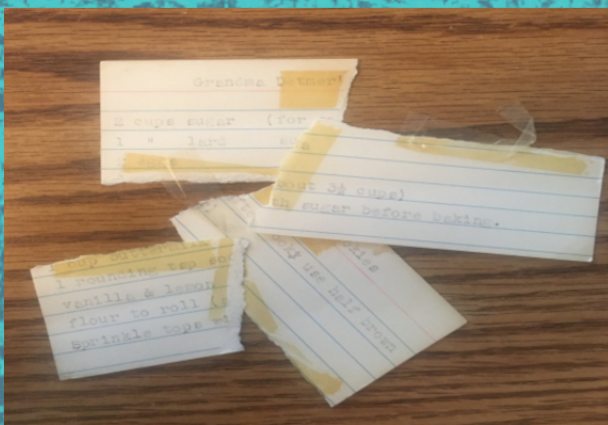


Pleasures Taken

In Our Dreams, Small Things, Escapes and Conversations



A Writing It Real Anthology
Edited by Sheila Bender

Pleasures Taken: In Our Dreams, Small Things, Escapes and Conversations

Sheila Bender, Editor

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Port Townsend WA, October 2021

I am honored to present *Pleasures Taken*, our fourth Writing It Real anthology. The essays and the poems offered by Writing It Real members for this fourth in our series demonstrate the importance of looking into our moments, hours, days, and years for the ways they hold what we value. Each of these writings evokes qualities of living a meaningful life, even when pleasure arises against a backdrop of difficulty or sorrow.

As writers, we have learned that we write in order to know what we think. The thoughts in this anthology are poignant, sometimes humorous, and always enriching and restorative.

– Sheila Bender

Table of Contents

[Pumpkin Dreams by Virginia M. Amis](#)

[Various by Carol J. Wechsler Blatter](#)

[Three Poems by Anastasia Juno](#)

[Of Love and a Transistor Radio by Mona Anderson](#)

[Smitten by Mona Anderson](#)

[Rediscovering Salmon by David D. Horowitz](#)

[Markings by Joanne M. Clarkson](#)

[The Hardest Things by Judy Barker Kvinsland](#)

[Simple Exotics by Mary Ellen Gambutti](#)

[Pigeon Coop by Mary Ellen Gambutti](#)

[A Red Loveseat Observed by Linda Netherton](#)

[Great-Grandma's Sugar Cookies by Pat Detmer](#)

[A Me Day by Pat LaPointe](#)

[Tres Personas en Una Bicicleta by Michael W. Shurgot](#)

[Spring Yearnings by Suzy Beal](#)

[When I Need to Know What I Am Capable of Dreaming by Barbara Simmons](#)

[Escapes and Conversations by Lizbeth Hartz](#)

[What Gives You Happiness, What Gives You Pleasure? by Marlene Samuels](#)

[Contributor Bios](#)

Pumpkin Dreams

by Virginia M. Amis

I want to grow a pumpkin. Just one. I want to tend the vine in the garden soil, watch its blossoms open in the morning mist, shift its position to catch the best sunlight, cut the weighty fruit from the vine and hold it in my arms. I want to choose to carve it for Halloween or make it into a pie. I don't want to buy another pumpkin at the Farmers' Market.

Let me just grow one to maturity. That's all I ask.

Driving home from work through the valley, I see fields of pumpkin vines, large leaves shielding orange orbs. The farmers seem to take for granted that their efforts will succeed. They sow their seeds a month after I plant my seedlings. I never see them tend the plants, pull invading weeds or shoo the crows who try to destroy them. Their crop is ready for harvest in early September. Thousands of pumpkins, Jack O Lanterns, pie fillings fill their fields. After harvest, I see their surplus pumpkins rotting, feeding scavenger birds. Makes me want to scream.

At the same time, the vines in my garden have either withered from some alien invasion or are raging against imminent death. I hope they are raging. I'd hate to think they'd given up on me.

I don't know what I am doing wrong.


Everything else I've tried growing has been successful. I grow so many strawberries I have to give away quarts and freeze the rest. Lettuce grows well, too, and tastes so good in a summer salad. I've grown potatoes, beans, kale and squash. Blueberries and raspberries stain my hands as I pick them. Pumpkins are my final frontier. I must conquer them!

I don't want any more advice from my friends, whose gardens produce pumpkins as afterthoughts. I've listened and they've commiserated. I don't believe they are sincere. I think they are members of a cult that has magical powers which allow the pumpkins to grow. They don't offer to admit me to their group. Somehow, I am not worthy.

Or, maybe, they plant pumpkins, never questioning their success.

I don't care at this point. In my dreams, I see the blossoms smiling, bees pollinating them, fruits forming. In my dreams, I have to choose which of my too-many pumpkins to keep and which to give away. I stick out my tongue at my friends' cult and hold my head high. Who needs their stupid magic? I grew them under my own power.

Today, I planted four pumpkin seedlings in a mound in my new garden, in new soil with all the right amendments. I watered them and applied slow-release plant food. I think they know my expectations. I think they will perform well this year.

In my pumpkin dreams. 

Various

by Carol J. Wechsler Blatter

A Russian Samovar, A Treasure Trove of Tchotchkes, Two Dreams, & A Collection of Conversations

Traveling Samovar

The saga of our samovar began with the first owners we know of, Rose and Manny Sack from New York, the wife and husband who worked in sales with my father. My parents visited them in their Forest Hills apartment. Mom admired the samovar. Rose noted my mother's interest. She didn't want it, so she offered it to my mother who was delighted to have it.



I imagine that someone in the Sack family brought the samovar over from Russia by boat at the beginning of the last century. I imagine it was handed down generation to generation of their family members. Which side of the family? Rose's? Manny's? I don't know. It is hard to imagine their ancestors carrying this large teapot in their belongings as they crossed the ocean to come to America. Even more curious is that if they fled from pogroms in Russia and they had little time to pack up their belongings; why choose the samovar? Candlesticks to honor Shabbat, I understand. A seder plate to show the symbols for Passover, I understand. A menorah to kindle the lights of Chanukah, I understand. But a samovar? A samovar is not a ritual item.

The samovar, packed in Dad's car, found a new home in my parent's apartment. *Albert & Bertha Levy Wechsler, Highland Park, NJ.*

Years later Rose, after Manny died, asked for the samovar back. My mother refused. I was furious with my mother. Why wouldn't she return it to Rose? How selfish! How thoughtless! How awful! My mother was never a grabby person, so her behavior surprised and saddened me. How important could this samovar have been that Mom needed to hold onto it? If Rose was grieving after her husband died, and she needed to hold onto a family heirloom, Mom should have honored her request. It was hard to forgive Mom.

With your grandparent's gold rimmed seder plate,
silver candlesticks stuffed in their packs,
to observe Passover and Shabbat
they fled Russia in middle night's
narrow, harrowing escape,
boated over choppy, rocky foamy edged
white waves forming a ladder
climbing to windows in steerage.

Sea sickness, sleepiness,
smelly tight quarters
small sacrifices to come to America
for freedom and peace.

Absent their treasured samovar
no room to carry
What will they use to make tea?

After my mother died, the samovar needed another new home. Now my sister wanted the samovar. My husband wanted it and he rarely asked for anything, but I said, *please her, keep the peace, and send it to her*. My husband, the ultimate maven on securing things, surrounded the samovar in layers of bubble wrap and sheets of newspaper, and placed it carefully in a very large box. Next home for the samovar: Rye, NY.

The package arrived there, and she was happy. A few years passed. I used all my *chutzpah* (nerve) and asked my sister, *please put the samovar in your will for us*. I was blind-sided when she died unexpectedly of a massive cerebral hemorrhage soon after this conversation. Our niece honored my

sister's wishes and so in a large box, specially and carefully wrapped, the samovar came home *us*.

Tchotchkes, Yiddish (pronounced chotchkees)

Small things: ornaments, knick-knacks, souvenirs. Our collection of tchotchkes now stored behind bifold closet doors in our home, could be inventory for a classy store of miniature collectibles. Open them and you can see a mini mauve and blue glass teapot, a small blue and rose colored glass globe with a picture of a menorah, a small brown and white china cow with an opening to serve milk which we don't use but it's a fun thing to have, a wood-carved turtle, a mini china swan with a tiny opening for a candy or two, little china boxes with lids to store small things, a glazed pink china, heart-shaped box, also to store tiny things, and in a box my husband labeled *from Bubbe* (his grandmother), I found miniatures like a brass mortar and pestle, a tiny brass swan, and tiny brass candlesticks. And a favorite fun *tchotchke* is a brass frog holding up weights overhead with his skinny frog arms. There are a few ceramic angels with golden halos and a wood duck puzzle (it's fun to take it apart and put it back together again).



My especially treasured *tchotchke* is an oval shaped china candy dish with dainty, delicate curves. Its inside is decorated with pale yellow flowers attached to light brown stems on a pink and ivory background. I bought this beautiful dish for my mother at an antique store around the corner from where we lived in Brooklyn, NY. I was seven or eight. I have no idea how I got the money to buy her this gift. I was too young to have babysitting money. Did dad give me money?

Did my sister give me money? When I saw this candy dish in the window of the store, I knew it I had to have it for my mother. Was it in time for Mother's Day? I have no idea.

Dreams

I am a university student. There is a lot of excitement because then President Trump is coming to campus to speak to us. Some students aren't looking forward to his arrival, but it is tacky to say it. I leave my coat and notebook on my seat in the auditorium to get something, planning to return in just a few minutes. By that time, the doors are locked. The guards will not let me in. They go to my seat, retrieve my things, and return them to me. I am so mad that I am not in the auditorium that evening. Trump never shows up. I guess I didn't miss anything. Just like him to disappoint all of us. Rather, to do us a favor. We didn't have to listen to his nonstop grouching.

Another dream. When we were young singles, we shared a house. We were good friends. She got sick. Something was wrong with her eyes so I took care of her. I worried that Mom would be mad at me for taking care of her. She was. The next day I thought about this dream. Maybe my assessment was faulty. Maybe I'm the one who was needy. Will somebody be there to care for me? Maybe I felt guilty for not being there enough for my mom when she was ill.

Conversations

"I'm so sorry *preciosa de me mida*, precious of my life. You didn't make SP (Special Progress, skip eighth grade). I know this meant a lot to you. You have the ability, no matter what this test said. For Dad and me, you'll always be special."

I cried and cried. I sat in my mother's lap to cuddle like a baby. My world had broken as if my tears were glass shards spread all over the floor. It confirmed my distorted belief at the time that I wasn't good enough, not smart enough. I couldn't compete with my other three friends who were of extraordinary intelligence. These beliefs stayed with me most of my life. From time to time I still have to fight them off. Holding on to them pulls me down.

A family friend called to comfort me about my dad's illness. I didn't know he had lung cancer and an inoperable brain tumor. I thought he was still recovering from a stroke. *So sad about your dad's cancer. What?* She

realized I didn't know. It was hard to recover from this bad news. When I confronted Mom, she apologized. *I didn't want to worry you.* This is why we always tell our daughter about any health issues we have, no secrets, it's always full disclosure.

My dad never said *I'm dying* even though I know he knew. His unspoken words gave me the message. I could see his sad, tired eyes, his shriveled neck, his drooping face, and his swollen feet stuck in place. My dad never had enough time to say *I will miss you.* My dad never had enough time to say *I wish I had more time with you and mom. I wish I could have given you more than I did. Dad, you gave me lots, lots of everything.* Then he became too frail and sick in his last weeks before his death to speak at all. I said *good-bye* just as he took his last breath. Too late, he couldn't hear me. Only my tears had voices.

I walked down the aisle with Mom next to me on my wedding day. Dad died four years earlier so he couldn't be there to walk with me on this most serious, solemn, and important time in my life. I kept walking. Mom spoke to me without words. A small kick on the foot reminded me I was to stay there, and Harold would come for me. Always a look, a touch of the hand, her hugs, her kisses, her embraces just because . . . there didn't need to be a reason.

I told my husband, *Don't leave me. Don't die.* Everyone dies, I know better. *I'm not going anywhere,* he said. I squeezed his hand. He squeezed mine. He repeated, *I'm not going anywhere.* I needed to believe him. I needed to keep the fantasy of immortality alive for as long as possible. He's six years older. I wish he was six years younger.

On a walk in the beautiful Sonoran Desert, our daughter asked me, *What will you do after Dad dies? I will stay here as long as my health is good. If not, we will talk about me going to where you live. I will always want my own place. What about if I die first? What will Dad do?* She didn't answer.

One of my college roommates was diagnosed with lymphosarcoma but her parents kept it from me to protect me from the pain of knowing she was dying. A give away: she said, *pray for me.* My eyes open, I couldn't see that she was dying. All I could do was to hold her hand. Before she died, she

knitted me a pink mohair sweater which more than fifty years later I keep as one of my treasures. It keeps me connected to her.

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I?" – Hillel


I imagine a conversation between me and Hillel, the great Jewish teacher. He reminds me not to put myself down. He reminds me to forgive myself and not blame myself for things I am not responsible for. He reminds me to believe in myself because he believes in me, and I am made in God's image. He reminds me that I have to be more than for myself; I have to be there for others, too.

I call our little granddaughter, Zoe, a pumpkin. Once time she said, *Grandma, I'm a little girl, I'm not a pumpkin.* She talks to her favorite puppet.

Fraggle, you have to be a good boy. Otherwise, you can't go to school. You have to listen to the teacher.

I will, she has him say, I want to be in second grade with you.

No, you have to start in kindergarten. I'll help you learn to read.

Zoe, now three months short of her eighth birthday, wrote her newest story and read it to us, the *Tale of Two Dogs* which she illustrated. Will we have another writer in the family? 

Three Poems

by Anastasia Juno

Abigail Elizabeth - September 26, 1977

If there were a hundred roses
From which to choose
I would still pick you.

Ride home from the hospital
Car seats were novel
Dad said this was right
I put up a fight.
He strapped you in.

Round black vinyl
Handel's Messiah
I sang with the chorus.



Somewhere in the Middle of Montana

The back seat of a 1950's sedan, so stuffy
Brother, so squirmy, no seat belts.
“Where is my blanket?”

I whisper.
Music blares
Can they hear me?
Will they stop talking?
“Where is my blanket?
My blanket?”
I can try a bit harder, a bit louder
Will they hear me?
“Where is my blanket?”
“What?”
“My blanket.”
They must know.
“My blanket? Where is it?”
“It’s not with you?”
“No”- I cry?
“You must have left it
At the gas station
And stop sucking your thumb.”

I sat in the back
No blanket, no thumb.

Pruning Roses

The roses are a scramble
Branches on pathways
Pink merging with red.
Climbers down bending.

I clip the scrawny
The cross growth
The diseased.

My brothers grow roses
One taught me how,

“Roses for our mother’s grave,” I said.

I did not expect to find
A sense of my father
Among the thorns.

My father, World War II
Burma road.
Death of friends,
Death of strangers.
Thorns with no roses.



Of Love and a Transistor Radio

by Mona Anderson

To build a stone house in three months requires back breaking work ten hours a day, seven days a week. I know this because my eventual husband and I built our stone house one summer when I was 28 and he was 33.

As November neared, we scrambled to cover the roof – boards, insulation, and black plastic held on with strapping. Shingles would have to wait. The interior walls were unfinished with white beadboard stuck to the stones as we built. No partitions separated rooms, and we climbed ladders from floor to floor.

We also had no running water or electricity. Crazy? Maybe. It was 1979 and we were wanna-be hippies eager to live off the land. Love would sustain us through a grueling New Hampshire winter we might have thought.



Our only furniture was a large red vinyl chair, a stuffed wing-backed chair with stuffing popping out of the arms, and an old stuffed couch, the once vibrant floral pattern now faded and dulled to a patterned brown. A few antique, or maybe just old, kitchen chairs surrounded an equally old pine kitchen table. Moveable white metal cupboards held kitchen items and sometimes mice. Buckets of plaster – finishing our walls was to be our winter project– provided extra seating, although visitors were rare. I think they were afraid we'd put them to work.

The real focal point of this small, 20x30 wide-open space was our 1920's Home Oakland wood-burning cookstove resting majestically at one end like a queen on her throne. Its light green enamel finish was pristine since the former owners hadn't burned wood in it. It also had a gas side-arm, although that first winter we weren't yet hooked up to gas.

It was also our only source of heat. And with its small firebox, our workdays went something like this: wake up to temperatures near freezing, build a fire, drive forty minutes to work (and shower there, luckily), return home in the dark to 32 degrees, build a fire, keep on hats and down jackets, pull the couch closer to oven and put feet in oven. Eventually, the house would warm enough to take off our jackets and make supper, and by bedtime it was a toasty 70 degrees. Until the next morning.

Kerosene lamps, also known as Aladdins, provided magical light at night. They glowed like candles but were bright enough to read and write by. Each day we trimmed the wicks, filled each base, and cleaned the glass chimneys.

The outdoors was our refrigerator. Water and plumbing were ingenious we thought. Each day we took an axe out to the brook that ran beside our house and chopped a hole, bringing in a few buckets of water to boil on the stove. Although we had an outhouse of sorts, who really wanted to run out in the middle of the night in the snow? Instead, we cut the seat out of a chair and put a white enameled pot underneath so we could then chuck the liquid contents out the back door. For other toileting needs, we laid down a newspaper and when done, folded it up and burned it in the woodstove.

On Saturday nights, with our plastering done for the day and our bellies full with the meal we cooked on our wood cookstove, we pulled the couch close and stuck our feet into the massive wood oven. Snuggled there and wrapped in the glow of our Aladdin lamps, we tuned our transistor radio to Mystery Theater. Each hour-long episode, with titles like "The Sinister Shadow" and "Shadows from the Grave," began with a creaking door and ended with host E.G. Marshall's "Until next time, pleasant...dreams?"

This is how you live on love. 

Smitten

by Mona Anderson

When I saw him kneeling
in the dirt patch on the front lawn
head bent as if in prayer
for five minutes
then ten
willing the grass seed to sprout,
how could I not smile
smitten with his endearing obsession
with life
when he fashioned
a tiny tent over the humidifier to save
our new sick kitten
willing her to breathe and coaxing
her to live with eight dollar a pound smoked turkey,
or when in my second week in the hospital
he brought me sweet scented
deep purple and fuchsia phlox
and prune cookies he made that morning

❧.

Rediscovering Salmon

by David D. Horowitz

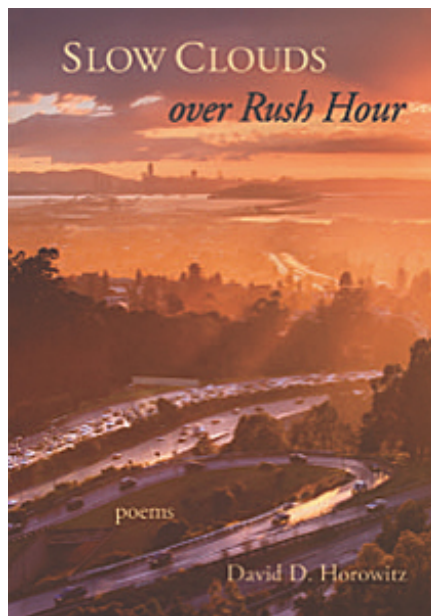
I love how a word can inspire, describe, and console. And I love to learn about the origins of a word—its etymology. Often, I’ve learned to appreciate a word’s English-language connotations after I’ve learned its meaning in Latin, ancient Greek, Arabic, Sanskrit, or some other language. Scrolling through websites devoted to etymology, or simply randomly exploring the pages of a dictionary, I’ve discovered a fabulous array of English words: for example, “deliquesce” (“to melt away”), “sussurus” (“a whisper; a soft murmuring or rustling sound”), and “lucubrate” (“to work, write, or study laboriously, especially at night” and “to study by candlelight or a lamp”). Perhaps my all-time favorite discovery is “oenomel”—which in ancient Greek means “wine” and “honey” and was an actual drink. Yet, oenomel has a contemporary second meaning: “something combining strength with sweetness.” How could such a word not provide pleasure?!

Sometimes familiar words assume deeper meaning for us because of their connection to some revelatory experience. For example, during the summer between my freshman and sophomore years at the University of Washington the dusk horizon skies were an astonishing mix of red, orange, pink, violet, purple, and magenta. August evenings spent admiring the horizon helped me, a novice versifier with a pocket notepad, evolve my description from “red-pink-orange” and “purple-orange-red” to one word: *salmon*. Yes, salmon—perfect for a Seattle sunset!

With salmon-like tenacity, I committed to reexperiencing the pleasure I’d felt discovering “salmon” could describe sunset skies. Several years ago, my dual interests in etymology and precise description rewarded me during one of my dictionary-browsing sessions. Casually flipping through pages, I came across the word “salmon” and learned, to my surprise, the word is a direct borrowing from the Latin “salmo,” which means “leaper.” Yes! Such pleasure that gave me! Salmon describes a dusk color, has a Latin root that means “leaper,” and connotes rugged persistence.

But poetry enriches experience even more. Here’s how poet Stanly Kunitz described a salmon: “a yard of muscle.” The brevity of “yard” suggests

toughness, as does metrically stressing “yard” and the first syllable of “muscle.” Reading that phrase, I feel I am in the Cascades watching a salmon leap and leap as it defies rapids and currents. Indeed, that salmon might inspire me to ascend, despite difficulty, to higher levels of understanding.



And, indeed, I’ve experienced many such deepening etymological surprises: “focus” is Latin for “hearth.” “Cursor” is Latin for “runner.” “Iris” is the Ancient Greek goddess of the rainbow. “Scintilla” is Latin for “spark.” “Safari” means “expedition” in Swahili and evolved from “safariya”—or “journey” in Arabic. How fitting: virtually every word journeys across different landscapes and cultures and is influenced by each of them.

I am a leaper, but I can focus, even as a cursor runs about my computer monitor on a safari as above me dusk’s salmon sky holds a star—a scintilla of hope. ♪♪

Markings

by Joanne M. Clarkson

Today the crest of a Steller jay reigns
from a pinnacle of spruce. On the weathered
fence a pair of towhees display the white chests
that mark them as not-robin. That and the white
spatter on their wings. Below in the raked soil
at least a dozen sparrow flutter like duff,
little purses of stolen seed. These lines

are not about birds. They are about how
I am learning the birds, the moveable
garden. Notch in the tail of this one,
bright yellow beak of another and how females
differ, too essential to be seen.

In the spring I held a fragment
of robin-sky shell and a brown speckled one
so fragile any pressure turned it to dust
too fine to feel; fine enough to fly.

I listen for the brief score of a call.
Not exactly repetition; more the lesson
of a feather: I am here. I am landscape
for the wind. In my notebook
I mark off kinglet with his yellow
bands of crown. Then, toward evening,
three colors of common finch.



The Hardest Things

by Judy Barker Kvinsland

Inspired by Kelly Corrigan's Tell Me More: Stories About the 12 Hardest Things I'm Learning to say

It's Like This. This is it.

By the time I ventured out in 2020, on my first foray away from the safety of our newly quarantined home, it was the middle of March. As I drove toward our neighborhood grocery, a little over a mile away, I barely noticed the lemon-hued forsythia blooming on the corner, the first harbinger of spring in my eastern Washington neighborhood. I overlooked the newly unfurled, linden leaves that lined familiar streets, bursting open to provide welcome shade from the spring sunshine.

I was too focused on survival to notice anything around me. I gripped the steering wheel and wondered if my tattered, misshapen N-95 mask, found wadded up in our garage cupboard next to paint cans, would be enough protection from this mystery called Covid-19.

Instead, I clutched our grocery list, compiled after a walk-about with my husband as we surveyed our kitchen shelves, pantry, refrigerator and freezer, taking stock, "What do we have? What do we need?" How naive of us, I now recall.

The shelves of Yoke's Market were stripped of every item on my list: no toilet paper, paper towels, or any other paper product. No peanut butter or rice cakes, to slather it on. No cleaning or sanitizing solutions of any kind. No 7-grain bread, diced tomatoes, cheese, bananas, or fresh fruit and vegetables, staples in our home. I snatched up a pound of chicken breasts and one box of frozen Garden Burgers and waited in a long line to pay for my two items. On my way out of the store, I crumpled up my original, lengthy list and stuffed it into a pocket.

When I returned to my car and pushed the ignition button, the radio broke the morning silence to announce, "As of today, March 15, 2020, Washington, California, Massachusetts, New York and Colorado lead the country in diagnosed cases of Covid- 19." My head slumped onto my chest.

Everyone I loved, everyone who was close to me, lived in Washington, California, and Massachusetts, three of the five states.

After my husband surveyed my single sack and searched for peanut butter, he looked at me and wondered, “What’s going on? Where have you been? Why didn’t you get the stuff on the list?”

Disheartened after my unsuccessful forage and aware that there would be more days like this one, I sank into a chair and sighed, “It’s like this. This is it.”

No Words at All

Only a few weeks earlier, I had finished reading Kelly Corrigan’s bestseller, *Tell Me More; Stories About the 12 Hardest Things I’m Learning to Say*, a reflection of simple phrases and words that “pass between people, that make love and connection possible.” What are the situations that require the hardest and most potent things we might say to each other, even when difficult? How do we sustain relationships and distill moments to their essence?

Our extended family was already grieving before the first Covid 19 death was recorded on February 29 in Seattle, which would become an epicenter for one of the earliest outbreaks in our country. Our dear cousin, who lived there, had died two weeks earlier, after a valiant struggle to stop the progress of pancreatic cancer.

I recalled our last goodbye in September of 2019. I recalled our last lunch and conversation reflecting upon fifty years of summer vacations on Puget Sound, shared in family cabins built near each other.

“I hoped that I would live long enough to vote in the upcoming presidential election. But it’s starting to look like I won’t be able to make it that far.”

We hugged each other, no words at all.

Later, I sent a check to the Biden Victory Fund. It felt like a vote.

I Don’t Know

On the same day that the governor of the state of Washington issued an edict to close all schools, ban all large gatherings, and shutter all but

essential businesses, my publisher released my first book, *Disturbing the Calm: A Memoir of Time and Place*. Essential businesses did not include bookstores, although one might disagree. I recall that I strongly did.

After four years of writing and revising, I finished my collection of inter-related personal essays in the fall of 2019. My memoir was a reflection of how memories of significant persons and specific places can be called upon to give us strength, inspiration and insight as we maneuver through turning points in our lives. Set within the context of historical events, including Title IX, I wanted my book released in March, during Women's History Month. Little did I know that the event space where I planned to celebrate with readers at a release party would lock its doors. Little did I know when I chose that date, bookstores where I hoped to sign copies, would close. I was devastated. By delaying the release date, I had created this mess for myself.

I winced when a friend joked, "Hey, it must be great to have a book out with the title, 'Disturbing the Calm!' This pandemic sure disturbed our calm."

"No," I replied, "It's really not that great to have a book released right now, not at all."

Later the same friend consoled me, "I'm going to buy one, for sure. But not online, I don't like online shopping. When will bookstores open up again?"

I whispered, "I don't know."

I Was Wrong

Within a few days, I realized that I was wrong.

I had underestimated the interface of a sudden pandemic with folks quarantined at home, now furloughed or unemployed from their present jobs, with time to read and already comfortable in the vast culture of shopping online. Several hundred books sold in just a few days, from online retailers, primarily Amazon. Perhaps readers, unlike my anti-online friend, just added my book to their queue, while ordering cases of paper products and jars of peanut butter.

My inbox quickly filled with heartwarming messages:

“Just ordered mine! A good read for when I self-quarantine!”

“Congratulations! I just ordered a copy. I look forward to reading it!”

“I just submitted a purchase request to our library system, Seattle Public Libraries!”

“Congratulations! Your new book will be at the top of our reading list!”

“Ordered this morning! Seems like the perfect book to read at this time of craziness!”

Soon deliveries from Amazon slowed because of the volume of orders for household goods and nonperishable food items. Somehow, my readers regrouped and sent their orders to Barnes and Noble, who could guarantee two-day delivery. Clearly, I was wrong.

No

Neighbors who know us well, describe our retirement lifestyle like this: “Go, Come Back, and Go!”

On New Year’s Day, when I opened the calendar app on my phone and scrolled through the year, I was reminded that our 2020 travel plans would not disappoint: meeting authors at the Tucson Book Festival; cruising on a small ship for two weeks, port to port, along the coasts of England and Ireland; hiking during our annual trek to Montana; family visits in northern California; and six weeks in our family cabin on Puget Sound, interspersed with our grandson’s baseball games, close to home.

Quickly, things changed.

“No, we’re not going to the Book Festival this year,” I lamented, but recovered when I realized that I still had shelves of unread books and lots of time to read. Then I discovered Book Passages streamed author interviews from their San Francisco store, almost like a Book Festival in my own living room.

“No, we’re not going to England and Ireland this year,” I told a friend. We were relieved when the trip was cancelled. We committed ourselves to stay safe and stay local. We planted tomatoes and lettuce among our geraniums

and petunias and harvested vegetables around the time we would have been flying to Europe.

“No Montana this year,” my brother and I agreed. We FaceTimed each other frequently during the pandemic, both of us walking around our homes, sharing our gardens, vistas, and occasionally, a quick face shot, to compare whose hair had grown longer and more unruly due to the closure of salons and barbershops.

“No, we can’t see you this spring, but let’s see how this quarantine goes. Maybe we’ll be able to get together later in the year?” I commiserated with my California loved ones. “Let’s set a goal for August at the cabin?”

Baseball season was cancelled.

Tell Me More

We were watching Netflix in early March, a pastime that would later become a nightly pandemic ritual, when my son’s name popped up on my phone.

“Mom, we’ve been talking, and while we appreciate how often you help us with the kids, and how much they love spending time with you, we think we should take a break, until we find out what’s going on with this Covid-19 virus. We feel we need to be more mindful and protective of you and Dad. What do you think?”

I was relieved. I felt the same but did not quite know how to express my concern.

He continued, “What can we get you from Yokes or Costco? Can you give me your shopping list, and we’ll drop off what you need. Does Dad need a prescription filled?”

“No, no, we have everything we need. We’re fine, for a while,” I assured him. We agreed to assess our self-chosen quarantine in one week. It was not necessary. In forty-eight hours, the governor closed all schools and encouraged all but essential workers to stay home.

We worked on our Skyping skills. We worked on our FaceTiming skills. We learned to Zoom, but it was hard to end those calls and sit alone again

without family.

“Tell me more about your new puppy,” I begged our grandchildren. “Tell me more about your classes online. Tell me more about how you found those cupcakes you dropped off for my birthday!” We stayed in touch, but we always wanted more.

Yes. I Love You.

In the middle of August, ten days into our anticipated, two-week stay at our Puget Sound cabin, we spotted an eagle swoop down from his perch on a nearby Douglas fir and dive into shallow waters to secure breakfast. From the vantage point on our deck, we shouted our customary, “Bingo! Way to go!” We wondered if we’d spot the same eagle later when we boated down Hammersley Inlet toward Boston Harbor, chasing a tugboat, a ritual of summer.

I surveyed the scattered remnants of our own breakfast; crusted cereal bowls that might appeal to a scavenging chipmunk, half-empty coffee mugs, and an empty plate with traces of frosting left behind by someone who thought, “I think I’ll have cake for breakfast. After all, it’s summer.”

Our vacation was a heroic feat in the midst of the pandemic. We all agreed to quarantine for two weeks, before we arrived. We agreed to zone the house, one family per floor in the three-story A-frame, built fifty years ago and recently renovated. We agreed to wear masks at all times inside, socially distance, and forgo outside visitors while there, only family.

We lazed about, relaxing, and semi-planning the day, until my grandson broke the calm.

“Hey, how long have we been here? Is it ten days yet? That’s how long we have to distance before we know we’re safe! Right?”

He looked at his mother for guidance, “Can we hug them? I mean Poppa and LaLa. Can we hug them yet?”

“Yes!” We all jumped up and bear hugged each other, shed more than a few tears, and celebrated our survival. “I love you,” we shouted. Words could barely convey our joy.

Good Enough

As we anticipated Christmas, the United States had surpassed eighteen million cases of Covid-19 and reported 319,000 deaths. Even though, we were all healthy, we agreed that inside celebrations were not the best of ideas. Christmas in our own homes would have to be good enough this year.

After we decorated our home, I wandered from room to room and enjoyed our traditional tree ornaments and wreaths in our windows, but I felt forlorn. Our plan was not good enough for me. After a few days, I broke the agreement and asked, “Can we try something else?”

On Christmas Eve, when my son’s family arrived for lunch, all the outside doors in our house were open, screens back on the storm doors to allow outside air to filter through the house. I counteracted the chill and turned up the furnace, just for the hour or two, we would be together. I’d conserve tomorrow.

My husband and I sat masked in our designated zone, the entry hall. We carried in a small patio table and adorned it with a holiday cloth. From there, we visited with our family in their zone, the living and dining rooms, all within our sight. One at a time, we served ourselves a holiday lunch, most of it take-out, spread across the kitchen island, alongside paper plates, cups, and napkins, and disposable cutlery.

After we opened gifts, my grandchildren said, “This is a great Christmas, LaLa and Poppa! We love our gift certificates from Dick’s Sporting Goods. We can order online and they have curbside pickup. They’ll bring our presents right out to us, sort of like Santa!”

It was an enjoyable day. It was good enough for us.

I Know. Onward.

My legs were just long enough to step from one yellow circle and the next chalked circle in the parking lot of Brookdale retirement community down the street from my home. While vaccinating their own residents in late February, their medical director extended an invitation to nearby neighbors “of a certain age” to also get vaccinated. Like frogs leaping from one lily

pad to another, seeking safety and a good landing, my neighbors and I were back again, seeking safety and our second Pfizer Covid-19 vaccination.

After we finished, we lingered, in no hurry to walk back to our homes. Still masked, we marveled at our good fortune. “This is so wonderful. Can you believe it?” someone mused. A few of us replied, “I know, I know! How lucky we are!”

For the first time in a long time, we felt like we were trekking onward, not up a mountain, but down the other side. 🌀🌀

Simple Exotics

by Mary Ellen Gambutti

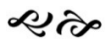
Under a 15-watt bulb
fine fingers focus
on silk and satin.

A red fez cap covers
oil tin to smooth
the Singer's stitches.

The needle bobs, and its
rhythm soothes me drowsy
beneath her cabinet model.

Tiny remnants of her past creations—
ivory elephants, tarnished brass,
glass diamonds, the tang of the tin box

A mid-century whiff of Bake-light –
I spill, sift, and sort the buttons
on grandmother's sisal carpet.



Pigeon Coop

by Mary Ellen Gambutti

Two brothers, Albert and Mack, owned the brick tenement at 402 W. Broadway and operated a store-front swap shop. Albert enjoyed pigeons. His scruffy flock flew freely to Washington Square Park and returned each night to roost on his roof. “I need a new pigeon coop,” declared Albert. At the far side of the roof, a rusted, broken cage was flipped on its side, awaiting removal. His pigeons waited for new housing.

In the summer of 1928, Albert acquired a compact lawyer’s cabinet. Its solid, yet light frame and plain wood shelves sparked an idea: “Help me carry it to the roof.” So, affable, mustachioed Mack hoisted it onto his back and hauled it five flights up.

Mack eased the cabinet into a corner, against the parapet and away from the stairwell and clotheslines. Albert positioned a few loose bricks against the open glass door to hold it open and covered the shelves with a thick layer of newspapers.

The flock swooped over the alleys and apartments after their day in the park where old folks and children tossed nuts, bread, and Crackerjacks to them. The grey birds strutted on their yellow feet, scratched the asphalt roof, and sampled the crumbs Albert had spread out for them. One or two were interested in the lawyer’s cabinet and settled in for the night. Others, warier, nestled in an air vent.

Mike and Julia had moved to the city from Pennsylvania to find work when the coal mines closed. Albert and Mack rented them a third-floor flat. Julia lugged a bushel basket of wet wash two flights up to the clotheslines. She was a long way from her Allegheny Mountain home. The sooty summer air burned her nose. Her city view was rooftop water tanks, cramped alleys, and an endless grid of windows. The grass-less drying yard draped in clotheslines stirred sadness in her. She sighed and set down her laundry basket, pulling two clothespins from her apron pocket to put between her lips. Bending for a shirt, she spied Albert’s cabinet in the far corner and stepped over for a closer look. Julia had seen evidence of Albert’s hobby; pigeon droppings. *How peculiar to use good furniture as a pigeon coop!*

Her footsteps were deliberate as she descended the dim stairwell. Julia was determined to make a deal with Albert. The little man sat behind his shop counter absorbed in his newspaper. Her high voice startled him. “Albert! Is the cabinet on the roof for sale?” His forehead furrowed, he peered at Julia over his spectacles, then stood to affirm his pride in his repurposing of the cabinet. “That’s my new pigeon coop!” Julia, envisioning the warm, dark wood of the cabinet against her bare parlor wall, pulled two crumpled bills from her apron pocket and held them toward Albert. “I can give you two dollars for it.” The shopkeeper thought it a tidy sum, having paid only one dollar for the used cabinet. “Done!” was his answer.

She had tended chickens back home, and hard work was not beneath her. While Albert’s birds were at the park, Julia removed the messy newspapers, twigs, and feathers from the shelves. That evening, Mike, who worked across the street in a garage, was happy to carry the cleaned-up furniture downstairs to their flat. Julia polished the oak finish until it gleamed and shined the glass door with newspaper and ammonia water.

She had begun to collect volumes of magical children’s stories, *My Book House*, from a door-to-door salesman for her boy and girl and aligned them on a shelf. She bought a few fancy cup and saucer sets from Albert to pretty up the cabinet and lay a lace-trimmed linen cloth on the top. Julia’s hope was restored.

Mike repaired the toppled nesting cage with scraps of wood stored by the brothers in the cellar. He replaced the perches and the nesting boxes, and he attached new chicken wire and nailed the warped back and bottom. He stood it in the corner where the cabinet had stood. Albert and Julia were pleased. Mike was pleased to have made a dollar on his repair work for Albert.

Mike, Julia, and their family moved uptown in 1930. The cabinet held pride of place in the parlor among new furniture. They – my mother's parents– moved with us to a home in the suburbs in 1955. The cabinet was placed on a rug in my basement retreat, where it held my Golden Books and the Book House collection.

Years later, I asked my nana whether I could bring it to my first apartment. She feigned disbelief, “That old pigeon coop?” And that was the first time I heard the story of Mack, Albert, and the used lawyer’s cabinet.

Its tiny latch still fastens, but all four casters have disappeared. A brass shelf support is missing and tips unless balanced by a book placed just right. I marvel at how the glass has stayed intact a century on. ♪♪

A Red Loveseat Observed

by Linda Netherton

You brushed by me with your walker, your eyes scanning
The endless landscape of recliners, sofas and loveseats,
Past banners sagging limply from ceiling wires, announcing
For the comfort you deserve, furniture that tells a story.
Flanked by your family, you fanned out across the showroom
Like an elite corps of trackers seeking a special prey.



As your daughter called out, “gray blue or maybe, tan, Mom?”
You stopped and turned around, suddenly attracted,
And I could feel the tragic curvature of your ancient spine,
As you sank with relief into the fire-engine-redness of my micro suede.
You stroked my arm with long slender hands and wide fingertips
While the others looked at us together, wide-eyed with surprise.

I arrived at your apartment, knowing my place would be prepared,
A prominent place where you could show me off to your many visitors.
My comfort allowed you to give up your favorite recliner
To your disabled son, who always chose the best place to watch TV
Always with you, comforted just to be near you, chatting and eating
popcorn,
Never mind that your back really did better in the recliner.

Your daughter helped you decorate the apartment, with me as the focal
point.

What else? I fit in well, learning that my predecessor was an overlong,
second-hand
Couch that allowed your other son, the drug-addled one, to sleep on it for
weeks.
His loud, endless talking, demanding money and your pain pills, scared you
and your neighbors,
Leaving you with a bout of colitis that you hid from your daughter because
She'd made you promise not to let him take over your space and peace of
mind.

You solved the problem when you realized you only needed a new loveseat.
Too short to sleep on, you whispered conspiratorially to your daughter with
a sly grin.
I became the center of parties for kind old women who sipped rosé and ate
cookies,
Welcoming new neighbors, reviewing musical events and sharing news,
Their sagging backsides comfortably tucked into my cushions, remarking,
what a lovely
Red loveseat, where did you get it? And me, honored that your best friend,
Marian,
Bought my twin at the Ashley Homestore and, looking at it now, still thinks
of you.

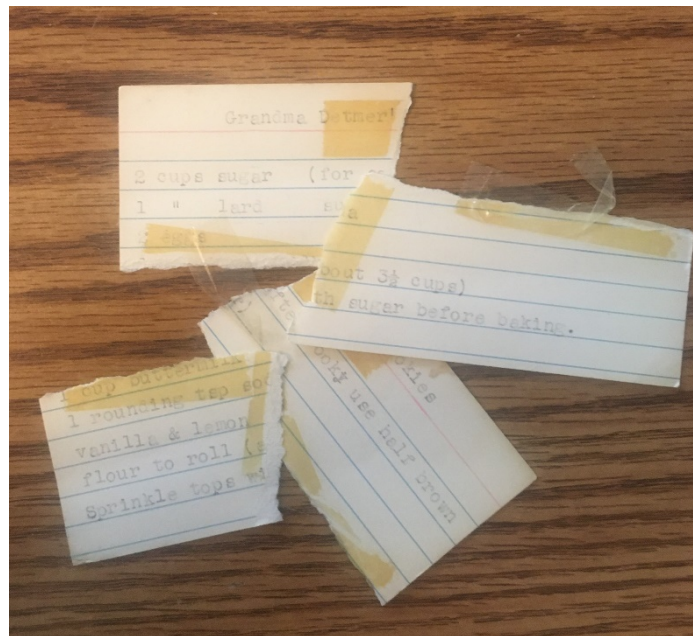
When I lost you, I was moved to the home of your son who was so good to
you,
And heard his crying when you were gone. He sat with me, for days and
days,
Remembering you, for I carried your scent and your exuberance for life,
The softness of your touch and the great goodness you brought to all who
knew you.
And now I am covered in pictures of you, as he sifts through them,
remembering
Your great beauty and the redness of your lips when he was a child.



Great-Grandma's Sugar Cookies

by Pat Detmer

Even though I'm the least likely of her three daughters to be found in the kitchen, I somehow ended up with my mother's recipe box after she passed away. Her own mother had gifted her with the box when she was a young and inexperienced housewife, and it came to her filled with Grandma's hand-written recipes, filed alphabetically by category: Cakes, Casseroles, Cookies, Dips and Spreads, Misc., Pies, Salads, and Soups. Mom added to it over the years, and it's now stuffed with wraps cut from tin product cans, newspaper clippings, magazine ads, and 3 x 5 cards both written and typed, some of them pre-printed with the provider's name at the top, official documentation for only the most serious and deep-pocketed home cooks. Mother never got her own branded card, but used a printed one that said "My Pet Recipe for _____"



I'm not a cook by trade or nature, but I've added to the box myself, and periodically I'll take a tour through it, perusing the recipes and the comments written on them: "11/10/92 - Pat and Fred liked, but cut back on salt next time" or "6-15-97 - Added green peppers." As I flip through these, I can almost smell the onions and garlic cooking on the stove and hear the laughter at the kitchen table as we waited to be fed. Mother's been gone for

over two decades, and while some memories fade, kitchen memories remain as strong as the scents that wafted from the stovetop and oven.

I decided to make a batch of cookies one rainy Saturday, and pulling out a possibility, I realized something was stuck to the back of it: A 3 x 5 see-through plastic sleeve with paper remnants in it. I took the pieces out and jig-sawed them back into place. It was a recipe card with a red line at the top to delineate the title, followed by light blue lines under that. The recipe had been typed, barely readable now, faded like the paper and the lines on it. The card was ripped, not cut, and then taped back together. The tape, brittle and yellowed with age, had surrendered its task. I wondered if one of my sisters might have ripped it apart when we were kids, but generally, we didn't mess with things that weren't our own, and we ate whatever Mother put in front of us without complaint. It's doubtful one of us would have done it in a moment of unbridled recipe rage.

At the top, "Grandma Detmer's Sugar Cookies," followed by a list of artery-clogging ingredients. I looked at the backside and understood immediately who had done the tearing and taping: My mother. Written on the back in her strong, unmistakable hand:

LaSalle, Illinois

From Grandma Detmer

*Ed's mother made these. She made them for Jack
when he was a very little boy and he loved them.*

Ed was my dad's father, and because Jack loved the cookies, the recipe was passed from Great Grandma to Grandma and then to Jack's wife, my mother.

I was surprised to find it. My mother and grandmother tolerated each other but were not kindred spirits. Grandma could fit under her son's arm and carried breasts so large that we used to hide in the extra bedroom when she got dressed so we could gaze in wonder as she swayed them into her bra. Despite what she carried on her chest, she was petite in form, a sprite who believed in table-tapping and consulting Ouija boards, and who spoke with a southern lilt even though born in Illinois. We could do anything we liked when we stayed at her house, and if we said we wanted ice cream, she

would put on her heels and walk briskly to the store to get it for us, no questions asked.


My mother, on the other hand, was not a sprite, but walked solidly, fully tethered to the earth. Third generation German, eldest child, no-nonsense sheriff of whatever local environment she surveyed, she was three years older than my father when they married. They look handsome and happy in old pictures, oblivious to what the years together might bring. Children, homes, boats, camping, job promotions, trips across country, it was a good life until Dad seemed to tire of the passive-aggressive management of it. He didn't share Mother's desire for tidiness or industry, so an unacknowledged apprehension began to hover over and cloud everything we did. Rather than asking Dad deep and difficult questions and then asking them of herself, Mother doubled her efforts, ironically the very tendency that may have caused Dad's disenchantment in the first place. She threw everything she had at the task, worked their little patch on this earth, watering, pulling weeds – hers and his – feeding, sowing, harvesting, trying to ignore the fact that she was the only one who seemed to be interested in toiling in it. She tended and fed her denial as carefully as she did everything else.

Eventually, he left. She got the house and most things in it, and he got to walk away, which was all he ever wanted. His favorite Sugar Cookie recipe was folded into Mother's life like eggs into batter.

One of my sisters was married when Dad left, the other, happily dating. I was thirty and single with time on my hands, so I watched Mom cry and heard about the betrayal and listened to her laments. It was difficult. Not because she was in pain – she'd earned that – but because she saved it for me, sharing it in the dimly lit downstairs family room while her neighbors, co-workers, and acquaintances saw only the perfect spurned woman: Gracious, equanimous, rational, smiling, strong, brave. In the outside world, she never spoke ill of my father or the secretary he left with and eventually married. In the outside world it was performance art, and she gave a master class. I was too close to it to help her, too entrenched to be effective, my heart carrying anger and sympathy for them both. After a while, seeing little progress in the dark mood she showed me, I suggested she try working with a professional or consider looking for a therapy group, perhaps women who

found themselves in the same situation she was in. To my happy surprise she found a group, but she attended only once. She didn't need it, she told me, because everyone came up to her at the end and said she was amazing, so together, so even-keeled that she shouldn't attend groups like these, but should start and lead groups of her own. Unconvinced, I urged to her to get pissed just once - just once - and unload on Dad to get it out of her system, maybe in a letter if she couldn't do it in person, something she could mail or keep to herself. Or go out for drinks with friends and have a little too much and cry in front of them and ask to be driven home. From what I saw, all my suggestions went unheeded, and eventually she passed through the raw pain of it, but never got over it, remaining, to the rest of the world and for the rest of her life, the perfect and stoic spurned wife.

But the recipe card ... that card ... at some moment in time she found it and tore it apart. She might have seen "Jack loved" and ripped it into pieces knowing who else Jack loved, which after almost 30 years of marriage, wasn't her. Maybe she had a vision of a line of three women going back generations who carefully tended to the needs of a man who seemed incapable of taking care of himself, with no recompense for all that hard work. I picture her finding it, fingering it, feeling the anger burn inside her. It would have only taken a moment, perhaps a few seconds of pique for her years of labor. "Well, oh yeah? Here's what I think of you and your cookies!" A brief flurry of hot thoughts and an unconsidered and inconsiderate act, so unusual for her. And then, after her moment of muted fury, she taped the pieces back together, making it look as if she'd had second thoughts, mending it rather than tossing the evidence in the garbage.

As poignant as the background story might be, I grin whenever I find it. The act was so human and free that it makes me oddly happy. I like to think that she put the recipe back in the box because she knew that I'd find it one day, and seeing it, would know that she'd finally had her moment of release, that she'd finally given in to the anger I'd urged her to acknowledge. But maybe I'm overthinking it. Maybe she just thought they were the best sugar cookies she'd ever had. 

A Me Day

by Pat LaPointe

A restful sleep. No crazy dreams. No waking in the middle of the night to rush to the bathroom. Stretching my body makes me feel I'm much taller than five feet.

My only focus is on getting that first cup of coffee: a double espresso Americana, accompanied by the first cigarette.

I check the fridge for my favorite breakfast ingredients: English Muffin, cream cheese, and if it's a great day, salmon if not, then ham. Since it's my day of pleasure, I find salmon. While I eat and savor the next cup of coffee, I take time to make my "to do" list.

First on the list is Barnes and Noble. I enter and fall under the books' spell. Temptation dictates that I must buy, buy, buy. I scan the shelves of new releases and find something interesting. Perhaps a new novel from a favorite author. There's the "I must have this book and a few more" message coming from somewhere in my brain.

I scan more books in the fiction section. I stop at the letter "L" where I imagine the book I am writing to be somewhere between Charles Lamb and D.H. Lawrence.

Now Whole Foods. I spend most of my time in Produce, filling my cart with lettuce, spinach, cucumbers, green onions, avocados, cherry tomatoes, white and sweet potatoes, sweet onions, apples, bananas and ripe melons.

The next aisle is "Fish and Seafood". Need to make sure there will be salmon for coming breakfasts, shrimp and scallops for my favorite dinners.

I load my goodies into a thermal bag. Luckily, I still have time to go to Trader Joe's before lunch.

I don't know how they do it, but walking into Trader Joe's always feels like entering a "happy place." I gather organic chips and dips, no-hormone roasts and chicken, and nuts. When I reach the checkout lane, a smiling employee exchanges comments about the weather, asks what I'll be doing the rest of the day.

How nice it is that there's a Panera Bakery in the same shopping center. I stop in to enjoy one of their delicious salads before heading home. I load more food into the thermal bags

I get home just in time to leave for our condo in Wisconsin. With the food already loaded into the car, only a few necessities to put in for our seventy-five-mile journey: clothes, medicine and a six-pound Yorkie.

I'm not driving, so it's a good time for a nap.


I wake up, feeling energized, just as we enter the condo complex.

I race to my office in the backroom. No matter how many times I've entered that room, I feel a rush of excitement and pleasure when I open the door.

It's nearly dinner time and I have a bit of work that needs to be done. My husband understands this. He unloads the groceries and offers to pick up food from a nearby restaurant for our first night here. I am "over the moon" as I sit at my computer and look out at the trees and flowers just outside my five large windows. I've had the privilege of an unobstructed view of the changes in every season.

I accomplish the work I wanted to do just as my husband arrives with dinner.

After dinner, I cuddle with my Yorkie while I read and watch TV.

I ready myself for bed, grateful for a day of such pleasures, wishing for many more of them in the days ahead. 

Tres Personas en Una Bicicleta

by Michael W. Shurgot

"When you travel you step back from your own days,
from the fragmented imperfect linearity of your time."

- Lucia Berlin, "Luna Nueva," *Evening in Paradise*, p. 232

Having been a professor for 35 years, I have always reveled in students' willingness to learn. With university students in El Paso and Seattle, community college students in Olympia, and adult learners in Seattle's Lifetime Learning Center, I have taken immense pleasure observing students' determination to master their material. Indeed, this "educational process" has been for me nearly as satisfying and important as students' final achievements. Having observed this process in numerous settings, I realize that it requires several steps, and that what I observe in my individual classes is often the result of years of gradual intellectual development and emotional commitment. On a recent tour of Nicaragua, a stunning, sudden, seemingly small moment in Leon, considered amid the scars of the country's turbulent political history, crystalized for me – as never before – just what "commitment" to education can mean.

Nicaragua has suffered through numerous political upheavals, interventions, wars, and revolutions that have decimated the economy and frayed the social fabric. The recent unrest began in 1933, when American Marines handed power to Anastasio Somoza, who in 1934 engineered the murder of Augusto Sandino, the leader of a guerrilla campaign against American intervention, and then ruled brutally for twenty years. In 1961 a revolutionary force, the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, or FSLN, was formed to fight Somoza's son. In the midst of this strife, at midnight on December 23, 1972, a devastating earthquake struck Managua, killing 6,000 people and leaving 300,000 homeless. When Somoza diverted to his own interests the aid money that poured into Nicaragua, he sparked a violent revolution led by Carlos Fonseca and Pedro Chamorro that eventually led to Somoza's resignation and the Sandinistas' victorious march into Managua on July 19, 1979. The revolution had killed 50,000 people and left 150,000 homeless.

As if Nicaragua had not suffered enough, dissatisfaction with the Sandinistas led to further American intervention and trade boycotts, and eventually to the American-backed Contra War in which another 18,000 people died. Relative peace did not come to Nicaragua until August 1987 when an agreement with other Central American countries was arranged by Costa Rican president Oscar Arias Sanchez. Successive governments under Daniel Ortega, Violeta Chamorro, Arnoldo Aleman, and again Ortega, plus American and international aid have increased economic activity, built new roads, decreased the rate of illiteracy, reduced the rate of infant mortality, and finally, in 2009, opened the country to tourism. Hence the classy hotels where visitors can relax in lovely rooms or swim in sun-drenched pools while outside the air-conditioned walls small children cry in broken English “I am hungry,” as they peddle tiny flowers shaped from palms. Their plaintive voices echo Nicaragua’s violent, troubled history.

Yet, as in every developing country, one finds hope and determination among its people. In the hotels, restaurants, cafes, markets, shops, craft and pottery stores, among workers in large coffee plantations and rum factories, one meets proud, dedicated, and hard-working people determined to build a prosperous country from the political terror and geological trauma of its past. The food is rich and fulsome, and elegantly served; small, family-owned coffee shops offer rich brews and fabulous chocolate frappes; hand-made, distinctively Nicaraguan jewelry and pottery are available in markets; and an afternoon at the Flor de Caná rum factory is a tasteful delight. Articulate and well-educated guides in museums, restored historical landmarks, new and old cathedrals, schools, and even former Somoza torture chambers vividly describe not only the hideous past, from which they do not hide, but also an imagined future of economic, artistic, and educational growth.



The Hotel El Convento in Leon is a microcosm of the nation's chaotic history. The original structure was the San Francisco Convent, founded in 1639 by the Reverend Brother Pedro de Zuniga. Following a government decree in 1829 ending the recognition of religious orders and another in 1830 ordering that monastery buildings be devoted to public education, the Franciscan Brothers left Nicaragua and in 1854 the Lancastrian Public School opened on the site. When the school's funding ended, the buildings were abandoned to beggars and the homeless and remained in disrepair until 1881, when the Instituto Nacional de Occidente opened on the renovated grounds. The Instituto moved in 1892, and while the site was being used by the Reverend Mothers of the Assumption, it was heavily damaged during civil unrest in 1896. The site was further damaged in the 1898 earthquake; a portion was demolished in 1972 when it was occupied by the Instituto Azarías H. Pallais; and finally, during the Contra War in the 1980s, bombing destroyed what little was left of the original structure.

In 1995 the Hotel El Convento Project, rising like a Phoenix from the rubble of the war, began with the purchase of the site by a coalition of business and civic leaders. The construction approximated where possible the layout of the original convent while incorporating the requirements of a modern hotel. The result is an extraordinarily beautiful, almost somber

structure that brilliantly recreates the design and feel of Spanish colonial architecture and is among the most celebrated hotels in all Nicaragua. Paintings in bold, bright colors of Spanish and Native men and women in colorful dress and images of the Madonna and Child hang in cool, quiet corridors of white stucco walls and polished tile floors. Priceless, antique gold and silver artifacts adorn dark wooden cabinets in the large drawing room; and a gorgeous, meticulously maintained garden graces the central square between the parallel dormitory wings. Comfortable rooms feature sturdy, dark stained, four poster beds set against exposed brick walls that evoke the original structure, and large windows open to the sumptuous garden and the comforting sound of the bubbling fountain set in its midst. Just being in this room was an immense sensual pleasure.

At six o'clock on a Thursday my affable tour guide, Eli Gonzalez, and I strode out of the cool air of this peaceful refuge into Leon's sensuous dawn. The streets were already busy: workers hurried to their shops or offices or one of the many construction sites near the hotel; trucks, motorcycles, and cars raced up and down streets and tore through intersections; students (there are 10, 000 in Leon!) scampered on narrow sidewalks to get to their classes. On street corners vendors had already set up shabby umbrellas and rickety tables and chairs where they would sit all day selling fruits and vegetables, or tortillas they would fry in tiny coal-fired stoves and serve with rice and beans, a staple of all Central American diets.

We walked for about forty minutes, through several neighborhoods, past brightly painted stucco houses, over a bridge spanning a small creek and into an industrial area. After crossing back over the bridge, Eli took us a different way, through one of the poorer sections of Leon. "See all sides of the city," he said. A different side, indeed. We walked past tin shacks, where adults, victims of the high unemployment that Nicaragua has yet to solve, sat aimlessly in dusty doorways. Thin, poorly clad children, who number among the nearly fifty percent of the population that struggles to survive amid Nicaragua's persistent poverty, chased soccer balls down stony streets. Old men lingered outside hovels, hoping, perhaps, that this day would somehow be different from yesterday. Walking amid such poverty one is conscious of being the object of gazes that, one hopes, may

reflect gratitude because one's son or daughter works in the tourist industry, but may also harbor disdain for those who can afford to travel.

As we were crossing a narrow street I looked up. A middle-aged man, perhaps forty or forty-five, dressed in worn shirt and jeans and torn sandals, rapidly pedaled an old bicycle toward us. Sitting in front of him, on the cross bar, was his son; sitting on a rack behind him was his daughter. Each was carrying a small satchel with one hand and clinging to the frame of the bicycle with the other. The children were no more than six or seven; both were wearing dark blue pants, ironed white shirts, and crisp black ties. The children were smiling; their Padre was taking them to school.

Of all the sights and sounds of my long journey through Nicaragua, the second I saw those three people on one bicycle remains etched in my memory. No other experience encapsulated so brilliantly the fierce determination and resilience of Nicaraguans in their ravaged country to create a future so vastly different from its past. No war, tyrant, revolution, or earthquake will ever stop that man from pedaling his smartly dressed children to school. And I'll wager that nothing will stop them from succeeding in their chosen studies. Nothing!

A fleeting image. A tiny moment among millions in Nicaragua. But also an indelible reminder of why education – everywhere – matters. And from that realization I take immense pleasure.

Adelanté, Padre! 

Spring Yearnings

by Suzy Beal

Something happens in the spring, just as the trees bud. Primal urges of being the “harvester” creep in before I realize it. Once again, seduced by the seed catalog after swearing to “no more gardening” last fall, I’ve ordered seeds again.

I try to keep the size of my garden commensurate with what we can eat. Still, as with a buffet dinner, the seed catalog induces me to overindulge. Did you know there is a plant that produces potatoes underground and tomatoes above ground? They call it *Ketchup and Fries*. This year all purple vegetables are being introduced. Purple carrots, okra, broccoli, cauliflower, peppers, radishes, corn, onions, and beans are available. How can I resist?

Ever since I was a kid, I’ve had a garden. My first gardens of succulents taught me how to place plants for best results. For a child, they were easy to grow and looked beautiful. As I grew, so did my ambitions. I wanted to grow vegetables. I’d only had a garden for beauty up to this point. At age ten, I dug up a space just below our house. It was a muddy job, but I remember thinking I would feed the entire family, all nine of us. This first try at vegetables only produced lettuce and tomatoes. I wore out fast from needing to haul water by hand.

During the years my own children were growing up, I had a large garden behind our house. I didn’t need to haul water, and I ended up making it bigger than we needed. That was a mistake. I spent hours washing vegetables to give to friends, beans, snap peas, cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes, and zucchini. We also had two long rows of raspberry bushes. While waiting for the berries to ripen to that perfect blush, we fought off the birds. My little girls took turns running outside to chase off the robins. We didn’t want to share the berries with the birds. I had a special recipe I made with the raspberries. It took a quart of berries to make the raspberry torte, so we saved each day. One morning we looked out the window. Our little dog balanced on her hind legs was eating all the lower berries. The girls ran out shouting.

This year, after mixing in all the compost from my meticulously tended compost pile, I plant my seeds and begin the battle. I have to keep the quail from eating all the little green shoots as they appear. They love those tiny, green lush bits and the squirrels do, too, but they also dig up the seeds and eat them. We chase the deer away with a snow shovel, banging it on the ground. They are not afraid. I spray deer repellent around the area, but they seem to like the odor. I hang garlic-scented rags near the garden. Maybe I need to purchase the lion pee for sale in the garden catalogs.

Recently, my husband fenced the garden. He put in eight-foot stakes and hung six-foot chicken wire from it. He added a swinging gate big enough for the wheelbarrow to go through. The wire reaches to the ground to keep out the quail and up six feet to keep out the deer. I water by hand with a hose to keep the weeds to a minimum. Here in the high desert, weeds don't grow if they don't get water, so even though watering by hand takes time, it prevents needing to weed. A visit to the garden each afternoon to water brings a calming effect to my days. I look forward to slowing down, checking out each plant, and talking to them as the water circles around their roots and soaks in.

I love to garden. When I see those first little green shoots come above the soil, I smile and realize I can't help myself. It's hard to imagine from that tiny seed I will get beans that reach six to eight feet. They shoot out tendrils to latch onto anything that will hold their weight. They climb into the air, feeling their way as they grow. Soon I have to tame them to the wires I've strung. They grow fast, as if to outrun autumn's first freeze. The white blossoms draw in the bees and the miracle of pollination takes place. It seems as if I stood still, I could see them grow. Tiny beans appear in days even before the blossom dries out.



The growing season is short here and I've had to adjust my gardening to growing things that require a forty-five to sixty-day span from seed to harvest. We can have freezing nights in June and August. This challenge somehow makes the harvest even more satisfying. My heart swells with pleasure as I fill my garden trundle with ripe zucchini, eggplant, beans, lettuces, beets, and cucumbers. They are organic, healthy, and they have flavor, contrary to those from the grocery store. Feeding my family home-grown vegetables is the best. ♪♪

When I Need to Know What I Am Capable of Dreaming

by Barbara Simmons

Journal Entry, April 2017

Arrived in Warsaw on the 18th, having begun the trip on the 17th. The notion of time has disappeared for a while – I am not really feeling time's passage; so vast is the space we've covered, time's not conceptually a reality for me right now, having looked out a small rectangular window at oceans and countries that we sped over, naming them with the help of navigational maps on the small screens on the chairback in front of me. Language seems to be flying, too – and the letters 'tbd' - that had announced the as yet undetermined time of our arrival in Poland, stay with me.

To Be Determined – the meaning of raveling – undoing – rewinding – and Ravel, the musician whose name is appealingly a contronym, a word that has two meanings that are the opposite of each other. Confusingly, ravel can mean both "tangle" and "untangle." And I'm in that space of tangled time, untangling the time zone I'm from and, like Peter Pan, sewing on a new time zone to untangle the two timepieces that my body is inhabiting.



Not sure what I dreamed, or if I even really slept over the thousands of miles, we flew to be with our son who lives in Warsaw, and I am now stuck on the Latin words *hinc omnia* that I remember being written on a large sculpted open book that is placed atop the entrance to the library of the University of Warsaw. Maybe everything does start from here.

Journal Entry, May 2020

Halfdome.net – here, time-lapse feeds help me spend a day in less than a minute, watching the light paint the sides of Badger Pass, and flicker over Yosemite Falls, making the waterfall look more like a horsetail flicking off flies, making me wonder about the fact that has stuck with me once I looked it up – that *an estimated 135,000 gallons of water drop over the top of the falls every minute during peak season*. My vocabulary is trying to meet the demands of describing something as awe-inspiring as these falls, but mainly my sense of wonder and the pleasure of a day compactly fitting into a few minutes again takes me to time and space, and my belief that somehow, we're in and beyond all that surrounds us.

Journal Entry, Summer 2020

Pleasure in words, in their origins, and I find *bellwether* jotted down, my having used it frequently, but knowing that I didn't know its origin story. The word *wether* is Old English for ram, especially a castrated one. And *wethers* were used as leaders of flocks of sheep and had bells around their necks to amplify their role, I imagine. About the 15th century, "*wethers*" was used as a term for people – in a derogatory manner, for leaders whose followers were sheeplike in their blind devotion. By the 19th century, the phrase bellwether began to be used when talking about things, rather than people, and particularly about things that indicated a trend. Time, again, takes over and whittles and shapes our meanings and usages – and that gives me pleasure that words are indeed such living entities, moldable, changeable, re-fashioned over centuries of use. I've got the word in my head, ringing with pleasure.

Journal Entry, Summer 2020

I attend a virtual program that talks about writers who live, in a writers-in-residence program, in Edith Wharton's home, the Mount, in Lenox,

Massachusetts. I'm watching novelists and essayists from 2014 and 2015 share with viewers the gift of time of this residence program. There it is again: time. I love one of the quotations I hear from Edith Wharton: *Life is always a tightrope or a feather bed. Give me the tightrope.* I wonder which I'd choose, especially when I'm feeling worried or anxious or not creative – and then I understand that as a writer, I've always chosen the tightrope. I decide to put my name on a list of writers to be notified when the writers-in-residence program opens up again in 2021. I've got time to work on my poetry manuscript – and hopes that, maybe, some of the writing might occur at The Mount.

Journal Entry, Fall 2020

I have fallen in love with a daily word puzzle, Up & Down Words, created by David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt. The puzzle clues lead me to pleasure in the quip, the phrase, the word coinage that will help me descend the list of 7-word phrases, ending with the final word (always, the first and last words are given) and I try to complete the puzzle quickly, even though there is no time limit, nor prize for alacrity. But I love tumbling down the phrases, from *dust*, the first word given – with a clue of *dry, dirty weather disturbance* – so that I pencil in *storm* – and there I have it, the first word phrase, and then I'm on to *storm* as the first word of my second phrase – with a clue of *certain weather alert*, and I fill that in – and so it goes. I finish with *reef chain*, as the word descent has taken me to wade in word waters from *warning sign*, to *sign language* to *language barrier* to *barrier reef* to *reef chain*. Simple pleasures, this waterfall of words, my small version of Yosemite Falls, and the time lapse here has been just a few minutes, but sufficient to last the whole day.

Journal Entry, Christmas 2020

Stapled to the page is a Ceylon Sunrise English Breakfast teabag, and I've taken pleasure in steeping these teabags for the suggested 2-3 minutes in a warmed teacup, waiting for the aroma to lift itself from the very rim of the cup, to touch my nose, to be breathed in as if the fragrance of the sun were infusing my body. Again, time matters, as Ceylon is now Sri Lanka, and I look up its history, beyond its being a producer of tea, cinnamon, and tobacco. Over time, Ceylon had invaders from the Portuguese, and then the

Dutch, and most recently, the British in the 1800's. But, in 1948 (and now I emerge in the world for my parents), the country regained its independence, and begins its time of creating a world for its inhabitants, without British rule. Looking over the timeline of this small island country is like looking at a recording of seismic ruptures in the earth, with Sinhala nationalism, and ethnic tensions, and the changing of its name from Ceylon to Sri Lanka, then Civil War, war leading to diplomacy, then peace, then mounting violence, then Tamil Tigers defeated, Presidents elected – but still, as recently as Easter 2019, Jihadist suicide bombers killed nearly 350 people. All this time has passed. In the 2-3 minutes I've steeped my Ceylon Sunrise teabag, I've been able to read about this island's history and the turmoil that exists in a country finding its footing. And I sip my tea, grateful for this small pleasure, aware that many do not have time for even this in Sri Lanka's turmoil.

Journal Entry, Early 2021

I've always taken pleasure in fonts, and I've entered into my journal the following: *Walbaum's type is more French than German in appearance. Like Bodoni, it is a classical typeface, yet its openness and slight irregularities give it a human, romantic quality. This book is set in Walbaum, a typeface designed in 1810 by German punch cutter J.E. Walbaum.* I'm thinking about what fonts draw me to them – this one does, with its slight irregularities reminding me of what I like most about myself – my own slight irregularities as a human being – and what I'm grateful for in others' finding those slight irregularities appealing. Good friends, good moments, never perfect, but these are the ones that give us pleasure.

Journal Entry, March 2021

My birth month and reading, in the Wall Street Journal, an article about not being able to fly for almost a year. The word used is *grounddiversary*, and I'm reminded of our tickets that we'd not been able to use to fly to Poland last spring, to visit family there, and am reminded of an earlier entry in this journal about the very flight that took us over Iceland and Reykjavik, the one in 2017. My granddaughter has grown from the 2-year-old toddler I remember visiting, to the 4-year-old little girl skipping about her home in Bielawa, small video images of her absorbed again and again on Whatsapp.

I take pleasure in curating book packages to send her (a children's version of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Hundred Dresses* are posted to Warsaw). I imagine my being with her as she sees beyond the wardrobe's doors in C.S. Lewis' book, asking about imaginary lands that I hope will be a part of her mind's life. So, on the anniversary of my birth, this past March, I take pleasure, again, in words – and have written in my journal a quote from Gabriel Garcia Marquez – *Human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them, but...life obliges them over and over again to give birth to themselves*. I remember a friend saying that she was always a woman giving birth to herself, and I'd written a piece, some years ago, about my re-birthing over many years. I still find, in my current jottings, my pleasure in food, in recipes, in those things that are fragrant and delicious and joyous to taste and smell and touch. And, I have learned how much I rely on what I see and hear, what I read and write, what I share and speak, so that, daily, in and beyond my journal, I understand the gift of time I have, and the many ways I have been able to – and will – spend this currency. ❧❧

Escapes and Conversations

by Lizbeth Hartz

The first night dementia-ridden Lily screamed, “Hello, hello, HELLO!” shards of moonlight pierced storm clouds racing above these wide, winding streets nestled in the mountains above Manoa Valley on Oahu. Rain soaked the green ferns and palm trees, white-blossomed mock orange shrubs, and crimson bougainvillea decorating the perimeters of million-dollar homes.

Earlier that night, frail elderly neighbors awaited the arrival of sleep-deprived nursing assistants providing overnight home care. These young women hoped to grab some zzzz’s while their charges slept in wheelchairs and hospital beds or stared into space inside their elegant redwood homes.



One of the languishing old-timers was Lily, my husband Barry’s 101-year-old mom. During her younger days, diminutive, feisty Lily read the classics in English and mysteries in French. A fine seamstress, cook, and gardener, she lifted weights to stay strong. An eloquent author, she talked with me about writing for hours.

Lily's three daughters lived on the mainland; her son Peter lived with her in the hills above Honolulu. Peter wasn't home, however, when Lily fell from her walker and lay on the floor for hours. To help out, her other son, Barry, and I moved from our condo in Mililani into his sisters' old bedroom. Nursing assistants gave us three adults a break 4 days a week, 4 hours a day, except when they failed to show up.

Never one to run from a fight, even after her memories started leaping like lemmings into the ocean and drowning en masse, Lily bravely fought this new battle. Unable to trust her mind any longer, she relied on her body to fight for her, to kick, scratch and scream.

"Lily's got Lewy Body dementia," the doctor pronounced. "Similar to Alzheimer's but more combative, more hallucinations."

Before Lily sank deeper into unknowing, she found comfort in me, the only other female in the house and a former friend she sometimes recognized. She spoke of a dream where she parked her car in Chinatown, went shopping, then couldn't find her car. "Am I losing my marbles?" she asked.

"No," I said. "You're just forgetting. But part of you knows everything."

After Lewy Body stole her reasoning power, Lily warned anybody trying to put lotion on her formerly porcelain-like, now dry, peeling skin, "I'm going to kick you!" or "scratch you." Easily dodging the kicks, I grabbed her wrists to defeat her talon-like nails.

When Lily had managed Barry's chiropractic office, she and I talked about writing while I waited for my appointment with Barry. Years before I loved him, I admired his tableside manner, our conversations, and how thoroughly he fixed my back. "People we love get sick" he told me, "to give us the opportunity to care for them. To teach us how to give."

I received another opportunity the night Lily started yelling "Hello." Peter had escaped to sleep in his office and leave his mom to us. At 4:30 a.m., I awoke to her yells. Sleep-deprived Barry slept like a hibernating bear. The previous night, Lily had kept him up until dawn. She'd slipped out of bed and onto the floor. A strong man, Barry lifted her 140 pounds of dead weight while she screamed, "LET ME GO!" and dug her nails into his

arms. Only after he'd deposited her safely back in bed and she'd fallen asleep did he let me bandage his bloody wounds. Glad that he was able to sleep now, I tiptoed to the large open master bedroom where Lily gently snored. Slipping back into bed, I fell asleep.

"Hello? Hello? HELLO?" My heart pounded like a locomotive engine.

On the previous day, Lily had informed me, "I scared."

"What are you scared of?" I yelled so my nearly deaf mother-in-law could hear.

She frowned. "I don't know."

"No need be scared." I flexed my skinny arm. "I will protect you."

She laughed and said, "You don't have any muskels." That's how she pronounced it, musk-els. I made a sulking face. She laughed again and said, "Where are the boys?"

My most effective way of communicating with her became writing on an erasable board. She repeated the same questions over and over again. Tired of telling her the same response dozens of times, I wrote the answers with erasable blue and red sharpies, pointing at my writing every time she asked. She read my words over and over, sometimes remembering what she'd read, sometimes forgetting her question.

Tiptoeing from Barry's and my bedroom, I hurried to Lily's bed, where she lay on her left side. Her right side, still black and blue, undoubtedly ached from a recent painful bout with Shingles. I switched on her overhead light. Thank goodness she hadn't slipped off her mattress and onto the floor. Her small brown eyes squinted at me. "Why the hell are you here?" she yelled.

My cheeks heated up. "You were calling hello..."

She repeated, "HELLO! Is anybody here with me?"

I wrote on the erasable board, "Liz and Barry are here. You were yelling hello, so I am saying hello back."

"Who the hell are you? Barry or Liz?"

I pointed at my name on the board. "Liz."

“Hello! Who hired you? Why are you in my room?” she yelled,

I bit my lip, restraining myself from saying anything other than, “I’m here to say goodnight. Now I’m going back to bed.”

“Good! Get the hell out of my room.”

My heart pounded at this assault. Even though I understood poor Lily’s helplessness to stop the decline of her mind, her words cut.

Two nights earlier, I dreamed of a big square white van plunging into a ravine, disappearing into the depths. In my dream, Barry watched the accident, too, and feared his mom might die soon. I thought she was spiraling deeper into decline.

I withdrew to my bed and practiced deep breathing. Still, my heart pounded. I tried to meditate, but kept thinking, this is what I get for helping. I shouldn’t have moved here. Sleeping fitfully, I dreamed a boxer punched me and I didn’t punch back.

The next day, while hanging clothes on the back patio, I heard Lily quietly calling over and over again from the living room, "Is anyone here with me?" A few years earlier, Barry and I had adopted a young feral kitty who'd given birth to three kittens there, where I fed the cat family and played with them. I whispered, “Okay, girls,” and dangled feather toys, laughing as our yellow, white, and tortoise-shell beauties leaped and twirled in the air in pursuit of their prey. I kept listening for Lily. I figured, if anything was wrong, she’d yell loudly enough for people to hear her in Honolulu, four miles away.

After a few minutes, I heard her softly snoring.

The sun broke through the clouds. “Come on, cuties!” I yelled, teasing my pretties with the two toys again. I never imagined these inquisitive little explorers would give so much back, would cheer me when I wanted a respite from my inability to communicate with Lily.

Every time I drove home and parked on the street, our cat family hung around the garage, waiting for me. They meowed, probably hoping I’d walk to the back patio and give them the salmon treats they craved. My next-door

neighbor, Paul, spotting the cats sitting like little Sphinxes in the garage, watched me step from my car.

He called to me, “Look at them. They love you.”

I heard Lily call, “Liz.” Knowing she could see me in the reflection from the living room picture window, I waved to Paul and walked inside. She beckoned me from her spot on the long couch, patting the cushion beside her. Amazed that she’d remembered my name, I sat. She held my hand, squeezed it, smiled, and said, “I love you dearly.” ♡💞

What Gives You Happiness, What Gives You Pleasure?

by Marlene Samuels

“What gives you pleasure? What makes you happy?” The announcer asks. I’m listening to the podcast entitled, *The Daily Stoic*. Epictetus, the Greek philosopher, asked those very same questions during the first century A.D., in the book he’d written to be a manual for the best ways in which to gain mental freedom and happiness in all circumstances.

How intensely had I thought about who and what gives me pleasure that – items, living beings, interesting experiences, and sensory one that – prior to my altered pandemic-state daily life? Probably not much. I think dark chocolate or Paris’s Berthillon homemade rich coffee ice cream eaten while sitting on a hard metal chair at an uncomfortable table along the Seine. When I was in high school, I wondered whether anything could make me happier than being accepted by the popular girls of my class. Doubtful. Added to those, I knew that with some luck, attracting the attention of the boy on whom I had an unquenchable crush would guarantee me all the happiness I ever need.

What naive, fleeting beliefs they proved to be. In what felt like no time at all, graduate school and career paths loomed large. Once more, I knew to a certainty that those two accomplishments if properly managed, could be sources of total pleasure and happiness. By senior year at university, hadn’t I had endless hours of happiness being admitted into my first-choice classes or recognized for high academic achievement? But these milestones, too, fell by the wayside as I looked toward the future assuming somewhere out there on the distant horizon, was that one undiscovered “thing” that would prove the source of my pleasure and enduring happiness.

I’m driven to review Epictetus’s words of wisdom: “We find happiness when we manage our expectations realistically.” How do I manage my expectations? Do my family members and my own children make me happy? Do they give me pleasure, especially if I’m able to resist dwelling upon my disappointments, far too numerous over the decades? And just

what of all those acquaintances I've collected during my life, the ones I never really did like in the first place or those tedious obligatory social engagements I've kept?


All is not gloom and doom in the current, and most likely forever, altered state of our pandemic world. What gives me pleasure is the opportunity I've embraced these last two years to conclude what events, places and living beings consistently give me pleasure. I am pleased, even happy, to realize I'd been writing vastly more consistently and continuing to connect with a group of my women writing colleagues, both of which have led to my happy feelings about increased creativity. I found my way back to my kitchen once more but now as a braver, more self-confident version of myself. I'm transformed into an experimental scientist, enjoying the realization that I'm entirely unconcerned about others' food likes and dislikes. "Get over it," I think while I cook and create, "Grow up, eat, and stop picking at your food." My music — both old and new — plays in my earbuds to sooth and excite me.



Nature offers me pleasure and happiness in long walks I'd always been too busy to take advantage of but have now come to understand exactly what all those famous "walkers" derived from their meanderings, both rural and urban. I felt compelled to go back and reread some of those walkers' notes. There was Thoreau and Dickens, Muir and Wordsworth, Woolf and Kierkegaard. "Walking through nature was a kind of pilgrimage without a destination." I returned to Aristotle where long ago I started my thoughts about happiness and pleasure. He, too, was a great walker.

And in my home and on my walks, my Ridgebacks, George and Ted, are my constants in the pleasure and happiness spheres. They help maintain order on the kitchen floor whenever they are called upon. In the mountains and forests, I let them run free reminding myself that Epictetus believed happiness to be the highest attainable good but that misery results from our inability to differentiate between what we can and cannot control.

Periodically, their eyes dart back to me as they keep track but never seem to lose sight of that squirrel or rabbit. They intuit, like mind readers, when our walking time is coming to a close and don't complain. The three of us have gotten the perfect pleasure and happiness from our adventure and from one another. Am I practicing? Yes, I believe I am, for deriving pleasure with my human family and friends by knowing when to appreciate myself and thus to enjoy them without judging or holding expectations, by being free to understand what I can and cannot control, what I can appreciate and of what I can let go.

What gives you happiness or pleasure? Thanks to George and Ted, and Bill and Harry, my Ridgebacks before them, I no longer wonder or worry about the answers. I know what gives me happiness and pleasure. 

Contributor Bios

Having recently exited a private law practice, **Virginia Amis** is enjoying spending her semi-retirement gardening, writing and serving as a pro tem family law commissioner. She is a transplant from Pittsburgh to the Pacific Northwest and enjoys writing flash, short stories and novels which bring the beauty of that region to life. Her stories have appeared in *Perspectives Magazine*, *Reminisce* and *Reminisce Extra*, *Scribes Valley Anthologies*, *Linden Avenue Literary Journal*, and *101words.com*. Never one to sit idle, she is looking forward to new adventures and to reconnecting with her talented writing pals.

Mona Anderson lives in New Hampshire in the stone house she and her husband, Joe Kohler, built over 40 years ago. She's happy to report that they now have both electricity and running water. Their exploits in building are chronicled in their book, *The Art of Building a House of Stone*. While raising two boys and many, many cats, Mona was a Clinical Mental Health Counselor, Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator, and Assistant Director in the Counseling Center at Keene State College. After retiring, she began writing—and writing and writing. Her essay, “Hunter/Gatherers” was published in *Penning the Pandemic*, a project of the Monadnock Writers’ Group. One of her poems was selected for *Post Script, An anthology of postcard poetry* by the Peterborough Poetry Project. When not writing, she gardens, reads, swims in their round, above-ground stone pool, and thinks about writing. Except in the winter when she hibernates – and writes.

Suzy Beal took some time off from writing this spring. After writing daily for almost twelve years, she needed a break. This past eight months without writing brought some unique experiences to the forefront. She found the time to bring needlework back into her life, something she let go when she started writing. She purchased a new camera and looks at nature through the lens. Words are smoldering and coming to life. Soon her fingers will find the keyboard once again. She writes personal essays and loves writing poetry. Her work has appeared on *truestorieswelltold.com*, in Story Circle Network publications, *101words.org*, Central Oregon Writer’s Guild and recently an essay in *Placed: An Encyclopedia of Central Oregon*.

Carol J. Wechsler Blatter has contributed writings to *Chaleur Press*, *Story Circle Network Journal*, the Writing It Real anthology *Mishearing: Miseries, Mysteries, and Misbehaviors*, *Being Jewish is a Blessing in the Jewish Writing Project*, and in 101words.org, as well as poems in *Real Women Write*, *Growing/ Older* and *Covenant of the Generations* by Women of Reform Judaism. She is a wife, mother, and grandmother of her very special granddaughter who may be a writer someday. Ms. Blatter is a recently retired psychotherapist in private practice.

Joanne M. Clarkson's fifth poetry collection, *The Fates* won Bright Hill Press annual contest and was published in 2017. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *Nimrod*, *American Journal of Nursing*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Western Humanities Review*. She and her husband retired and moved to Port Townsend, WA in 2018. Joanne has Master's degrees in English and Library Science. She taught and worked as a professional librarian for many years. After caring for her mother through a long illness, she re-careered as a Registered Nurse, specializing in Home Health and Hospice. Her life-long avocations have been writing poetry and reading palms and Tarot, taught by her grandmother, a professional psychic. Find out more at www.JoanneClarkson.com (writing) or www.JoannethePsychic.com.

Nancy Juno Conrad, penned as Anastasia Juno, was born in Juneau Alaska in 1953. Her father, a mathematician, favored Juno as her first name but her mother, an English teacher, prevailed with Nancy and Juno received second billing. These two names exemplify the tension between the practical and poetic throughout her life. A 1971 graduate, she studied at Lewis and Clark college under William Stafford, but after two terms, she moved her classroom to the road and hitchhiked. Only by her mother's prayers did she escape harm and land safely back into a more normal lifestyle. By 1978, she was married and homebound with two babies. On the Kitsap peninsula, she went back to school; her choices were accounting or business administration. Practicality punched the poet. She became a CPA with her writing limited to IRS penalty persuasion letters. But she was only down for part of the count. By mid-career, chronic fatigue threatened to truly flatten her and writing poetry became a catalyst for healing. She lives in a co-housing community with her husband in Bremerton,

Washington where she enjoys her garden, grandchildren and good health as well as volunteering as an accountant.

Pat Detmer has had humor pieces in newspapers including *The Seattle Times* and *Eastside Journal* and had columns in the *Whidbey Island Marketplace* and the *Newcastle News*. She appeared in *Newsweek's* "My Turn" and was a staff blogger for BoomerGirl.com for the length of its existence. She writes copy for businesses and has a monthly blog about business management and sales on her company website www.thequincygroup.net. On the fiction side, she's won contests featuring brevity and speed and has appeared in three short story anthologies and a chapbook.

Mary Ellen Gambutti writes about her coming of age in a military family in the 50s and 60s, her adoption, search and reunion with biological family, and her survival of a stroke at mid-life. Her work is published in *The Remembered Arts Journal*, *Drabble*, *Memoir Magazine*, *Borrowed Solace*, *Spillwords*, *BookEnds Review*, *mac(ro)mic*, *True Stories Well Told*, *Modern Creative Life*, *Halcyon Days*, *Amethyst Review*, *FewerThan500*, *Portland Metrozine*, *Contemporary Haibun On-line*, and other literary magazines. Her memoir, *I Must Have Wandered: An Adopted Air Force Daughter Recalls* is forthcoming. She and her husband live in Lewes, DE with their rescued old boy chihuahua. Web linktr.ee/SCMel

Lizbeth Hartz moved to Hawai'i in the mid-70s and fell in love with the islands. A wannabe-writer, she dove into freelancing, resulting in nearly 150 magazine articles published in local and regional magazines. For 14 years during the 80's and early 90's, she dispatched military fire trucks on Oahu. Her book, *Murder in Hawai'i, A True Story* grew out of that experience. Her song, *Angel Hero*, lyrics by Lizbeth, music by local musician Johnny Valentine, demoed in Nashville, and is available on iTunes and Amazon and serves as the music for her book trailer at <https://www.kwillbooks.com/lizbeth-hartz/> Currently, Lizbeth is collaborating on a screenplay adaptation of her book and studying how to create radio plays/podcasts. To learn more about her, visit at <https://authorlizbethhartz.com> and her Angel Hero Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/LizbethHartz/>.

David D. Horowitz manages Rose Alley Press, which publishes books of Northwest poetry, including three critically acclaimed anthologies and his own most recent collection, *Slow Clouds over Rush Hour*. David's poems and essays have appeared in many journals and anthologies, including *The Lyric*, *Candelabrum*, *The Raven Chronicles*, *Terrain.org*, *Exterminating Angel*, *The Literary Nest*, and *Coffee Poems*. His website is rosealleypress.com.

A Puget Sounder by birth, **Judith Barker Kvinsland**, a retired teacher and college administrator in both Washington and California, happily exchanged professional writing for personal essays and occasional prose poems. She now lives and writes in eastern Washington amidst wide open skies, channeled scablands, and burgeoning wineries. She and her husband, her most trusted beta reader, are “itinerant grandparents,” frequent travelers to California, Montana, and the Olympic Peninsula, to connect with extended family and friends. One of Judith’s happiest moments was winning first place in the 2018 Fall/Winter Writing It Real essay contest with her essay, “Disturbing the Calm,” an honor that inspired her to dedicate her writing time to create the collection of essays that led to the publication of her memoir entitled *Disturbing the Calm: A Memoir of Time and Place*. Available at barnesandnoble.com, it was released on March 13, 2020, the moment that quarantining began and bookstores were shuttered. She is looking forward to the day when bookstores reopen in all of our communities and writers and readers can meet up again. You can visit Judith’s website judithkvinsland.com to learn more about her publications and enjoy her weekly blog, “Recent Reads,” a collection of book reviews, one of which was the inspiration for her essay in this anthology.

Pat LaPointe is editor of *Changes in Life*, www.changesinlife.com, a monthly online women’s newsletter, and a contributing editor of the self-published anthology: *The Woman I’ve Become: 37 Women Share Their Journeys from Toxic Relationships to Self-Empowerment*. In addition, she has facilitated writing workshops for women — both online and onsite. Pat’s essays and short stories have been published widely. Currently, Pat is completing her first novel.

Linda Netherton grew up in Tucson, Arizona, loving the desert, her Mexican heritage, and the cowboy boots she wore in high school. She moved often – at 17 to a rural farming community in Indiana and, thereafter, to Bloomington where she attended Indiana University, graduating with honors in Spanish and Political Science, and later, with a degree in law. She moved to Portland, OR and worked in a variety of non-governmental organizations serving the causes of education, healthcare, international development, and decent, affordable housing and services for farmworker families. In 2007 she moved with her sons and Canadian husband to British Columbia, where she resides today. Linda has competed in Judo competitions, traveled the Silk Road in Uzbekistan, body-surfed in California, studied in Mexico City, completed an Advanced Certificate in Painting at Emily Carr University, and raised a wide variety of vegetables. At 15, she began writing poetry for the high school literary magazine and only recently emerged from a many-decades-long detour through legal briefs, business memoranda, and a zillion grant proposals to try her hand at writing. She lost her mother in May 2020, just after the start of the Covid pandemic. In her grief she was inspired to write *The Red Love Seat*.

Marlene Samuels is an independent research sociologist, writer and instructor. She earned her PhD in sociology from University of Chicago where she serves on the Advisory Council to the Graduate School. Her essays and short stories appear in a wide range of publications, both online and in print, and her research articles have been published in numerous academic journals. Marlene was Research Director for the documentary, *A Voice Among the Silent* (Eshel Productions). More recently, she published, *When Digital Isn't Real: Fact Finding Offline for Serious Writers*. Presently, Marlene is putting the finishing touches on her short story collection, the title of which is up for debate, but one point is firm: *A Memoir Told in Short Story*. Marlene divides her time between Chicago, Illinois and Sun Valley, Idaho with her two amazingly supportive Rhodesian Ridgebacks, George and Ted. www.MarleneSamuels.com

Michael W. Shurgot, PhD. retired as Professor of Humanities from South Puget Sound Community College, Olympia in 2006. He has published three books on Shakespeare; a memoir; six essays on baseball; 25 scholarly

articles; 52 theatre reviews; and most recently a novel, *Green River Saga*, published in April 2020 by Sunstone Press in Santa Fe, NM. He teaches Shakespeare and modern fiction at Lifetime Learning Center and Women's University Club. Visit his website at www.michaelshurgot.com.

Barbara Simmons grew up in Boston and now resides in California – the coasts inform her poetry. A graduate of Wellesley College, she received an MA in The Writing Seminars from Johns Hopkins and an MA in Education and Counseling from Santa Clara University. A retired educator, she continues to savor life and language, exploring words as ways to remember, envision, celebrate, mourn, and try to understand more. Publications have included *Santa Clara Review*, *Hartskill Review*, *Boston Accent*, *NewVerse News*, *Soul-Lit*, *300 Days of Sun*, *Capsule Stories*, *Isolation Edition*, *Capsule Stories*, *Autumn 2020*, *Capsule Stories*, *Winter 2020*, *Capsule Stories*, *Isolation Edition Volume 2*, *Journal of Expressive Writing*, *Second-Chance Lit*, *Ekphrastic Review*, and Writing it Real Anthologies.