

LITERARY TEA SPRING 2022



Cover Photo by Eric Lohse



**STONY BROOK
UNIVERSITY**



Table of Contents

Mending the Broken	
<i>Patricia Ballan</i>	4
Spring Willow	
<i>Virginia Bushart</i>	5
Well Sam	
<i>Jane I. Cash</i>	6
Cohen’s Candy Store II	
<i>Joel G. Cohen</i>	7
The Country	
<i>Michael Dolber</i>	9
I Never Asked	
<i>Sheila Eisinger</i>	11
Exercise or Exorcise	
<i>Len Farano</i>	12
The Protesting Life	
<i>Lucy Gluck</i>	13
A Hidden Treasure on the Shores of Lake George	
<i>Barbara Golub</i>	15
Wordle Woes	
<i>Irma Gurman</i>	17
Cheyney State College	
<i>Aldustus Jordan</i>	18



A Moving Conversation	
<i>Lily Klima</i>	20
Having Fun on the Farm	
<i>Mel Lantz</i>	22
Hello? Is Anybody There?	
<i>Martin H. Levinson</i>	23
My Computer Blues	
<i>Susan Pace</i>	25
Cat Lessons	
<i>Geri Parisi Kaplan</i>	26
How to Prepare a Patient for Surgery: A Nursing Story	
<i>Rachelle Psaris</i>	27
High Tide Sunset	
<i>Kathee Shaff Kelson</i>	28
Diddy	
<i>Bruce Stasiuk</i>	29
My Poem Stands Up for Me	
<i>Susan Steinmann</i>	31
The Medical Report	
<i>Bob Stone</i>	32



Mending the Broken

Patricia Ballan

Ask half from my folks
The rest from my friends

Join the sides
Tape the ends

Notice the size!
See the bright shine!

Why you'd never have known
This old heart of mine.



Spring Willow

Virginia Bushart

A golden glow enshrines the willow tree.
It gently sways as if to please,
Two mothers,
One above and one below.
One their anchor,
One the spotlight for their show.
One gives the willow strength and form.
One keeps the willow fed and warm.
Together in shared harmony,
They nurture their majestic tree.
I pause to apprehend the scene,
Of golden fronds with glints of green,
That herald spring with graceful sweeps -
So welcome from a tree that weeps.



Well Sam

Jane I. Cash

Well Sam,
Pricey box you're in
I'm alive and you're dead
Surprised?
You with all your marathons
Seventy Five years
A long haul
Friend for forty
Friday poker games aplenty
Easy to read you
Nose rub with a bluff
The time you screwed my wife
Thought I didn't know
She was better after that
Ridden with guilt
You both were
Your wife never guessed
Poor thing
Maybe like me
It was too late to care
About that thousand you borrowed
Twenty years ago
I never saw that again
Some things don't matter
You did drink too much
That's what killed you
Like they say
You never looked so good
Ciao old friend



Cohen’s Candy Store II

Joel G. Cohen

As a young teenager, sports took up all of my free time. Playing it, reading about it and talking about it late into the night, filled my life. When it came to girls, I was bashful and shy and thus spent little time being preoccupied with them.

When it was too dark to play, my friends and I would “hang out” at Cohens Candy Store, which was at a dead-end street at 174th Street in the Bronx. We all lived on Anthony Avenue either in the large apartment house, or the private houses across the street. To get to the store you walked down to the bottom of the hill and then up five flights of stone steps. You passed two vacant stores, the vegetable store, Monroe Bakery, the grocery the butcher shop, and finally at the corner of Clay Avenue was Cohens. Across the street, on your left was an apartment house.

The Candy Store was typical of the times. There was a newsstand outside. As you entered on the left was a soda fountain with stools. Penny candies were on display on half of the counter, they included chocolate covered marshmallows, long salted pretzels, caramels, baseball cards with bubble gum, licorice, lollypops, etc. On the shelf against the wall were the packaged candies such as Lifesavers, cough drops, Milky Ways and Baby Ruths. Further into the store came the malted machine, cigarette displays of Camels, Lucky Strikes, Chesterfields, Old Golds, etc. Then came the open cigar boxes of White Owls Berings, etc. and finally pipes and pipe tobacco. As Mr. Cohen faced the customers, below the counter were the refrigerated units holding the bottled sodas, milk and ice cream. On the counter were the syrup and seltzer dispensers for the sodas and malted.

As young teenagers, Cohen’s was where we hung out. It was wartime and the last thing in the world you’d expect to see walking in pairs, usually stiff as boards, always in gray- West Point Cadets. Perhaps 20-30 lived down the block on Clay Avenue in a three story brick house. We heard they had failed Math and it was either a review course and re-exam or expulsion from the Point. The course was given by a Math professor in our neighborhood. Among our celebrities were football players and generals’ sons. You would see them walking in the street, or in the store making purchases. Every few months the group and another take their place.

Back then in 1943, the Cincinnati Clearing House was a very important part of the culture of New York City. The daily number (three digits) was determined by its day’s total activity. This information was published by the Daily News and Daily Mirror, in their evening editions. Customers would await the delivery of the papers, usually between 8 and 9 in the evening for these results as well as sports, racing results, news and the comics. Today the “number” is picked on television. During World War II there was no TV. We were always discussing sports, reading comic books and just horsing around at the store.

The store had two public phones; the second phone was unlisted. It rang only when someone misdialed the Ogden Theatre, a local movie house just north of Yankee Stadium. There would then be a race to pick-up the phone and have some fun.



“Ogden Theatre, good evening”, I said with my most grown- up voice. “What’s playing this evening?”, she asked. “Tom Mix in Cement”, Mary’s Ass, In Two Parts”, or less playfully, ‘The Lou Gehrig Story starring Gary Cooper and Theresa Wright”, I might respond very politely. “Isn’t that still playing on Times Square?” she inquired. “Yes, but there’s a special show”, but I couldn’t hold it in any longer and burst out laughing. Anything to keep the conversation going. We would then spend the rest of the evening reviewing the details of our ruse.

Years later the store as well as the rest of north 174th Street became part of the Cross Bronx Expressway.

When I grew up, I became an Accountant and had the occasion one day to have an appointment with a potential client. He had purchased a building with two other partners. The building had been renovated and after three years the main tenant had broken his lease and moved out. The two partners wanted “out”, but there were Notes to be paid. It was decided that the business would reopen; my client would manage the enterprise and it was further decided I would organize the Accounting system and help set it up.

During the first week of the reopening I was in the Manager’s Office late one afternoon. No one was in the office when the phone rang. After four rings I picked it up and in my grown-up voice said “Ogden Theatre, Good evening”.



The Country

Michael Dolber

I never heard anyone I knew talk about “the Catskills” – it was always “the country”, or sometimes “the mountains”, in contrast to Manhattan, which of course was always “the city.” Saying you were going to “the Country” sounded more like a get-away, an escape to a calmer and more relaxing environment. This area, known in popular culture as the “Borscht Belt”, was the home of a hotel owned by two of my mother’s cousins -- and therein lies a set of childhood memories, a handful of moments captured in old photos, and stories that have become indistinguishable from memories.

During the fifties and sixties thousands of predominantly Jewish families, who were among those lucky enough to have vacation time and some money, would make the pilgrimage from Brooklyn or the Bronx or Queens to their oasis about a hundred miles to the north. My cousins’ place was not in the same category as any of the Borscht Belt hotels you may have heard of. Don’t think Grossinger’s -- think Kellerman’s from “Dirty Dancing”, only without Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Gray. Their hotel was originally called the Jefferson, and then, after going through Chapter 11 bankruptcy, it was reborn as the Glen Briar. Both names feel in retrospect as if the owners tried a bit too hard for assimilation. The hotel was located near Ellenville, not too far from Woodstock; but by the time Woodstock became “Woodstock”, our days there were over. The heyday of the Catskills was ending, and by the nineties almost all the hotels were closed.

We went there fairly often when I was a kid. The trip to the country always seemed like a huge undertaking. A major landmark on the way was a restaurant on Route 17 called the Red Apple Rest, which was supposedly the midpoint of the journey. It was not that far from Brooklyn by today’s standards, but to a child it felt like an odyssey. One day our ’57 Ford Fairlane suffered a flat tire on the Thruway, or maybe it was Route 17. (My father and my uncle used to debate the preferred route and the best way to beat the traffic. To my father, “making good time” in his travels was very important, and he was known to shave some time off his trip when he reported it to whoever would listen. Any place within an hour of home was a “fifteen-minute ride”.) I am not sure if I actually remember that flat tire, or if I know of it only from the picture that I took of my exasperated parents standing on the side of the road staring at the car.

My memories of the hotel exist in that hazy mist in which reality and stories overlap. Yet some details remain with me – the front porch with the oversized Adirondack chairs that seemed big enough for several people; the short stone wall in front of the dining room, which I would proudly jump off as if it were a major athletic achievement; the lake and the rowboats; and the playground. That playground unfortunately is the site of one of my very early memories, when my three- or four-year-old self had what was euphemistically called an “accident” of the gastrointestinal variety. Upset and not knowing



what to do, I marched into the dining room, where I interrupted my aunt’s lunch and reported my misfortune. I’m pretty sure she remembered it too.

The day camp at the hotel allowed the parents some time during the day without their kids. It was called “Camp Navajo”, a name which strikes me now as a bit of cultural appropriation, but after all, it was the fifties. My sister, Ellen, worked at the camp as a counsellor for a time. Though she was a teenager, six years older than me, I thought it strange that she was gone for that long. Her living conditions there apparently left much to be desired, and though she is gone, I feel as if I can still hear her describing the time she frantically ran from her room after finding a mouse dining on something in her dresser drawer.

There was entertainment provided for the guests, including a night club of sorts, but my age kept me from experiencing it. Guests at the Jefferson would not be seeing Martin and Lewis, or Mel Brooks, or Tony Bennett, or any of the other big names that played the major hotels. But there was a guy who would sometimes hang around the pool to fool around, make jokes, and motivate the guests to get up off their lounge chairs to dance or play Simon Says. This person, I have since learned, was called a “tummler”, a derivation of the Yiddish word meaning “to stir up”. I suppose the idea was that guests who were livelier and more active were more likely to be happy, but I suspect many of them would have preferred to have been left alone.

Another major source of entertainment, of course, was eating. There was a “children’s dining room”, which I’m sure was an assignment given to the least senior or least capable waiters. But the real action was in the main dining room, and when I was allowed to eat there, I would be reminded to “tell them whatever you want – they will bring it.” My father was especially fond of the breakfasts, which he would say was the best meal of the day. Guests frequently ordered seconds or even third servings, resulting in plates of eggs, pancakes, kippers, lox, and bagels multiplying on the large table. The food orgy was repeated at lunch and dinner. The place could have been a training ground for the Olympic Eating Team.

As I began writing this, I became motivated to look at old photos from those days in “the country.” I see my parents and my grandparents in rowboats on the lake. I see Ellen, contentedly standing by the porch; and my mother, looking unbearably young, sitting in the grass in front of the main house. There is the photo of my parents looking at that flat tire; and another of them in front of the dining room; I see Ellen and me sitting on the ground as I pet a cat; and there we are with the daughter of one of the owners, wearing our white Camp Navajo T-shirts. The older pictures are black and white, and somewhat fuzzy, and the later ones are in color, a sign of the passing years. As I study them, everyone is still alive, frozen in time. It is a glimpse of a world that no longer exists. The Borscht Belt is no more – it is a place and a time that the world and the culture has left behind, but for now it still exists in the memories and the stories of many New York City Baby Boomers



I Never Asked

Sheila Eisinger

How pigs could build houses

and a wolf could talk?

Why Goldilocks thought a wolf in bed in her granny's nightgown

might actually be her grandmother?

Did a cat actually play the fiddle?

And how could a cow jump? - over the moon?

Why anyone would have so many children - and live in a big shoe?

Where was the old woman's husband?

How a wooden nose could grow so long?

Did puppets walk and speak?

Why Santa inherited an extra reindeer - Rudolph?

And why did Rudolph's nose light up?

How Hansel and Gretel found a gingerbread house?

Wouldn't birds and bugs have eaten it?

Was there really such an attraction to music

that rats would follow a piper?

How could twenty-four blackbirds be baked in one pie

and still be alive and sing when the pie was opened?

I never asked.



Exercise or Exorcise

Len Farano

My old body’s in need of a fix
And won’t yield to my usual tricks
Thus I must choose a course
That won’t lead to remorse
So what tactics can be in the mix?
Should I try to amend my poor diet?
Eat more beans, add more greens? Do I buy it?
Will one less glass of wine
Put some steel in my spine?
Stop the ale? Chomp some kale? Ever try it?
Hey wait, exercise! That’s the play
To get strong. Won’t take long. Right away
I’ll get rid of the flab
That’s invested each ab
And keep wrinkles and wattles at bay.
First I must join a very good gym
That will help get me muscled and slim.
With a personal trainer
I’ll be “loser” not “gainer”
It’s much less of a plan, more a whim.
Perhaps there’s another safe path
That will lead to success without wrath.
I have heard there’s a Shaman
Who claims that it’s common
To shed fat with a ritual bath.
He mixes a powerful potion,
With some salt that he gleans from the ocean,
In a tub that is steamin’.
You immerse, he shouts, “Demon,
Cast out fat” in a voice with emotion.
So I’m ready to throw in the towel
And endure all this heat and his howl.
I’ll get used to his scream
While I’m eating ice cream
All it took was to change one small vowel.



The Protesting Life

Lucy Gluck

It’s a cold day, damp with the threat of rain. It’s not comfortable standing outside and I wish I were somewhere warm. I’m standing in front of my congressman’s office protesting one of the many horrific actions taken by the Rump administration. I have such mixed feelings about being there. Being at a protest is a familiar and even comforting thing for me to do. It reminds me of exciting and inspiring times in the past.

But then I think, “What am I doing here? I can’t believe that I have to get out on the streets again at my age.” I look around me and see that I am definitely not alone. Our generation has dusted off our sneakers, taken out our markers to make new signs with zippy slogans and we’re back. We never thought we’d have to do this again, but here we are because it must be done.

What has made protesting and fighting in this way part of my life? My parents were good liberal democrats but were freaked out by Mc Carthyism and didn’t take any actions to support their views out of a combination of fear and the toll of living day to day. I remember that they absolutely went crazy when they found out I signed a petition which seemed like such a harmless thing to me “Your life will be ruined. They will find out what you signed and prevent you from getting into schools and getting a good job”. That’s when I first realized how far apart we were and from that point on I had a double life where I hid my actions whenever I could from my parents.

From the teens I remember being obsessed with injustice and how I wanted to change society and change how I lived my life so that I didn’t live the safe, fearful and rather dull life of my parents. I would write my ideas of small slips of paper that I kept in my top desk drawer. The High School of Music and Art was a haven and an intense learning experience for me. I met people from so many backgrounds and was entirely captivated and won over by the world of “red diaper babies” who grew up in leftist families. They had a whole new world so different from my home. My parents worked hard but their whole social life was with family and meeting the neighbors on the benches on Eastern Parkway. I never remember them going to parties or having people over for dinner. This new group had a world of shared vacation spots, camps, meetings and interesting lives in the arts. I ended up going to such interesting places and events. I even ended up at John Kennedy’s birthday party where I heard the famous happy birthday sung by Marilyn Monroe.

Folk music was a way to express all these longings through music and I became involved in this political and musical world with great glee. I remember marching at Woolworths for integration and being suspended for a day for some action that I no longer remember the reason for. I would take my guitar and go down to Washington Square on weekends and went to see Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan and many others.



My longings and the times meshed intensely by the time I went to college. Wisconsin was a very split place with right wing blond farmers and dark-haired intense leftists from New York and Chicago. It had a strong progressive tradition going back to Governor La Follette but was also the home of Joe McCarthy so it attracted both groups who at that time were very separate and didn't interact much. I have a newspaper photo of me and about five other people marching around the Capital to protest the Vietnam war before it became so much more popular later. Racial, political and social issues became merged in those times. I remember that The March on Washington was such a pivotal event that still resonates today. Being in the crowd of hundreds and thousands of people like me, hearing Martin Luther King, hearing the music, and feeling the incredible positive energy in the crowds. We really felt that we were making change. After all, integration down south was happening and the Vietnam war was ending. Oh, how hopeful we were!

We definitely felt that we were living a whole new life in a new world but how did that translate to our lives as we finished college and entered the world? Because we rejected the world of our parents, with marriage family and the house in the suburbs, we faced so many possibilities. What would our new life look like? Do we work, do we go to school, what kind of relationships do we have with friends and lovers? Do we marry and settle down? Do we live in the country and raise our own food? Do we live in communes or in families? The possibilities were exciting but very intimidating and confusing as well. When I look back, I see that we were trying to build something new but that often led to random choices of where we were and what we did. Basically, a rather cautious soul, I made a series of these random choices that formed my life from then on. I have recently started zoom calls with my two best high school friends and when we discuss our lives, we have noticed how random some of these choices were.

And now, we are back in a turbulent time of change. I am excited to see a new generation of young people energized to fight against economic and racial injustice. So, I sit at home, unable to go out into the streets before the pandemic and try to find ways to help. I am trying to learn to use the new technology so I can “protest” from home. Right now, I am looking at a huge pile of postcards waiting to be addressed to swing voters in another state to try to encourage them to vote. But now I am more fearful and the darkness of these times keeps me up at night or wakes me early in the morning. It seems like protest and change are more important now than they ever were. And so, I join with so many others of all ages to continue the fight.



A Hidden Treasure on the Shores of Lake George

Barbara Golub

It was very late at night and Edith and I were in a canoe, drifting along the silvery path that was being reflected by the full moon on the dark and mysterious lake. She and I were oblivious to the fact that the waves could become treacherous and gobble us up. We were awakened out of our dream-like state when we heard the harsh sounds of the camp motor launch searching for us. We paddled quickly to the tree lined shore and hid beneath the overhanging branches. Our thoughts were that we had outsmarted them but when we raked the canoe we saw that our shoes had been taken. Like all of our other belongings, our shoes had our names in them. The next morning came and I was waiting to be fired from my first job as a camp counselor. I guess our adventure was forgiven as we never heard a word about it.

Camp Sagamore was a children's camp situated on the other side of Bolton's Landing on Lake George in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York. A more beautiful sight was never seen. The only way to get to camp was by a boat that looked like a small open cargo hauler.

I was hired with my friend Edith to be a counselor in a bunk of 12, twelve year old girls. The large wooden building was divided in half by a thin wall making six bunks on each side and one for each counselor. Edith and I sat on the deck in the back many a night after the girls went to sleep watching the ripples on the lake in the moonlight while eating the "goodies" that my mother sent up to us. We loved peanut butter on Ritz crackers and the chunks of salami that we were able to tear off of the large sausage. We were so happy---too bad we couldn't have bottled that joy.

Our girls didn't realize how fortunate they were to have us as counselors and I'll tell you why. Edith and I had been friends since high school; we lived near each other and knew each other's families very well. We went to Pratt Institute together, she studying Home Economics and I Costume Design. We went folk dancing every Friday night at the Central Needle Trades High School in New York City. Our warm friendship was inspirational to the girls. There was a wonderful feeling of camaraderie in the bunk. We taught the girls many folk dances, dressed them up in Ionic Chitons (Grecian dresses) made out of our bed sheets and gave them many fun things to do along with the camp routine. Twelve year old girls were at the best age for camp. Since Edith and I were only nineteen years old ourselves, the girls adored us.

When we were not on OD (on duty) the girl counselors went to the "big rock" on the hill overlooking the lake. We sprawled out on top planning what our lives would be like in the future while staring up at the millions of tiny sparkling diamonds in the dark blue sky. One night we had a most incredible experience, we saw the "Northern Lights". They were as magnificent as spoken about. On other nights we went into the social hall to listen to records, mingle with some of the boy counselors (those who were left after the cuter ones had paired off with the sexier girl counselors). My favorite record to listen to



was the Benny Goodman 78rpm recording of “Only Another Boy and Girl” and on the flip side “Every Time We Say Goodbye.” This was a recording by Benny Goodman’s small group including Benny on clarinet, Teddy Wilson at piano, Gene Krupa at drums, Lionel Hampton at vibraphone, and Jane Harvey, singer. As soon as I returned home from camp I went immediately to the local record store and bought a copy of this for myself which I still love to listen to.

Hitchhiking was an accepted way to get around in those days if you didn’t have a car. Like Clark Gable did in “It Happened One night” my thumb went up. On our one day off a week, I traveled with DD, the swimming counselor and whoever else wanted to come along. It was always an adventure as to where we could go that day. One time a very nice young guy driving a convertible changed the direction he was going in to take us sightseeing. An older couple stopped for us another time and when we heard that they were going to Montreal, Canada we excitedly hopped in. After driving many hours we crossed the United States/ Canadian border and started to panic. How would we make the last boat to camp which left at twelve midnight? Well we didn’t make it and slept that night on the dock in the camp station wagon. My friend DD was a good friend of the Head Counselor for girls so our arriving at 7AM on the camp grounds the following morning was overlooked.

The best was saved for last at camp. “Color War” was something that I had never experienced. Edith and I were on the “White Team” and dreamt up some great things for the girls on the “White Team” to do to earn points. As we of the “White Team” were singing our hearts out, doing the song we put our own words to, we heard the “Great News” that the “White Team” was the winner. Bedlam broke out.

Amid lots of hugs and kisses we said our goodbyes as it was time to leave our beautiful summer at Camp Sagamore. I came home from camp not only with the \$50 paycheck, a scarf from Daisy’s mother, a few \$10 thank you gifts but with the respect and love from the twelve most wonderful girls that I ever had the privilege of knowing.



Wordle Woes

Irma Gurman

Like Groundhog Day, each morn's the same
It's time for today's Wordle game
It's now all the rage
So I google the page
To guess the word fast is my aim

It's a good exercise for the brain
Though sometimes it drives me insane
The final construction's
About my deductions
"A waste of time," people complain

But somehow we all do obsess
And post our scores, hope to impress
But the truth is it's luck
Sometimes we get stuck
And sometimes we make a good guess

Open up Facebook - it's boring!
As people make public their scoring
All over the screen
You'll see boxes of green
Can we post something else? I'm imploring

Yet these puzzles keep calling to me
And I think that we all can agree
That my brain's not improved
And my IQ's unmoved
And time is a-wasting, you see

From now on, I'm not gonna play
I'm putting my smart phone away
Hey -- what are you doing?
A new one you're viewing?
Let me solve the new game for today!



Cheyney State College

Aldustus Jordan

Cheyney State College (my alma mater) is the oldest historically black college in America. Established by Quakers on February 25, 1837, as the African Institute, it is located in the rich farm land of Delaware County 30 miles west of Philadelphia. Cheyney has been an academic oasis for black students—those who need their dreams fulfilled, those whose dreams have been deferred, and even those who have stopped dreaming. Cheyney is the only college that accepted me.

I was the first member of my family to go to college. My mother, pregnant with me at 17, was forced to leave high school. She did not graduate. My father, then 18, chose to take on the responsibility of father and husband. Both my parents dreamed of sending each of their five children to college. There was an unspoken yet palpable expectation that I would blaze the trail and model for my four younger siblings—Sherry, Ernie, Michael, and Kevin. The expectations weighed heavily on my shoulders as I often thought of not going at all. My mother died at 53 years old. Two years earlier she attended the college graduation of her youngest and last—from Princeton. Dream fulfilled!

In August 1963, days after the historic March on Washington, I arrived at Cheyney. My nervous parents were engaged in a rehearsed, poorly choreographed, and awkward good-bye. My mother, usually practical and calm, was fidgety, hugged me, and left to sit in the car. My father carried luggage to my tiny dorm room, and with a firm handshake and hug, he was gone. Anger, fear and confusion, three uncomfortable bedfellows, gripped me immediately. I was their first born--what parents leave their son at a college in the middle of nowhere within an almost empty dorm with five dollars and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich? And with that, I was taking my first real steps towards manhood.

Loneliness often leads a search for things familiar as its antidote. Alone in my dorm room, my search began. I turned on my clock radio and through the static, the country and western music, and farm reports, I found the familiar, a small sliver of hope on the dial--WDAS a soul station in Philadelphia. A blind twelve-year old musical genius named Little Stevie Wonder sang “Fingertips” and I was home—my personal antidote to loneliness. Between my dancing and off-key singing, I unpacked, claimed the top bunk, and college felt good to me. I was ready to face freshman orientation the next day. Even now that song gives me goosebumps. Thank you, Stevie, for saving my college career.

We called ourselves “The Cheyney Family”—1400 students bound by race, culture, tradition, history and circumstances. We came from cities large and small—Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New York, Coatesville, Aliquippa, and Chester—each with our own stories of struggle, sacrifice, perseverance, and purpose. As a family we were the keepers of our brothers and sisters and failure was not an option. Our faculty, also part of the family, loved us in ways that were tough, confidence building, and unconditional. They knew our stories because years before they walked the same path in historically black colleges such as Morehouse, Fisk, and Howard only to find opportunities for advanced degrees often closed to them. Armed with infectious excellence, the no nonsense academic rigor they demanded prepared us for success in a world of discrimination and unlevelled playing fields often tilted away from us. They told us that “you must be 10, times better than everyone else just to get our foot in the door.” We believed them.

The bliss of innocence, luck and the whimsy factor often join hands and design a wonderful life-altering outcome. One cold blustery February morning in my freshman year, I helped a professor carry his bags and that brief encounter and conversation changed my life forever. I found a teacher,



mentor, and life-long friend. Dr. Theodore Thomas Fortune Fletcher, Professor of English, poet, scholar and world traveler, was the most brilliant and sophisticated black man I had ever met. He opened the

world to me—a world filled with academic rigor, curiosity, and intellectual challenges. Without apologies or hesitation, he placed me in conversation Shakespeare, Chaucer, and the Romantic Poets as well as Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and the Harlem Renaissance. He taught me how to become comfortable with discomfort and deal with persons who did not look like me or share my views. “Do not fear words,” he would say, “they are powerful friends—embrace them.” We exchanged beautiful handwritten letters until the day he died in 1988.

Fraternities and sororities, often referred to as “The Divine Nine,” are an integral part of the history, tradition, and social life on historically black college campuses. Apart from the status and prestige in membership, these organizations are gateways to leadership, political power, influence, and community service. I knew nothing about fraternities. I was too busy with fear of academic failure and holding my spot on the basketball team. But I had friends who belonged to fraternities, so I decided to pledge.

Borne out of racial segregation, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., a national organization, was founded in 1911. The hardship of pledging can make or break you and challenge beyond your expectations. My pledge journey later found me as Basileus or president of the chapter. I learned that I could be respected and listened to even among alumni brothers much older and more experienced—a valuable lesson for a 19-year-old.

Beckoned by the political turbulence of the 1960’s, I dropped out of college and joined the ranks of those willing to fight and even die for racial equality, social and economic justice. I exchanged pomp and circumstance for power to the people. The transition was not difficult. I had already been arrested twice in peaceful protests, authored controversial editorials as editor of the student newspaper, and drew the ire of the campus administration and some students alike for my involvement in taking over the administration building.

I was becoming more politically aware and active in the civil rights movement. As a community organizer, I volunteered in Philadelphia working for peaceful solutions amongst rival street gangs, and participated in civil rights demonstrations. I now realize that I was simply trying to understand the transition from boy to man. It was not easy for young black boys then and it is not easy now. But I had made a vow to my parents that I would return to college and I did—older, wiser, more purposeful, and focused on being an agent for change.

It is difficult for me to imagine that I once viewed college as brick and mortar, buildings, desks, books, and professors who gave you information that they wanted back. Where students traded in their souls and beliefs in exchange for a signed document certifying that they were educable, possessed table manners, and ready to enter the system. The Cheyney family changed my way of thinking because they accepted me on my own terms and provided a forgiving environment in which I was able to grow, develop, and mature.

Recently, Cheyney, caught in a political fight for its existence, was in danger of closing. The same nervous students who entered decades earlier—now educators, judges, doctors, lawyers, elected officials, and television personalities—gave back exactly as we were taught. We saved our beloved alma mater.



A Moving Conversation

Lily Klima

Lil, you said you would begin to declutter.

Yeah, I know but where to begin?

Any closet, start somewhere, but start already.

Okay, how about the garage and the shed? I am not attached to anything there.

So do it.

What if the kids want stuff?

They already told you that they don't want anything.

Yeah but...

But nothing. You're stalling. Why?

I guess I don't really want to move.

We've had this conversation for months. You make a decision and then hesitate to get moving.

Don't get funny with me. I want to move and I want to stay.

Lil, I know it's hard. We've talked so often. Even at 3:00 a.m.. Say goodbye to the house, greenhouse, garden and ponds and let's go.

What if I don't like it there? I don't like change. Have to right size. From four bedrooms to two. From a big garden to none. What to take? What to sell? How to sell? Fifty-one years in this house. Everything has meaning. Memories galore.

You keep bringing this up. Let it go. You are just leaving stuff. Take photos of every room. Memories will come with us. Take all 150 photo albums of your travels and family. Those are worth keeping. I know COVID did you in and the stresses of isolation and aloneness are crushing. But while you still can, this is the time to move. You take yourself, and me of course, wherever you go. Creating a new life will be invigorating for both of us.

Departure is like another death. Grief is...

Stop! You might be sad but you will get through it. You have a lot of life left. Perhaps realistically not a lot of time but enough to live free of house and garden chores. I am getting tired of



you griping about having to call the plumber, electrician, roofer, gardener and other technicians needed when things go wrong.

Of course, you are right. But Jefferson’s Ferry and Bright View Senior Living communities are so expensive.

Lil, I hate to say it but this is the rainy day. This is why you’ve been investing and saving. This is your time. The kids don’t care about inheritance.

If Mani were alive, we would not be having this conversation.

He died. You didn’t. What would he want you to do? Get old and be alone in this house which, by the way, is also getting older. No! He’d want your life to be worry free. You’ve been solo for sixteen years. You capably managed to take care of everything. Now it is time to let it go. Shake yourself up. Get rid of the cobwebs. Give birth to yourself.

You’re right. How about I clean out the pantry, or the linen closet, the china cabinet or the curio collections? Perhaps the crawl space? I will call antique dealers and set up an E-Bay account. Fill boxes for donations and others for discards. I’ll start tomorrow. The garage and shed should be easy.

Are you sure?



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.



Hello? Is Anybody There?

Martin H. Levinson

Thank you for calling the Department of Motor Vehicles. For English, press one; para Español, marque número dos; pour la français, presse trois; für deutsch, drücken sie vier; orfay igpay atinlay, esspray ivefay; для русского, нажмите шесть. Please listen carefully as our menu options have recently changed. If you know your party’s extension you may dial it at anytime during this sentence. If you wish to speak to the operator dial “O” but please keep in mind that wishes are only granted in fairy tales.

If you would like to participate in a brief survey after this call to help us improve our services press one, if you would rather not participate press two, if you think phone surveys are a total waste of time press three, if you simply feel a need to press something press four.

Is this call related to a matter you are truly worried about? If it is press one and say what is troubling you? If it is not press two, hang up, and have a nice day.

You have pressed one but I can’t make out what you said. Please repeat what you said 500,000 times into the phone. Do not rush—speak slowly and carefully. When you have finished speaking press the star key.

I am still having trouble understanding you. Please find someone else to deliver your message or take speech lessons and call back later. I heard you say “no.” If that’s right press one, if that’s not right press two, if you need some more time to think about the question press three. You pressed one so let’s do this another way. Rather than mumbling so softly that only a dog would be able to hear you, please scream what you want to say as loudly as you can into the phone. Make sure you are really yelling and not just raising your voice a little.

I believe you said, “the sky is green, the moon is blue, the earth is yellow, the stars chartreuse.” If that is what you said press one, if it is not press two. You pressed two, which means you didn’t say what I thought you said. No problem, let’s try something else.

Please go to your computer and type in the following web address: www.dmvsupport.com. When the page comes up access the menu bar and click on “Alternative ways to get through to the DMV.” While waiting for something to appear on your screen you may want to watch the last season of Game of Thrones, read War and Peace or a book of similar length, or take a week’s vacation in Bermuda.

If you have the patience of Job and the luck of the Irish, you should now be on a page with the heading “I’ve Got a Question.” Below that heading, type in your query and then complete the next 500 pages, which contain interrogatories on every aspect of your life from the date of your conception. Take your time composing your answers, as they will be checked for accuracy by a government database that knows you better than you know yourself. When you finish doing this you should be old enough to collect social security. If you are already on social security, congratulations! Future generations may not be as lucky.

The current waiting time to speak to a representative is two weeks, six days, seventeen hours, fifteen minutes, and twenty-three seconds. If you would prefer not to wait and have someone call you



back press one. If you would rather stay in the queue press two. If you would you like a referral to a mental health provider who can offer you coping strategies for dealing with big bureaucracies that could care less about the people they are supposed to serve press three. Thank you for contacting us and have a great day.



My Computer Blues

Susan Pace

A mysterious package shows up at my door
Today there's just one, yesterday more.

I don't think I ordered all of this stuff
I 'm sure the computer must have messed up.

Used to be when I'm tired, I'd unplug the phone
Now I'm always on call, leave me alone!

All of these group chats could lead to a war
Think I'm talking to one, but it really is four.

Put my heart in a letter and when I am done
Sending multiple copies. I meant to send one.

Responding to emails that were sent long ago
So much being said without any flow.

All of my documents are being saved ... WHERE?!
That's private, important, I really do care!

Artwork existing only online
Doesn't clutter the house so maybe that's fine.

First cryptocurrency now Metaverse?!
Somebody please, call me a hearse.

Perhaps I'm just old, that's what I've been tol
My ways are to set, unable to mold.

All that may be true, but I still do believe
Me talking to you is where I should be.

Meeting in person, the look in your eye
Helps me know meaning, understand why.

All this technology does have its place
But let's not forget to meet face to face



Cat Lessons

Geri Parisi Kaplan

love has moved on
I watch the cat ballet
jealously
as she softly steps
to the window

in a darkened
coffee house
I try to loosen
my imagination
in a search for words
whose rhythm
feels like jazz

Emmy slides into my
lap sensing my need
for consolation

purrs
invites me
to take my place
beside her
by the window

I hold my pen
ruminating in the sun
wondering if the words
have moved on



How to Prepare a Patient for Surgery

Rachelle Psaris

Do introduce yourself with your title.

Do smile.

Do not allow the patient to minimize her fears when you hear her say, “I’m not scared or worried”.

Do not say, “Don’t worry”.

Do not allow the patient to apologize for being afraid of needles before you start his IV, especially men, who are afraid of appearing weak or wimpy.

Do touch your patient—hold his hand, pat his forehead—this is important if the patient is expressing fear.

Do not be afraid of showing your emotions, i.e. tears in your eyes if the patient starts to cry.

Do leave your problems at the door.

Do include the patient’s family/friends in preparing her for surgery.

Do laugh.

Do encourage the patient to laugh to forget the surgery if only for a second or two.

Do close the curtain if the patient is crying and expresses embarrassment.

Do not focus on your own past experiences as a patient, but a small parallel is ok.

Do not indulge in blaming anyone or anything should something not run smoothly in the pre op setting, i.e. surgeon running late.

Above all be human.

Be yourself.

Be the nurse you always wanted to be.



High Tide Sunset

Kathee Shaff Kelson

seduced by the moon
tide silently
inched stole grasped
sucking the shore
covering it fondling it
catching it gently

stealing the sand rocks reeds
floating dock
fisherman's waders
confused in the glare
of the flames of the sun

the fish grasped at the fly
that wasn't a fly but
a hook
and was caught
and released

and rose gasping
grasping burning
in the ripples
burned by the sun

fooled by the moon
caught in the tide
burned by the flames
of the moon or the sun

caught released
struggled on its side
beside itself
caught and released
drowned in the air



Diddy

Bruce Stasiuk

The Ukrainian word was difficult for the kids to pronounce. It came out, ‘Diddy’.
He was the source of our family.
Sitting at the end of the table, he’d eat kasha, yogurt, and sliced apples.
A diet the doctor prescribed for the small hole in his heart.
We had kielbasa, holubtsi, and Bobcha’s pirogues.
A bowl of beet-reddened horseradish was always within reach.
After dinner, he’d sleep, even while sunlight sliced through the Venetian blinds.
Bobcha said that we children were to be quiet.
Diddy came from the Ukraine. It was called The Ukraine back then, as if it were the
possession of others.
History says it was.
He left around 1904, not yet centered in his teens.
After packing, he gave the family a final embrace.
Looking at his mother, he said, “Goodbye.”
Both knew it meant forever.
He closed the door to his home, its dirt floor, its embroidered cloth, and rustic tools.
Taking a wagon to a town, then another wagon to a larger town, he worked his way to a place
bold enough to have tracks.
The train traveled to Bremen, a teeming port where its namesake ship was steadied by a
harness. He had never seen anything like this in Torske.
Not even in the big City of Ternopil.
This place was so full for the senses.
The Bremen leaned against the very ocean which would deliver him to the land of promise.
He paid the boarding fee to a bearded man who was wearing gloves and a dark coat.
Documents were stamped and re-stamped before securing them deeply into his pocket.
The dock moaned to the water’s rhythm as passengers were herded aboard.
The ship squeaked impatiently, rubbing against the pilings. A departure horn rattled his chest.
This mighty vessel would take him but one way, outpacing the steam pouring from its funnel.
The frothy cut in the water swayed like a gusty wheat field.
He looked back toward his world, family, friends, language, until the city was lost in vapor.
He was welcomed into the coal mines of Central Pennsylvania, where words were not needed.
Muscle was... brute, hungry muscle.
Quickly advancing from culler to miner, he rode the trolley deep into the shaft each day. The
humming ventilator fed the mine with breathable air, while the engine pumped encroaching
water out.
After taking a few strikes at the abutment, the support timbers exploded— splintered — and
the earth folded in. A chorus of shrieks and fading groans were buried in black silence.

He felt the stings and warm drip on his forehead. He blotted his fingers against one gash, and
looked for blood. He couldn’t see his hand, inches from his eyes. Was he blind? The dark was



unlike any before. He called out — arms and legs searching for space — finding little.
He screamed.
He had nothing. Nothing but his thinking. Thinking for hours. Sleeping. Opening his eyes to
nothing. He ached for his home, his village. He thought of his mother’s piercing sadness when
she’d be told of her little boy and how his dreams were crushed and drowned in an airless
grave. He held in the lightless pocket, moving little and searching for the next thin gulp of life.
One more breath of fading air. Then another.
The thirst and hunger grew, suggesting it was days.
He was too young to die now.
And then, something.
The soft pattern came from above. It grew louder. Then strange voices. The ping of pipes
being hammed through the rock.
Hollow tubes pounded and pushed through the shale, delivering breaths to save him from
gasping to death.
Then, a break-through with a trace of sweet light.
Between the approaching thuds he could hear his insides begging for water, a sip from the
unreachable puddle that was feet away.
He never went into the mine again.
Farming. Barbering. Finally, the diner.
I sat in his black Chrysler with its big woolen seats and watched him move the round wooden
handle of the gearshift as his feet worked the pedals.
We drove away from ‘Steve’s Diner’, where the floor was covered with sawdust and the cellar
stored barrels of fermenting cabbage.
We drove up the hill.
Beneath his healed wounds, blue strokes were tattooed into his flesh from the powdery chunks
of falling anthracite.
I wanted marks on my face too.
His low and tilted eyelids gave him the look of an Eskimo.
Torske was always there in the shape of his words.
The coal dust never left his soft voice.
When he laughed I could see gold flashing in his mouth.
We turned onto the Grand Concourse and Harry the cop waved.
Diddy was important.
Thinking. I drove northbound through thick snow.
Even with huge plows working into evening, the turnpike challenged all the way to Albany.
Bobcha words were, “If you want to see him alive...”
I could hear the groan before entering the room.
He was staring at the ceiling.
I followed a tube that crossed his chest and was tangled in his hands.
Were they always this big? Thick, and meaty like a bear’s.

When his head flopped to the right, our eyes met.
He spoke to me in the language I never learned.
Bobcha made the journey with his ashes and cast them into the Ukrainian wind.



My Poem Stands Up for Me

Susan Steinmann

Sitting down against the Iraq War
When the voices of the Law turned inside out.
Called me a terrorist
I who step around ants on the sidewalk
Who worships the Peace of the Lamb
Not the rending of the empiric Lyin’ .
Scared, reading the names of the Long Island dead.
Thinking of them and the military families:

My poem stands up for me and shields me
Against destruction, it comforts me in a cell
With bars of ignorance and vicious torture.
My poem whispers love and a Just peace.
My poem calls Cassandra-like, but foretells
A safe future for my grandchildren.
My poem surrounds me with belief in
Gentle arms and Loving friends

My poem stands up for me in reign
As false politics present winning as
The only credo.
My poem wraps me in surety, secure
And sweet.
It stands up to despots, dictators, fiends,
Liars and fakes.

My poem shouts freedom.
It towers up and unfolds the banner
Of brotherhood and kindness
And my poem carefully etches its coming
In the music of the young.



The Medical Report

Bob Stone

When I call on my muscles,
sleeping like old hounds,
to drag my bones from their rest
into what now passes for action
they reluctantly comply.
What my appetites desire
and my taste buds savor
my stomach rejects.
I suspect that the mumbling style
of characters in the play
is not all method acting.
As gaze into my magic carpet
flying among the photons
visiting the wonders of the world
my neck soon becomes rubber
my head turns to stone
and apps are replaced by naps.

These failings of age and habit,
some admitted as inevitable erosions,
some capable of adjustment
with proper modification,
the subjects of vague intentions
for future reforms
at some more convenient time
are filed away for later consideration.

Upon medical advice I am probed, palpated
imaged, measured, chemically analyzed and
then confronted with a detailed inventory
showing a tally of my corporeal state
including but not exclusively
the misalignment of my lumbar vertebrae,
diverticula in my ascending colon, an
unfavorable ratio of lipoproteins
in my circulating juices and
the derelict condition
of various internal organs.



The results are clearly stated
exquisitely detailed in clinical language
with names, images, numbers
and statistical probabilities.
Now, no longer amorphous background chatter
of potentials and possibilities
my physical status is given shape and substance,
a reality to be confronted.
The words have become flesh
and the bills have come due.