. “Push Connie, push.”

Now we are really moving. I’m doing the backstroke without moving my arms. Hey it just got brighter in here. Now dark again. Now bright, dark, bright, brighter, brighter. Hey, I’m coming out!

I hear someone shout. “It’s a boy!” No kidding Red Ryder. I coulda told you that months ago.



Resort Summer

Aldustus Jordan

“I just work. I’m black. I work and I don’t bother nobody.”

From *Native Son* by Richard Wright

In 1960, my family lived in Long Branch, New Jersey just minutes from the ocean in a neighborhood not listed in the tourist guide. My parents, barely in their 30’s with 5 kids, always struggled on a minister’s salary. In the best of times my father was paid about \$125.00 a week. To earn extra money, he became a jack of all trades and even mastered some--house painter, landscaper, and chef/owner of a hot dog stand across the street. The church provided a small broken down 3-bedroom parsonage with treacherous crumbly cement stairs leading to a tired see-through wooden porch. At night every room became a bedroom! I slept on the living room couch.

Making ends meet is very difficult when finances are always at loose ends, but my resourceful mother made it look easy. She ironed shirts at home for wealthy folks and handled the family money, a kind of “wealth manager.” My father could not be trusted. He would give away his last dime to a perfect stranger. All paychecks, including mine, were handed over to her. No one was allowed to touch the black dog-eared notebook that contained her cryptic financial notations Each week she announced:

“June (my father’s nickname short for Jr.)
these are the only bills I am paying this week.”

Being a high-profile person in the community, he needed to know who to avoid each week.

“Dad, when do I get to keep my paychecks?” It was one of those out of body experience questions that sounded appropriate in my mind, but leaving my lips was a foolish mistake. The air grew tense, my siblings began to look at the floor, and my mother was poised to referee. With controlled calm and firmness, my father responded:

“Do you see the food you’re eating, the clothes you wear, the roof over your head, your haircuts, and basketball sneakers, that’s your paycheck.” The subject never came up again. It was a teaching moment and my father seized it. With my first paycheck after college, I made a down payment on a brand-new Chevy Impala, a gift I handed over to my mother. Some habits are hard to break!



Living in a seaside resort town almost guaranteed a summer job. In the summer of 1960, just after my freshman year in high school, with working papers in hand; I found a job as a pot washer in a 5-star restaurant located in the ritzy west end. I loved my job. I was buried deep in the bowels of the restaurant with no one telling me what to do and I bothered nobody. Happily, I was far from the guests arriving in Cadillacs accompanied by uniformed drivers with overdone toothy smiles, white-gloves, and distinctive black caps. These folks often wore tuxedos, gowns, and expensive jewelry. We were worlds apart but somehow had an intimate relationship at the dinner table—my pots cooked their expensive gourmet meals.

I worked with three unforgettable dishwashers, “Joe Snow”, “Tookie” and “Crow Bait.” I never learned their real names and they never volunteered them. They simply called me “Son.” Joe Snow’s nickname was at odds with his blue-black face. He was tall, angular, and fancied himself a lady’s man. “Man, you shoulda’ seen the chick I was with last night,” he would brag. His trademark was “conked” shiny slick hair protected by a tightly tied blue “Do Rag.” Tookie appeared to be the youngest, He was a short light-skinned dude with a round cherub-like face and green eyes. He had an easy smile and talked a lot. Each week his pay disappeared betting on horses at near-by Monmouth Park. By payday he was always totally broke.

“Crow Bait”. the oldest, was quiet most of the time. I could just sense that luck and opportunity never knocked on his door. Unlike the others, he did not engage in idle chatter. But the quiet man wanted to talk to me. In a thick Southern drawl, he said,

“Son, let me tell ya why I left my family in Alabama ‘round your age.
A cracker smacked ma sistah cuz she didn’t pay nuf respect,
Me, I sez nothin’ to him, keeps my feelings to myself, hard to do.”
He then lowered his voice, looked around with a watchful eye and said,

“But I bides my time, evil eyes him for days, and one night I stabs him.
The onliest place I heard ‘bout up north was Harlem and that’s where I went.”

His revelation was without, anger, fear, or remorse. Stunned, I dared not ask any questions He said all he wanted me to know. At that moment he allowed me beyond his protective hard exterior and into his heart. Indeed, still waters do run deep.

My parents instilled a strong work ethic. I arrived early and often worked on my days off. These traits were not lost on Jim, the ruddy, overweight, and ever vigilant restaurant manager. Just before Memorial Day, he called me into his office. I noticed a pair of



black pants, white shirt, vest, bowtie, and cummerbund--the uniform of a busboy! With pride, Jim said,

“Al, this uniform is yours, you have earned a promotion. You will make more money and share in the tip pool.”

“But Jim,” I responded respectfully, “I don’t know nothing about the dining room or what to do.”

“Al, don’t worry, the others will show you what to do. You start next Monday.” He patted me on the shoulder and left the office.

Jim was not a civil rights pioneer. He was a pragmatic business man who respected and rewarded hard work. In a few days, I would become the first and only black person to work in the dining room. The promotion was a burden, not an honor. I did not want it. Why would I want to leave the comfort of my kinship with “Joe Snow”, “Tookie” and “Crow Bait?” to join a world of uncertainty and suspicion? In a desperate attempt to feel comfortable in my new role, I tried on my uniform several times and looked in the mirror- black pants, white shirt, black vest, black bowtie, and cummerbund and, yes, my “Sunday go to meeting shoes.” Why would I want to look like a butler? At 15 years old, I believed that Jim wanted me to become, Rastaus, the smiling black man on the Cream of Wheat cereal box!



You Never Know

Lily Klima

The date set for closing on the house was all too soon closing in on me. Under time constraints to sort and make the rest of my stuff ready for the moving van, stress and pressure persisted.

“Mom,” said my daughter holding up a Coach bag, “are you ever going to use this one again?”

How many hand bags do you need?”

“You never know.” I replied.

“Do you need all of these sandals? I have never seen you wear this pair. If you haven’t worn anything in two years, throw it out. Try on these slacks and dresses.”

With great reluctance, I tried on the clothes. Sure enough many no longer fit or were very much out of style. They went into the donation pile. I kept two black gowns that still fit and are somewhat fashionable. You never know.

“Do you want the blue suitcase or the red one?”

“Both. I want both.”

“Mom, get rid of these mismatched mugs, wine and drinking glasses. Do you really need all these vases and knickknacks?”

That’s when my fountain of pent up frustration erupted, “It is always easier to discard someone else’s treasures. I can’t wait to visit you in Colorado this Christmas and go through your closets to get rid of your stuff!” Too tired to cry, we hugged and laughed.

In contrast to my daughter, my son insisted I take everything I wanted. “Just take it, we can get rid of it later.” They both meant well. She the minimalist, he the sentimentalist.

Boxes taped and labeled, wall hangings wrapped, and furniture loaded onto the truck, we said goodbye to the house and followed the movers to my new apartment.



My kids were with me for a week. They unpacked, put things where I wanted, and when order took shape, I relaxed. I could not have made this emotionally and physically exhausting move without them.

There are still twenty-two boxes piled in the walk-in closet in the main bedroom. An additional forty-five boxes and bins, including boogie boards, beach chairs, beach umbrella and of course suitcases, stacked in the 4’x 4’x 6’ storage cage in the basement of the building. Thanks to my son who organized it, the cage is full. I don’t think I can even add a stick of gum!

I am within a ten mile radius of my LI friends, and much closer to the Stony Brook University, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship and the Paumanok Camera Club.

Residents and staff at Jefferson’s Ferry Retirement Community are warm and welcoming.

Surrounded by my own furniture, I feel cozy and comfortable in my ground floor apartment facing a large pond which I don’t have to maintain!

Embraced with fond memories and my husband’s spirit, I am on a journey prepared for new adventures. You never know.



Having Fun on the Farm

Mel Lantz

Remembering events from the past is always a useful way to spend extra time. Something came to mind which transported me back—way back. Now, I was in the ‘40’s living in a small Iowa town. Normally, I ran around with friends on a nice summer day finding something to do.

Mother appeared and instructed me and sister, Bonnie, to stick around because we were going out to visit Dad’s brother and his family on the farm. Sis and I jumped around excitedly. Now we could see our cousins, Marvin and Janice! That was always a happy event.

As our old car drove across the bridge over the Turkey River, we studied the water flowing below us. The road was gravel and the tires complained as we made our way out of town. The road turned and passed by the river. Hills were wooded and an occasional field appeared. Finally, Dad turned up the gravel drive and got out to open the gate. Cows roamed around and the gate prevented them from escaping.

Ahead, up the hill, the house appeared. There was one more gate to open to get in the yard. Mom and Dad waved to their adult relatives, and we jumped around as our cousins came out the door. Time was spent on the porch and soon we were ready for lunch.

What else could we do? All recent events had been discussed. There was no TV and the radio only featured news and music. Someone suggested playing the chicken/porch game. We were on!

Chickens roamed around the farmyard freely and flew to the top of the fence to get inside, where we were. Maybe there would be worms and scraps of food they could pick up. The game started when one of us chased a chicken and caught it before it could fly back over the fence. Chickens sleep, or roost, with their head under a wing. Our next step was to push the chicken’s head under a wing and then to rock it from side to side, for about a minute. The catcher then walked toward the house and gently placed the sleeper on the porch.

Then it was time to catch another chicken and place it beside the first. The game was to see how many sleeping chickens could be lined up. Before long, one would wake up,



shake its feathers and stride indignantly back into the yard. In our minds eye we could hear the bird complaining, “How could they do that to me! What will the others think? That can’t happen again!” With that off its chest and a few more shakes of feathers, it went back to being a chicken.

We didn’t much care who won. It was just our way of having fun.



At the End of the Day There’s Another . . . Cliché

Martin H. Levinson

At the end of the day, the day is over. That’s the God’s honest truth. If you want a longer day, get up at the crack of dawn. Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.

Some people strut their stuff, line their ducks up in a row, step into the sunshine, and have the time of their lives. Well gather ye rosebuds while ye may but the world is no one’s oyster. Life’s a long, hard slog and in the end we all have to pay the piper.

Other people go through existence with their backs against the wall, always at loose ends, thinking what doesn’t kill them makes them stronger. To these folks, life’s a bitch and then you marry one. Hey, I’m not going to bury my head in the sand and say life’s a bowl of cherries, but the show must go on, the game’s worth the candle, so eat, drink, and be merry.

But don’t sink your teeth into too much food. Quit while you’re ahead. That’s the best way to keep oneself fit as a fiddle. While it’s okay to let yourself go now and again, if you eat like a horse and drink like a fish you can bet your bottom dollar you’ll be pushing up daisies sooner rather than later.

Speaking of flowers, I know a place where, come hell or high water, cheap blossoms are there for the asking. You can have them for a song. If you think I’m pulling your chain, call my bluff and check the joint out.

To keep the ball rolling, I also know a place where clothing can be bought on the cheap. It’s a snap to get to, even for people who can’t find their way out of a paper bag and are dumber than a box of rocks. And the service there is to die for. The employees don’t have a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. They’ll go the extra mile for you.

Like every Tom, Dick, and Harry, I want to be served toot suite when I go shopping. It drives me up a wall when I enter a store and the salesclerks are just chewing the fat with each other and taking up space. Hey, I’m busier than a ten-peckered dog in a hydrant factory. I don’t have time to screw around.

And lots of salespeople don’t know diddlyquat. It seems every time I ask a salesperson about a product they say, “It’s the greatest thing since sliced bread.” But I guess I should count my blessings. I could be told, “I’m busy right now, I’ll get back to you in a jiff,” and then the person telling me that takes a powder and I don’t see hide nor hare of them. I yearn for the good old days, when you didn’t have to fight tooth and nail to be waited on and all was right with the world. But that era has come and gone. Now it’s every man for himself, rob Peter to pay Paul, do whatever tickles your pickle.

I hope you don’t think I’m like a time bomb waiting to explode. I’m not. I can take it or leave it, ride the tide, go with the flow. But lately I’ve been up to my neck in alligators



and that’s made it difficult for me to maintain an even keel. Still, my Momma didn’t raise no fool and I want to age gracefully, so I’m going to try to stay cool. Better to keep your shirt on and not get bent out of shape, because you don’t have to be a rocket scientist or the smartest guy in the room to know if you let people get under your skin, sure as you’re born you’ll get caught by the shorthairs.



She Had Not Lost Her Singing Voice

Rachelle Psaris

Poor Dolores-she had had a stroke recently and could not express herself clearly-she talked gibberish. She came back from minor surgery and beamed when I offered her some apple juice and a piece of pound cake. With no prompting she began to sing-her sweet voice filling the Ambulatory Surgery unit. Of course none of us knew what she was singing, but we hovered over her urging her on. I asked her son if she had always liked to sing and he told us she did. Suddenly, one of my colleagues asked her to sing “You Are My Sunshine”, and Dolores broke into song, the words not recognizable, but the melody pure and the voice clear and beautiful. For a moment the tragic outcome of the stroke was forgotten as one intact area of her brain illuminated through her singing voice.



Saint Peter and the Golden Gate

Dan Sherry

I saw a light in the distance and proceeded in that direction. It was strange being in the in-between world of the ever-after. The Buddhists call it the Bardo and Christian call it Purgatory. It was nothing of the kind. There was no pain, no suffering, no anything. Just strange. I continued walking toward the light while there was no ground to walk on, no legs to use. Strange new world but just an in-between.

When I arrived into the light, I saw St. Peter. He was standing some distance from some beautiful stairs that led to a large golden gate. He was large. Not just large, huge! Where all the saints up here of such size?

I had a whole life on earth to be ready for this moment. All those years being educated by the nuns and priests. Would any of it mean a thing? My fear was all those moments of doubt. But Saint Peter was not God. Maybe he was not privy to my doubts. I decided that a friendly approach was in order. Observing the souls in front of me discussing who-knows-what with him, they seemed frightened. I would keep it light, so to speak. My turn came.

“Hey, Saint Pete, how’s it going?” With a stern look from high above me, I realized a friendly, light demeanor was inappropriate. The results of this little interview would last an eternity. ‘Get it right moron’, I said to myself.

With a fiery gleam in his eyes he said, “Tell me why you deserve to climb those stairs to heaven versus those other stairs down to hell?”

I hadn’t even seen those other stairs which were a wee bit before the stairs to the golden gate.” Pay attention, dummy. This is it. There is no tomorrow”.

“Well, Saint Peter I did the best I could while down on earth. Lead a pretty good life. Helped my fellow man when I could. Raised a good family. Spent some time with a few charities trying to assist others in need. Avoided those mortal sins as best as possible. I even prayed from time to time”.

With a thundering voice I heard the words I dreaded, “Have you always had faith in Jesus, God the Father and the Holy Ghost?”

“Damn, now what?” I never did figure out that Holy Ghost thing. I remembered Mark 16:16, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Well, I certainly believe now, so I’ll go with that. And once again I try to figure out how much this guy knows.

“Saint Peter, I had from time to time some very small doubts about the Holy Ghost but at the end of the day, I returned to belief in God the Father and of course Jesus. Hope that helps.”



Saint Peter looks down at me and points me in the direction of the stairs. I start walking not knowing which stairs he pointed me toward. With dread I slowly proceeded. In a short time one set of stairs actually disappeared. I just keep going, walking into eternity.



War in Black and White

Bob Stone

The cannon’s black steel spits its lethal white flash.
Walls crumble to ruins in the moon ‘s pallid light.
Winter’s snow falls white on the blackening ash
where blood dries to black and bones bleach to white.
Missiles fly over and soon come to crash
creating false dawn in the darkness of night.
Their phosphorus flares claw out to lash
innocent faces and rob them of sight.

Pledges on paper in black ink are signed
by men in starched shirts whose clean hands agree.
To ensure that their power and wealth are aligned
they decide who is chained and who will be free.

While mothers despair at the moment of birth
bodies in shrouds are returned to the earth



Lubec, Maine

Bob Stone

In a restaurant at the docks
I was drinking my beer
waiting for a lobster roll.
I watched people gathering
in a park near the water.
Silent through the plate glass
they were placing benches and a podium
in front of two great slabs of granite.
The waitress looked out
for a long minute, then
told me it was memorial service
for the men who were lost.
I thought about what happened
to a wife or a mother
when the sea took a man.
She didn't get a slow ride
in the back seat of a black car
didn't get an engraved headstone
set on a windy hill.
There was only an empty room
or a half-cold bed.
Maybe a younger brother
or a child got the room.
If she was lucky
she might take in a boarder
or go down to the cannery
and try to get work on the line.
Now, if it's not slack season
she takes an extra shift at the café.
The waitress brought my lobster roll
then started clearing the next table.



Thanksgiving

Bob Stone

Premonitions

Chief Massasoit visits the Plymouth colony with his finely feathered warriors and marvels as the Pilgrims march and fire their guns in what becomes the first Thanksgiving Day parade.

The Hunters

Carefully groomed newscasters lead the morning news warning:

GANGS OF ROGUE TURKEYS TERRORIZE YOUNG MOTHERS

Outrage ensues as men and boys rally to quiver and bow, but hearing the shouts, the flock seeks shelter before the onslaught. The men return home in drab and orange, mud smeared, beer filled, laughing louder than necessary.

The Gatherers

Women move through the kitchen in practiced rituals, preparing their offering of the headless, footless, hollow hull amply stuffed with a seductive cargo of fragrant herbs, berries, bread and oils.

The Aftermath

Gravy and wine form curious blots across the table cloth, cranberry sauce slumps in sanguine clots before the foundered wreck soon to be salvaged and transformed to rise again in casseroles, chili and the dreaded turkey soup until its final defeat by the blood of rare steak.