



ESSAY

PIEDMONT PLUS

SENIOR GAMES & SILVER ARTS

BUYING A NEW CAR

Helen Webb



In late July 2018 the air conditioning quit in my 2003 Mercury Sable. In May when the oil was changed, I was told that car needed about \$2,000 of repair work. My plan was to wait until September 18, 2018 and buy a new car. September 18 was the last day of a three year insurance penalty for a prior mishap. For several weeks I was able to park in the shade and to do my errands in the mornings. Then the August heat arrived.

In the meantime I had talked with several people about what kind of car to buy. Honda Accord was the unanimous winner. Several neighbors offered to go car shopping with me as did Lisa, my daughter. Eighty-two year old women should not go car shopping alone. I made an appointment with a highly recommended Honda salesman and was late arriving as I had driven past the dealership and got lost trying to find my way back without having to make a left hand turn.

The salesman warmly greeted Lisa and me. He wanted to know what kind of car I wanted: the size, the motor, the various accessories, the color, etc. All of which are important to most people but not me. I told him: "I want a dependable car that will start on the first try and one I can find in a parking lot." Actually, I didn't want a yellow, white nor black car. Soon he had a car for me to test drive. Because I didn't have a color preference, he chose a car the color he liked: champagne. Lisa liked the color. We were making progress.

The salesman drove the car out the back parking lot on to Old Salisbury Road to another parking lot where we switched driver and I drove several miles and back to the second parking lot.

Before the test drive the salesman did try to show me some of the features and how to start and

stop the car. I was not able to start and stop the car as smoothly as he was. Several times he turned a little pale and his hands grabbed the back of the seat.

Pricing and paperwork took forever. Lisa was constantly texting or Googling on her phone. I was concerned that the insurance coverage be correct. The insurance agent wanted information I didn't know so Lisa dealt with him. Unbeknown to me, Lisa's husband called and talked to the dealership manager twice to make sure we were being taken care of. Eventually a nice man came to show us how the car worked. Lisa told him as well as the salesman to show me only what I needed to knownot any bells or whistles. I vetoed installing my cell phone number. I certainly do not want a phone ringing when I'm driving. The nice man adjusted the lights to automatic, the air to automatic, the windshield wipers, and the radio to play only the two stations to which I listen. He showed us how to lock and unlock the car, trunk, gas tank and how to work the windows. It all went in one ear and out the other. It was just too overwhelming.

After the demonstration, there was more paperwork to complete, most of which involved the business manager going over all the details and asking about add-ons. Lisa told me to say no to every add-on, which I did. Feeling everything was under control, Lisa left. It took another hour to sign everything and wait for the car to be cleaned and ready for delivery.

About 3:00 p.m., the nice man drove the car and me to the end of the back parking lot. (Another employee had followed us to take the nice man back to the dealership.) The salesman had not wanted me to leave by way of Peters Creek Parkway. I guess he was afraid I would wreck in front of the dealership. I did know my way home and arrived safely. I went in the house, got the key to the safety deposit box; drove to the bank, parked the car, got the old car title from my safety deposit box, got in the car and the car wouldn't start. After several choice words, it

started. I drove directly to Harris Teeter, as Thursday is grocery day, and got my groceries. I was able to unlock the trunk and the car. This time the car started.

During the first three months of ownership of this car, I lost it in the parking lot only once. I did not try to turn on the radio as I wasn't sure which button to push. After many mistakes, I learned how to work the windshield wipers as well as how to unlock the doors from the inside. The first time I got gas, I could not remember what picture to push to get the gas tank door opened and had to get the manual out of the glove box. It took ten minutes to find the answer. Fortunately no one was in line behind me. The second time I got gas, I forgot how the gas tank door opened after the picture was pushed and asked a man at the pump ahead of me if he could help me. The next time when I got gas, I couldn't make the gas tank door stay closed. The car continued to yell at me and to distract me by flashing pictures on the dashboard. Sometimes I could figure out why and sometimes I could not.

After eight and a half months of a rather rocky relationship, the new car and I have become more comfortable with each other. As I've told you, the nice man at the dealership had programmed all the necessary features for driving my car. The windshield wipers and I are now very good friends. The headlights are making progress in establishing rapport with me. Somehow I had gotten the automatic function for the head lights off track and they were on all the time. A friend showed me what was wrong and I am now driving with them on automatic. Then, one rainy late afternoon I could not tell if the lights were on or off. So: I got out of the car and looked. They were on. I now know where the little blue light is on the dash board that lights up if the lights are on.

Not only are the lights and wipers now my friends, I can also turn on the radio. Just am not sure how to change stations. To top it off, the fourth time I got gas, I did it all by myself: unlocked

the gas-tank door, open the gas tank door and locked the gas tank door. I was so proud of myself! But the next day when I got in the car to go to the grocery store, it would not start. I pushed the button for the red light; I pushed on the brake, back and forth. Sometime the dashboard would light up with messages and I tried to do what it said and nothing would work. Finally I called a neighbor who came over and the car started right away for him. He suggested that I move the seat closer to the front, which I did and the car usually starts on the first try. Because the seat has been adjusted, the side view mirrors needed adjustment. That remains a feat in progress.

One rainy Thursday, I pulled up to the side of Harris Teeter to have my groceries put in the trunk. I was able to find the button to unlock the truck from inside the car. I watched in the rearview mirror as the clerk put the groceries in and shut the lid, but I did not see him put in the crate of tangerines. So, I pulled up out of the way, got out of the car to unlock the trunk, but could not get the trunk open from the outside. I gave up and drove home. The trunk opened fine and contained all the groceries.

Cars changed tremendously between 2003 and 2018 as did technology. The transition to a new car has been a struggle, but I've come a long way with learning how to drive this car. Tomorrow I plan to make an appointment with the nice man to show me how to change radio stations and what all of those pictures on the dashboard mean.

“THE SORRY STATE OF CHURCH MUSIC”



Robert Dixon

What’s wrong with this oft-heard phrase? “Please turn to Hymn no. 566 in your Hymnals”. You don’t get it do you?

There are too #### many Hymns! Think about it. How many people in your congregation have ever heard Hymn 566, much less know the words or music? So they’ve got the music, but how many can actually read music? I’ll tell you – less than 5%. In fact, only about 15% can actually “carry a tune” more complex than “You know you make me wanna shout”; much less the one you’ve selected which makes “Death and Transfiguration” or “Tristan and Isolde” sound easy.

But we have the solution! A hymnal should have at most ten **good** hymns that people either know (or have a snowball’s chance of learning by repetition); for example “Rock of Ages” or “Onward Christian Soldiers”. By the way, for your information “Amazing Grace” does *not* fall into that category. It’s one of only three songs that are simple enough to actually be played on the bagpipes –so let the bagpipers have it (but do not, I repeat, do not under any circumstances allow bagpipe music in your church). Bagpipe music is like Haggis - even if it’s good, it’s lousy. But in case you’re feeling smug, the same could be said, perhaps to a lesser degree, about organ music. What percentage of your congregation do you think listen to organ music in their spare time? Less than 2 % according to our data. But, it’s tradition so you’re stuck with it; so here’s how to make the best of the bad hand you’ve been dealt.

It is highly likely that your organist is a significant detriment to your church (> 70% chance according to our data). Why? Because most do not consider themselves as accompanists to the congregation, but rather as soloists, with the congregation serving as backup singers. They noodle all over the melody, and rhythm has little meaning to them – they are always in a “mini-cadenza” mode. Since less than 20 % of your congregation have any sense of rhythm anyway, the organist has got to “lay down a beat” to lead that flock of bleating sheep. There is also the chance that your organist is in the 80% group having no sense of rhythm.

This organist problem is no joke. I have seen the organist at Sedentary Methodist Church completely demoralize the singers by failing to provide any recognizable melody or rhythm *during the singing of a well-known Christmas Carol of all things.*

Solution: First see if your organist can dance - choose something simple like “Tea for Two” (not the “Hokey Pokey”- too easy). If they pass that test, then get a metronome (or better an electronic organ with a programmed beat) and lay down the law – “stay on melody and on beat or you’re voted off the altar”!

These rogue organists have got to be stopped!

Finally, what is this compulsion to sing all four stanzas? I don't know if you've ever noticed, but after the second stanza the congregation raises its eyes hopefully- looking for a sign that someone will relieve their misery and end Hymn 566; but to no avail – the organist refuses to stop his solo performance and continues to drag these poor lost souls through the misery of two more stanzas of an obscure and joyless hymn- likely picked out by an organist fitting that same description.



The Value and Pain of Protesting



Bill Gramley

At least one version of the word “protest” goes back to the time when Christians in the 15th century and thereafter decided that the established Church in Western Europe, the Roman Catholic Church, had interpretations and practices of the faith that some people felt were a misunderstanding of how God's salvation came to us and what it's all about. Eventually these protesters were called “Protestants” and formed new churches. They differed in what they wanted to put into practice, but one of the essentials of their protests was to allow the common people rather than just the clergy to interpret the Bible, especially by reading it in their own language rather than in Latin. As the Bible became more available through the printing press, this became a reality. A major point in all of this was that Protestants believed that salvation was a freely given gift from God rather than something that had to be earned by doing good works or that could be gained by paying indulgences to forgive their sins.

But protests were around long before the Middle Ages. It was not a new form of human development and activity. People have often disagreed with those who have governed or controlled them. Slaves have not wanted to be slaves and sometimes they revolted or expressed resentment toward their masters. The same has been true for serfs or peasants in various feudal systems and for people who find themselves living under the power of a dictator or military regime. Actually, protests occur in just about any area of our lives if we feel we are being cheated or treated unfairly or are in danger because of products we use or the dangers in the environment around us. Migrants and refugees protest their living conditions by looking for a place or a country where they do not have to suffer from dictatorships, violence, gangs and

criminals, or poverty.

Most people believe that we have a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as the American Declaration of Independence puts it. We have also created a Bill of Rights that supports freedom of assembly, of speech, and of the press. In a way, everything is up for scrutiny and complaint and protest when we think about it: the quality of schools and teachers, the food we eat, the chemicals in our water and air, the health care we need, global warming and rising sea levels, the wages we are paid, the condition of housing and rental rates, interest rates on loans, and many, many more topics. The possibility of protesting is pervasive.

Protest has value because it is the main way in which we speak up about what we believe to be important for our well-being. It can take various forms as when a woman named Rosa Parks once refused to sit in the back of the bus during the long era of racial segregation, and a man named Nelson Mandela was willing to endure years of imprisonment as he and the people of South Africa resisted the policy of Apartheid. Their protests brought about change, and that is why people protest. We want to live with equal rights and with the right to choose how we wish to govern ourselves. We want that rather than being victims of tyrants and despots and corrupt practices such as sexual abuse and harassment that tend to hamper the dignity we deserve as children created in the image of God.

It so happens that I did not pay much attention to politics when I was growing up. I voted the way my parents did and I didn't give much thought to the qualities of the persons running for office nor of the "planks" or policies that various political parties endorsed. But things changed for me when I was thirty-one years old and noticed that the United States was involved in a faraway war in a place called Vietnam. I was a young pastor of a church on the outskirts of Winston-Salem, had a wife and four young children, and began to find out why we were involved in Vietnam.

I went to Washington, D. C. in February, 1967 and learned about our involvement in Vietnam. We were there to prevent the spread of communism after the Vietnamese had defeated their French colonial rulers in 1954 since communism was the form of government the leader of North Vietnam in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh, sought to install. The people in South Vietnam did not want communism, so they asked the United States to come and fight against Ho Chi Minh. However, the leader of South Vietnam, Diem, was corrupt and dictatorial himself, and many of the people in his part of the country rebelled against him. These were the Viet Cong. What happened after President Kennedy and President Johnson began to send advisers and then thousands of American troops to fight in Vietnam against the Viet Cong as well as Hanoi (by bombing it) is that the troops of Diem and Saigon did not have enthusiasm for fighting the Viet Cong and we ended up doing most of the fighting and dying. In a sense we were seen as imperialists like the French as we sought to make the country be what we wanted it to be.

As I learned more about this war, I began to preach against it and get involved with a national protest effort called "Negotiation Now" which implored President Johnson to call a truce and negotiate a settlement before more dying took place. My church members did not appreciate my stance. The boards of the church called me in to a meeting and told me in no uncertain terms to stop preaching about our involvement in this war. I was threatening their patriotism and undermining our military. I didn't argue with them. I kept quiet as they made their point. (I was never against the soldiers since many of my college classmates went into the military, but I was against the policies that sent them into the battlefield. I probably did not make this distinction clear, although I do not know if it would have changed their reaction to my protests.) I didn't preach on this subject often but enough that members went behind my back to sign a petition to get rid of me. In a fit of anger at a later board meeting I did say, "I resign," but church authorities asked me to stay until I got a call to another church, one in Pennsylvania,

where I went in 1969 for the next seven years.

I mention this situation because I felt the need to try and stop the needless killing, the atrocities that took place, the destruction of a poor country, the waste of our resources, and the belief that we could make another country live the way we think they should live. Since I carried out my pastoral duties faithfully and cared for my congregation, my church allowed me to go to the Paris Peace Talks in 1971 and come back and speak to the Rotary Club and other groups. The mood of the American people was changing and the pressure grew to end the war. I had a very small part in all of this. I was hurt to some extent, had some digestive problems as I tried to handle the resentment I felt, and endured some angry letters and reactions to what I was doing. I didn't know that protesting had its pains. I had simply jumped into the fray kind of innocently as a part of what I understood the gospel of Jesus Christ to mean, but ultimately I was glad I did.

Later I protested the nuclear arms race and I have continued to pay attention to the policies of our country. Sometimes I write letters to the newspaper to express my opinion. Getting policymakers to change their views is never easy. And I am not sure that public opinion always proves to be the turning point, but it certainly is important. Policymakers need to know that we care about the value of people and how we treat one another, and that might does not necessarily make right. I believe that good protests make good policies. And that is what protests should aim to do and why we all should continue to care about what's happening in and around us.

It is always inconvenient to stay informed about what's going on in our society. But that is what vigilance requires and what self-government is all about. Being part of a silent majority is no excuse and is basically a form of escapism from reality. And being hateful in how we express our opinions is not helpful either.

Some of the early Protestant reformers were imprisoned and put to death. The Inquisition

also took a terrible toll on folks who sought to think differently or speak truth to power. Protests often upset people. I found that out. And yet, if a harmful policy is changed and improvements are made in the way we govern ourselves and work to prevent ongoing damage to our biosphere and seek to live with our differences in a spirit of mutual respect, the effort is well worth it. Protest has to be as essential as taking care of our bodies, minds, and souls. Protest is the way we expand our compassion and our sense of justice, honesty, and decency. I encourage all of us to care about who we are and what we are doing and participate in expressing our views, even if doing so is painful and nerve-racking.

Tobacco Road

1985

Bill Pfefferkorn

It was late afternoon. An elderly man, named Jake was escorted into my law office. He sat down and announced that he was Vice President of the Communist Party.

It had been a hard day. One of my favorite partners told us that he was going to leave the firm. My son overseas had hurt his back and was in a hospital in Germany. My daughter quit school and moved in with an aimless grad student. I suppressed a laugh at this perfect ending to a crazy day.

He looked mundane. Most of my clients were anxious, confused or close to the edge of normal. This gentle seeming man could hardly start a conversation, much less a revolution. His accent was carefully modulated big city.

He told me he was not accustomed to dealing with Southerners as most of the members lived up North. He heard that I was willing to represent unpopular causes and asked if I would meet with him and a member to look at some property out near the river. I said that I was not a real estate expert but I had lived in the county since birth and knew a little about land and such. I liked to get out of the office so I agreed to the outdoor rendezvous.

“Leaving early,” asked my secretary. “No, just going to talk to some folks,” I replied. He led me to a car—an old dark brown Oldsmobile. A bald-headed man with an open white shirt was sitting in the driver’s seat. The front and back seats were crammed with old newspapers. The party man opened the front door for me. I warily bent down and slid into the seat with a yellow pad in my left hand.

“This is Ed,” said the party man, Jake. He ran for Congress in ’48 on the Henry Wallace

ticket.”

I smiled at ruffled Ed as I remembered my paper boy days and the picture of an older boy in our neighborhood on the front page of the paper in 1948. At a Wallace-for-President Rally, the neighbor boy was shown against a crowd of onlookers giving an angry middle finger salute to the Progressive Party candidate from Iowa.

Ed shook my hand and reached over to the ignition switch. He took hold of a knife that was stuck into the switch, turned it to crank up the car. “Works every time,” he said. “Beats having to keep track of keys. I worked in the furniture factory in ’48. I’m selling encyclopedias now. You got children” They need a good set.”

“Ed’s had a hard time since his wife died,” piped up the party man. “Take a left at the light and head west.”

We were going into the afternoon sun.

“Where is this place,” I asked.

“You’ll see and I hope Ellen is there for you to see.”

Ellen was there. After driving off the main road to a secondary road, then onto a long gravel drive, we came up on a flat-top brick house. A little old lady with thick glasses and hair piled up on her head came down the front walk to the car.

“So, you got him out here. Welcome Mr. Lawyer. My now dead husband talked to you several years ago about the peace march we were working on. He thought you were OK. Jake thought you might just be another southern shyster. I told him you helped the blacks, whites and union folks.”

“How much is this land worth,” Jake asked.

I looked at the strange house and the old tobacco barn.

“We need to check the tax records and recent sales out here,” I offered.

“What about a camp for the downtown kids,” asked Ellen?

“I think you better listen to the lawyer, Ellen,” said Jake.

Jake was walking toward the chicken houses.

“Has it got a creek or a pond,” I asked.

“There’s a big creek over the hill behind the house. It runs into the Yadkin River,” said Ellen.

“Let’s have a look,” I said.

With Ellen in the lead in her tennis shoes and black dress, we pushed our way through the trees and briars. Jake was fully dressed. Ed gawked behind.

When we got to a swamp I said, “I think this is as far as we go, folks. I guess there is a creek out there somewhere, but we aren’t dressed for exploration.”

“There was a nice trail down here, but it has grown up a whole lot,” Ellen said. “But, you can get the idea of it all.”

We turned back and passed the tobacco barn. Looking inside we could see the big poles stretching across the inside about five feet apart in width and height to hold the racks of tobacco brought in from the fields years before. The burners that heated the leaves as they hung on the racks that sat on the poles that were still in place.

“Curing tobacco took time,” I asserted.

“Just like our movement,” said Jake. “We will never give up until we win even if it takes another hundred years.”

I had seen the Breshnev funeral on TV and how the officer roughly pushed his coffin into the grave. I wondered how some ideas keep on growing like weeds ’til some good farmer either

cultivates them into some productive use or has to just kill 'em. This farm sure needed a lot of both.

Jessie Crockett

A Work Of Art And Heart

A work of art can be admiring and a work of heart can be inspiring. Beautiful art work is seen in frames hung on walls and art galleries around the world. Some of this art has names and some is abstract as well as priceless. A work of heart is inspiring and precious without a price sending messages from the heart felt rather than seen. Art work and heart work can make our lives meaningful. There is framed artwork that soothes us, brings moments of peace, and nostalgia. Heart work can give us a different mindset toward people and life. Both can give us hope, inspiration, and courage that help us face the challenges we encounter in life.

LIFE'S MOSAIC COLORS

Betty Weatherman

Our lives form a beautiful but complex mosaic, filled with rhythm, rhyme, rain, and shine, storm and floods--all brushed with colors sublime.

We lift our eyes to a sky of blue, puffy white clouds and birds of every hue. Our ears hear the musical whispers of breezes and songs of crickets and frogs. We look to the ocean, lakes and rivers--as their mood they reveal by changing song and color, according to how they feel.

Compare yourself...your colors, your feelings that surround and confound...to those of nature. Are they placid, calm, and serene--gleaming with that beautiful aquamarine blue, or are they brooding, churning with anger and taking on the dismal colors of black and gray?

Life is so special in nature and in us. Then, why do we continue to grumble, stumble, and make such a fuss? Why not be joyful and rest in the thought that there is ONE who knows our true colors as no other--and if we are acting as we ought.

I must confess that from early morning light, to noon day and into the night--this daunting question speaks to my heart and keeps tug tugging away.

What Coat of Many Colors are you wearing today?

MY LAST OIL CHANGE (and other tidbits)

Annette Collins

Today is Wednesday. I got up and fed all the animals, three dogs and four cats. One dog wanted out, two wanted back in. Two cats wanted out. One cat was on the counter and one was on the kitchen table. After the clean-up routine I made coffee and looked at the calendar. Tomorrow is my church social and I open the doors at noon. Folks come in for socialization, cards, coloring, scrabble, or just come in to chat and have a cup of coffee. I baked two dozen cupcakes to bring for the social tomorrow.

Once the dishes were washed, I sat in my big brown chair in the bedroom with a cup of hot coffee, thinking about how lucky I am. I live with my two daughters. I have a nice church to attend, a car of my own for transportation. I just had an oil change a few weeks ago.

I have always gone to Walmart for an oil change. I could never understand why they advertise this procedure for \$19.95 when I have never gotten my oil changed for \$19.95. It always ends up costing me \$30.00. At least while they were working on my car I could shop in the store. When I was done shopping, I would go back to the waiting area until my car was done. Oh, and they always vacuumed the front seat floors. That was a nice touch.

Well, on this particular day I thought I would try and save a little money. In the morning newspaper was an advertisement for AAA Car Care Center and they advertised OIL CHANGES for \$19.95. I called and made an appointment for an oil change. Yes, I could come in at 9:00 am.

Everyone was pleasant when I arrived and I was directed to a little waiting room area with about eight chairs and a new-fangled coffee maker. I watched as several employees went to the coffee

maker and left with a nice hot cup of coffee. I walked up to the coffee maker and while holding my empty cup I inspected the new-fangled coffee maker and could not see where the coffee came out. Where is the button to push to get a cup of coffee? There is no spigot to pull. I put the empty cup back and sat down.

A little later another employee went to the coffee maker for a cup of coffee. I got up and asked him if he could pour me a cup of coffee as I could not figure out how it worked. He poured me a cup of coffee with a big smile on his face. I sat down. I was enjoying my time “people watching”. The technician who was in charge of my auto came up to me and said that there are a few things needing attention. You are also going to need a new battery as your battery tested low. Oh, and we will have to replace the serpentine belt. Your rear brake drums need cleaning and adjusting. Do you want us to proceed with the repairs?

I watched \$19.95 fly out window of my mind and I heard a voice say “yes, go ahead and fix what is needed”. It did sound like my voice.

Long story short, the oil change came to \$475.84. Handing over my credit card, I asked one of the four men gathered behind the counter when I should return for my next oil change. One of the young men, laughing, said “see you in about three years!” my 10-year old car has only 38,000 miles on it.

My old car is paid for. I get several calls a week from someone suggesting I renew the extended warrantee on my car and I tell them no. It is too old and I do not want what would amount to another car payment. I used to wash my car monthly in the driveway. I do this occasionally, but do not enjoy it. I guess I am getting old or lazy. My dirty car is easier to recognize in the parking lot of church or Walmart covered I leaves and bird doodoo. My car...oh, it's the red one with white poke-a-dots.

I really believe there are people out there who take advantage of the elderly. I know I am not such a good decision maker at 80, and occasional I get taken advantage of. I have a hard time saying “no”. I need to get it through my head that when I get a letter from Publisher’s Clearing House, I need to throw it away before I open it. I am never going to win \$7,000 a week for life.

Every now and then I think about giving up my driver’s license. I no longer drive at night. I won’t drive in the rain. I never drive on the highways. I praise myself for knowing the back roads to everywhere without getting on a highway.

I realize the highway is the fastest way to get to where you need to go. When I find myself on a highway, believe me, my knuckles are grasping the wheel so tight they appear ghost white. People hate me on the highway. The speed limit is 65 miles per hour. When I get my car up to 50 mph I am also saying my prayers and driving white knuckled. Years ago, in Lincoln, Maine, I got pulled over for speeding. I was driving 35-mph in a 25-mph construction zone. Twice!

Sometimes I think about the money I could save if I did not have a car. There would not be a bill every six months of \$420 on car insurance. Getting a fill-up with gas is \$25, but it does last a long time as I only drive to church and Walmart, and occasionally to the Shepherd Center, where I meet with people my age. I could call a taxi. Last Monday night, while driving home from a church meeting at 8 o’clock at night, I drove right past my house as I did not recognize it in the dark. Backing out of my neighbor’s driveway then into my own driveway was harrowing. There is a large culvert on either side of the driveway and I thought for sure I would end up in one or the other. Turned out OK though.

Wouldn’t it be nice to win a lot of money? Yes, it would be nice, but with it come problems and much responsibility. There would be people calling on the phone, written requests, families in need, friends in need, charities asking for help, and my heart being tugged every witch-a-way. I

don't think I could sleep at night. I am never going to be rich. Knowing God gives me peace of mind. I have everything that I need, and I realize I have more than so many others in the world. I am so blessed.

THE BEST WE CAN DO?

Sue Murray

Ah, spring. The time of year when everything becomes new again. Everything, that is, except for us old fogies who enter the Piedmont Plus Senior Games Literary Arts division.

I can already tell you the themes are the same old ones as last year and the year before and the ... well, you get the idea. For some reason, we seniors, who have at least a half century's worth of life experiences, tend to gravitate toward what's wrong with us. There will be the nursing home story, the death story, the Alzheimer's story, the cancer story, the I'm-fat-but-I'm-happy-about-it story, and lest we forget there will be the diatribe from the self-righteous, crotchety old man with nothing better to say than how much he hates our current president. Wow. This is literature?

If we've any understanding of what the senior games are all about, why do we write this drivel? The spirit of the games is to showcase the fact that even though we're 50 'or better' (read positive adjective!), we are still a vibrant force within our community. We are still able to run, play softball, and throw a javelin, albeit not as well as we used to, but we glorify God for a body healthy enough to do our best.

Why then, do we accept less from ourselves in the literary arts division? Isn't there anything more in our minds besides the foibles of our senior years? Don't we still have vivid imaginations and creativity? Wouldn't it be nice to encourage younger generations that seniors know more than what our blood pressure is? That we don't have to grow cynical and depressed? That we still have something to say?

Personally, I'd be shocked to know that anyone under the age of 50 even reads the compilation booklet. Why bother? Is this what they have to look forward to?

Just as God blesses senior athletes with physical abilities beyond their years, he blesses everyone with a mind full of stories and experiences that go beyond our hip replacements and bypasses. If all we can offer is doom and gloom, we truly are old, and the best game for us might be channel surfing.



LIFE
EXPERIENCE

PIEDMONT PLUS

SENIOR GAMES & SILVER ARTS

THE BIG STICK

Helen Webb



I had been in the back yard picking up sticks which had fallen during the cold, wet and windy month of January 2019. It was a nice day, cold but sunny to be outside. The ground was slightly damp but not muddy. The yard waste container was now full of broken down sticks and branches. My plan was to fill the bird feeders and then go inside and study my bridge book. But I saw the big stick in the woods at the edge of my property. It was long with several branches at the end.

The city truck which picks up fallen wood hadn't been in the neighborhood in many weeks. The leaf truck was scheduled to come the next day. I walked to the stick and considered throwing it over the fence into the adjoining property, but I have never approved of throwing things over the fence. The land is overgrown with all kinds of trees and vines. Deer frequently jump over the fence into my yard. I decided to carry it to the curb.

It wasn't a heavy stick but it was about twelve feet long and somewhat gangly. The branches at the top made it somewhat difficult to maneuver. About halfway up the back yard I decided to break it. By breaking it I could add it to my neighbor's stock pile at the curb. My curb was full of leaves. So I put as much of the stick as I could on the ground and my foot on the stick and with all my strength bent the stick over to break. It did not break easily. When it suddenly broke, the stick and I went flying in different directions.

It took a little time for me to regain my composure and realize what had happened. As I untangled my legs, a sharp pain shot through my pelvis and right leg. No other body part seemed to be effected. Looking around I realized I was all alone with no one in sight. I started yelling

help and waving my arms in hopes that someone might hear me. I was the perfect picture of the lady yelling help in the medical alarm button ads. My only choice was to crawl up to the front yard which I did using my right leg and upper body. Although I was yelling help and waving my arms and cars were passing, no one came to help. As the yard slants downward from the curb and shrubbery is along the side, I would have been hard to have been seen. Determined not to freeze, I crawled to the front porch steps and was able to pull myself up to a prone position against the hand rail. Here, I began yelling again. Eventually a neighbor came out of her house and saw me and came over. Sarah called EMS, got my pocketbook and cell phone and then locked the front door.

EMS came and carted me off to the hospital. I stayed 6 nights and then went to Trinity Elms for two weeks of rehab. The fall had broken a bone in my pelvis. When I came home I could see the large parts of the broken stick from my sunroom. Every time I saw them I got mad at myself. When I progressed from the walker to a cane I went out in the yard and moved the sticks from the grass to the pine needles at the side of the house. Last week I was able to carry both of the long sticks to the curb where they can just stay and wait for the big truck to carry them out of my sight.

“Guantanamera”



Charles H. Swanson, Ph.D.

When I stepped off the plane in Havana, Cuba into the warm Cuban night I heard this song softly wafting through José Martí International Airport. I first heard the song when I was a teenager, back in Chicago in the early 1960's. I thought it was a love song, of the boy-girl variety. Over the next two weeks I was to hear it...quite a few times all over the island of Cuba!

I never really heard the words to the song; like so many other people I just went along with what I thought the song was speaking about. Actually I was dead wrong. The words are metaphorical; it speaks of a homeland and freedom and patriotism. I'm not sure if Cubans feel it will make foreigners feel more at home in Cuba or more generous but the ubiquity of the tune makes it something of the de facto national anthem. It is probably on par with America the Beautiful for Americans. Ola, amigo/a, ola. Welcome to Cuba!

As I *write* this, travel to Cuba is still possible, but by the time you *read* this... but there are some rules ("expeditionary potholes") about your travel. You can't just Google up your favorite airline and buy a ticket for, say, a two week stay on the island. You must be traveling under the auspices of one of 12 "licenses" and you'd better remember which one governs your journey. I traveled under the license called "support of the Cuban people." What that meant was we were to stay in casa particulares or individually (family) owned "bed and breakfasts." Private (enterprise) companies have coordinated this down to a fine art. You find the tour or travel agencies and they will fix you up with an escorted tour complete with a guide, bus driver and full itinerary of places to visit and places to stay all at a reasonable price. For our journey we were supposed to keep a daily journal and retain same in our possession for 5 years! I followed the rules and have my journal but I'm not sure how many of my 11 other traveling companions kept them. We were supposed to review our journals daily but our guide, Camilo, was just a wee bit lax in following the steps laid out in our printed itinerary. (His English was a tad weak too and if I closed my eyes I could see him saying to that stately redhead, "Lucy, you are soooo ridiculous." But, from time-to-time, he would inquire if we were "Hoppy.") He averred that he was a trained lawyer. Really! He was affable enough but there was a lacunae or two in his knowledge of the

history and sociology of Cuba. But Camilo had found his "niche" and by gosh he was staying put; nothing was moving his comfort zone.

I was met at the airport by a charming fellow named "Tito" holding a big sign: "Welcome Dr. St. Clair." As we walked in the starless night to his car parked about a quarter of a mile away we engaged in the customary small talk: where are you from? Have any children? When we got to his car, a 1954 Ford Custom, I excitedly informed him that my first car was a 1953 Ford but I could see by the blank look on his face when I launched into a lecture about flathead and overhead cams on automobile engines that I had lost him. The ride was short enough and the streets were dark with few streetlights. It reminded me of China where the cars were driven, mostly, with their headlights off. Huddled near the lampposts in almost complete darkness every few blocks were 4-5 individuals awaiting a bus. Tito explained that I, as a tourist, was not allowed to take this form of transportation. With every stop light that was red I thought the old Ford was going to let out some final gasp, give up the ghost, and we would be stuck. But the end of that old car never came. With a green light, it sputtered back to life and we were off again to our destination.

Tito and Karina's casa was located in the dingy part of Havana but the casa per se was immaculate. It was fresh and new; the walls and floors had blue and white ceramic tiles. The bathroom was spotless. The air smelled fresh and clean. And, before long, I drifted off to sleep on clean sheets. I was awakened before dawn the next day by a rooster somewhere in the neighborhood, proudly announcing his availability for a romantic encounter or two. In the distance, and then closer, came the sounds of horses hooves: clip, clop, clip, clop, in a steady staccato rhythm down the cobblestone street proclaiming: "It's morning: time to get the day underway."

After a hearty breakfast of eggs, ham and fruit, Tito drove me to the casa where our tour group would rendezvous and spend the night. At the guest house, we all gave our personal introductions, and our guide, Camilo went over, in broad strokes, our adventure for the next two weeks. We were advised that two of our troupe would be a day or two late due to some visa problems. We spent that first day getting to know each other and relaxing. We had our dinner, a couple of "Cuba Libres" (rum and coke), said our goodnights, and went to bed. Buenos noches. We assembled the next morning for breakfast and our bus ride with "Lewis" our driver to our first destination: Cienfuegos, land of 100 fires.

As we left Havana we could see the colorful vintage classic cars from Fords to Chevys even a Studebaker or two but there were no cars beyond the model year 1960. The paint jobs on the cars ranged from the immaculate (professional with oven drying) to those applied with a hand held paint brush. I marveled at their ingenuity and ability to keep machinery with a life expectancy of (at most) 10 years to keep chugging along 60 or 70 years or more.

The homes, packed close together, were made from all manner of material and were pastel colored: pink, yellow, blue, mint green and red. Every color you would expect to see in the Caribbean. The streets? Something to be desired: bumpy and rough. The people were for the most part cordial and polite. Animals? Horses, mules, and stray dogs. The latter also came in a "basic model": tan, short hair, thin and to my mind very much resembled Australian wild dingo's. Evolutionary biology would say this was the "model" most favored in an environment with meager food supplies and the many challenges to daily life in an urban setting. I fed them whenever I could; the locals simply ignored them. Upon reflection, I can't recall a dog ever barking. But then again, barking would or could call unwanted attention to your presence.

Our bus travels were quite lengthy and ranged from 3 to 7 hours. To keep our attention, and assuage our boredom, for these long rides our guide would often play a video. Our first video was about the "Peter Pan Children." I think everyone's attention was riveted to the screen for the 40 minutes it played. It seems that the success of the Castro revolution gave apoplexy to many governments around the world and particularly the American C.I.A. They did anything they could to de-stabilize the regime. One particularly pernicious and diabolical tactic involved separating the children from their parents and sending them to America with the promise they would join them "later." Over 14,000 children were part of this program which lasted from 1961-1962. (Routine flights from Cuba to the U.S. ceased after the Cuban Missile Crisis in the Fall of 1962.) While most of the children were temporarily situated in Miami many more were sent hither and yon around the United States. How many of these children were never reunited with their Cuban families is unknown. If this breaking-up-of-families is eerily familiar to what is happening on our southern border this very day it is because it is! The only difference is in the Cuban case it was to topple a government unpopular with the leadership of the U.S. by renting the social fabric (take away the children and the parents will demand change); with the "migrant caravans" it is to discourage the various indigenous peoples from Guatemala, Honduras, etc. from beginning their arduous journeys at all! When word gets back to the village

that "Maria" and "Pedro" were "taken" at the border-- and no one seems to know where they are-- it can definitely have a dampening effect on one's ardor for immigration.

Before arriving in Cienfuegos, we stopped at the Bay of Pigs Memorial. The success of Castro's revolution was so odious that our government took pains to plan an overthrow by landing a paramilitary force (largely disgruntled Cubans) on a remote beach on the western side of the island at a place called Bahia de Cochinos. Somehow, the Cuban authorities came to find out about the plans and knew when and where the attack was to take place. It (the fight) was all over in three days and was an utter failure. When we asked our guide what the translation of the Bay of Pigs actually meant, he averred that in this sense "pig" was much like we would use the word "rat" in English as in traitor or "snitch." After the introductory lecture we visited the Museo Giron complete with photographs and military memorabilia, e.g., weapons. There is a fighter aircraft tasked with silent sentinel duty in front of the building, as if to say, "don't try it again."

Travel from Santiago de Cuba to Baraquoá introduced us to some interesting topography. The road, in places, was literally a couple hundred yards from the Atlantic Ocean on one side and on the other side high, craggy mountains that were largely bereft of any type of flora but desert succulents. That side of the mountain was literally in the rain shadow. When we crested the mountain and started down the other side, we then began to see the banana trees, coconut trees and all manner of palm trees. From time to time there would even be a slick place in the road where there had been a brief rain shower heralding our arrival. As we descended the mountain everything became more verdant and the humidity increased.

Baraquoá was Cuba's first capital and dates to the early part of the 16th Century. It has a small, sheltered bay but it is on the windward side of the island and its potential for growth was limited which is why, as the population of the island grew, the capital migrated over to the western side to Santiago. The town of Baraquoá is small and compact: a couple of parallel streets with 8--10 cross streets. The people were friendly and ready to help with anything we needed: even a pharmacy. In Cuba there are no Walgreens or CVS. Even aspirin is dispensed through government controlled pharmacies.

On our second day we boarded the bus and headed for the "bush." We visited a coconut farm and found our way to a couple of ramshackle huts. The establishment was just off the ocean and

definitely not intended for receiving visitors. We had a brief talk about how a coconut was opened, and Raphael, the proprietor, split one as an example. Then on to the display of beads and crafts for sale. My attention was drifting away when they said something that brought me back: Raphael used to climb coconut trees *until last year*. They made him stop when he turned 97! As our group packed up their purchases and was ready to move on to our "boat ride" I asked Raphael if he was part of the revolution. My English was translated and he snapped to attention with a smart salute and a distinctive "Si" exclamation. As our group was departing he reached under a table and pulled out a small tin box with all manner of pins and medals. He proudly showed them to me. He was apparently a lieutenant in the revolutionary army! This squat little man, who still had his hair, had lived a full life, showing no signs of slowing down, was part of one of the most significant social events in the last 100 years of Cuban history and the rest of our group had missed this revelation! Claire, my adopted granddaughter for our trip, snapped a picture of me and the lieutenant. I couldn't have been happier. I have it on my desk.

On our drive to Camagüey we were told that the town was purposely designed with many unusual angles and dead ends to confuse unwanted visitors: "pirates." It worked. Our little group was out one evening to hear some local musicians. As one of our members, who played classical guitar would aver, "They are loud...but not very good." It was past 10:00 p.m. and I decided to go back to my assigned casa. Charlie and his wife Patti, two of my companions, decided to go with me. Charlie spoke fluent Spanish; he was a Cuban American who came to the U.S. when his father, a journalist, was transferred to N.Y.C. in 1952. He was eight. I confidently proclaimed I could get us back to our casas. On our stroll we passed certain familiar landmarks and my confidence increased. A couple more blocks and I was a little less sure of my navigation. We passed an open building where there were several people sitting, talking and drinking and I asked for directions. The closest fellow said: "No habla." Just then Charlie stepped forward and began the inquiry in Spanish. A fellow we called Pablo, stepped forward and volunteered to walk us back (we were only about 5 or so blocks from our destination at this point). Charlie and Pablo walked a bit ahead of me and Patti and were out of ear shot. After a couple of minutes Charlie returned (alone) and whispered, "I think we'd better leave this guy...he's been in prison." I demurred and said let us continue. We all made it home safely that night and Pablo never asked for a dime (or peso) for his services. The next day we had a chance to debrief and Charlie averred that Pablo was part of the infamous Mariel Boat Lift in the late-70's. There was much agitation by Cubans in the U.S. to allow more Cubans to emigrate to the U.S. So, that is exactly what Castro did: he opened the

prisons and mental institutions and they all got to go to the U.S. Oops. Not a good idea. How Pablo ended up back in Cuba was never clear to me nor was his offending offense that landed him in prison in the first place. But he rendered a rather valuable service to the three of us that evening.

After our visit to Camagüey we had a long ride to Santiago de Cuba, the second capital of Cuba, located on the western (leeward) side of the island. We were trekked to several historical sites, including the national cemetery which held the remains of many Cuban notables, including Signor Bacardi, who made his \$\$'s making rum, and the Moncada Barracks where an armed attack took place marking the onset of the Cuban Revolution, July 26, 1953. While the social/military history was interesting, what really made this city special for me was the music: Santiago is the host city for international choir festivals and Cuba is represented by a very, very good a cappella group called the Orfeon Choir. We were treated to an amazing display of their musical talents with the only musical instrument being the human voice. When they opened the floor to questions I requested that they sing the Cuban National Anthem. I was moved to tears.

I, of course, bought the CD along with most of our group.

A memory I shall always retain is that of a little boy helping an old man down a stairs. Our group was making a quick visit to the restaurant and souvenir shop at the Che Memorial in Santa Clara. I had found my way to the souvenir shop and made my purchase (a Che tee shirt) and making my way back to our group when I was faced with a couple of flights of stairs made of concrete and flanked with railings made of ordinary plumbers' pipe. The stairs were not steep and the pipe made their navigation safe. Ahead of my walk I observed 3 or 4 young boys of a very tender age. I was ignoring them and they were doing the same...or so I thought. I noticed one of the boys stood out from the rest with his short, wiry, strawberry blonde hair. The boys were scooting up and down the stairs in some sort of game of tag. My attention was fixed on getting to the bottom of the stairs at a manageable speed and in one piece. Silently from behind and to my right the boy with strawberry hair slid up next to me and without a word slipped his small hand into mine. Without a word, he became my escort. When we reached the bottom I said, "Gracias" and reached into my pocket for the only coin I had available: a 10 centavos piece. I quietly handed it to him. He said but one word: "dañada" and turned to resume his game of play with his companions. My last words were, "vía con dios, mi amigo." He turned, smiled and nodded. He left me with a very warm memory I shall always treasure. I can only hope I did the same for him.

I shall never forget the warmth and openness of the Cuban people and their willingness to assist with their currency and language. In time, I'm sure these visits from Americans, whatever the auspices, will increase our mutual understanding and comity.

Our guide informed us that there were over 600 attempts on Castro's life and yet he died an old man in his bed of natural causes. There is no memorial to him at the national cemetery save that of a rather large stone shaped like a kernel of corn. It bears but one word on a bronze plaque: FIDEL. Viva la revolución, Viva Cuba.

My Legs

Bill Gramley



I've been looking at my legs more than I used to. I've had them for 83 years and you'd think I'd have paid more attention to them than I have. What I've noticed is that they are wrinkled in some places; not as bad as my arms, but still some loose skin. Looser than it used to be. But what is even more noticeable are the protruding veins. I don't have many spider veins, but I do have some gnarly, contorted, weird pretzel-like twists there on the inside of my legs both above and below my knees. I don't plan to get them fixed like some people do. I think a doctor pulls them out. Not sure how they do it, but mine don't hurt and don't bother me.

No one has called my legs ugly. Just the opposite: good looking, muscular. “You must work out a lot,” one fellow said. And I know a woman who said they were appealing. Later I married her but not because she said that. It's just nice to be appreciated or have something pointed out to you that you don't realize—like strong legs.

Yes, my legs have carried me all over. When I played golf, I preferred to walk so I could enjoy the scenery and the woods where my ball often landed. Easier to go hunting for it by walking. When I played football, I had to run a lot and use my legs to get down in position to push off to block or tackle my opponents. It helped to have strong legs for that, not that I ever did any weight-lifting or special training.

I think the largest muscles in the body are the quadriceps or what I call the “thigh,” where you get a “Charlie Horse” if someone knocks into them. That muscle and the parallel ones underneath the leg are called the gluteus, and together they form your foundation for movement and power. In the middle of the legs are a series of about three muscles that connect to the sitz bone and they are called the hamstrings. In recent years these are the muscles that get painful

cramps in them, especially at night if I have exercised a lot during the day. If I can get to the refrigerator and drink some pickle juice or eat a spoonful of mustard, the cramps calm down. Someone said it is the sodium that helps. Some people drink quinine water. But if I'm in bed, I can't get up because the cramps are so powerful and painful. I simply endure the way they tighten and then loosen and then tighten again until they are satisfied with the punishment they are inflicting upon my weary body. When this happens, I say, "I knew I shouldn't have gone so hard today! I knew they'd get me!" Because they do.

I said I never did weight-lifting, but that's not entirely true. Once when I was in my 60s I went to a body-building gym to find out if I could increase my strength at my age. The owners said I certainly could, so I did work out there and found out that after a year I could jump farther than before. I had strengthened my quads and legs all in all. But the problem is that we lose muscle mass every year after age 40. That means that my legs aren't as strong as they were. I found out that for a year or two in my 60s I could high jump over 4 feet. Now I can't even jump 3 feet. And this is true for all of my activities. I still throw things: the shot put, discus, hammer, and weight, but every year I throw less far. And there is no way to stop this decline. It is something I keep trying to accept, especially when I recall how far I could throw those things when I was in high school and college.

My knees are good. I have one scar from a fall off my bike in the fifth grade when I landed on a stone in my yard. But my knee and hip joints seem to be O.K. However, I've had trouble in the last three years with spinal stenosis which causes pinched or inflamed nerves that come out of the spine. These cause sharp pains in my hips. I have been fortunate to have had epidural injections with some form of steroids to treat this condition successfully, one on the left lumbar area and one on the right.

I think my legs have stayed decent because I used to ride my bike a lot. I used to take

young people on week-long bike hikes, once each summer. I did that for 12 years. Later I did what they call the “spin” classes at the Y where you ride a stationary bike for 45 minutes with the leader telling you to increase or decrease your intensity. Each time I came out of those classes I was unable to do much else for the rest of the day. I did that for six years but now I just ride a stationary bike on my own for about 10 minutes to keep the muscles active.

My feet are O.K. They've gotten a little longer as I've aged, but I don't mind. I've moved from size 13 to 14. They're still “boats” and I bump things quite often. What's that old song: “Your Feet too Big?” I have arthritis in my right big toe so it won't flex but I can still walk just fine. In fact, that lifelong walking rather than a lot of running may have helped prevent excessive wear and tear. I hope so.

I've only pulled my Achilles tendon once. It didn't break, thank goodness, because the healing process for a tear is rather long compared to a pull or strain. Sure, I've twisted my ankles a few times, but recovered nicely. But nowadays I feel a tingling in my feet for a few seconds, not as severe as you get when you hit your elbow's crazy bone, but it is a little bit like that. It may be the blood flowing back into my feet when I get up in the morning or get out of my chair or it may be the start of neuropathy.

I don't think it would have mattered much if I had spent more time checking my legs over the years. Maybe that's because they have been good to me and held me up rather well, knotted veins, cramps and all! Thank goodness! On the other hand, I don't think I've ever taken them for granted. How can you not know they are there under you all the time taking you where you need to go? How can you not say, “What wondrous creatures we are, legs and all! Thank God!”

WHAT IS A BODY TO DO?

Betty Weatherman

Oh, what the years do to a body.....a mystery beyond compare or repair.

I've used it and lost it, moved it and grooved it, but it continues to move toward the floor! Each day it sags lower than before. From East it goes West; from North it goes South so.....What is a body to do??

I would be willing to stand on my head and do Hula Hoops if only it would bring back my girlish figure. Perhaps I should just hitch up my belt and declare to this Body-Boldly that we're in for a battle Royale!

You turn one way, I turn the other and never the twain shall meet. Truth is that old Mr. Gravity is doing his number on me even as I sleep.

Now dawns the reality that regardless of my sincere desire to retrieve what WAS but IS no longer. 'Tis a futile endeavor to push against the inevitable. Why cry in my milk? Why try to fight it for I'll never again be able to right this sinking ship.

So here's the deal. I must come to grips with this simple truth--the Silk Purse is now gone--never to return, and the Sow's Ear is in much to my chagrin. Now comes that daunting question: What is a body to do?

I will now simply grin and bear it (oh, no, not BARE it heaven forbid). I'm now determined to move forward with the purpose to live, love, and be happy with what I've GOT--and even with what is NOT!

MY JOURNEY

Ray Schehr

Two plus years ago I attended an evening meeting of men at our church. At the meeting I professed to one and all...that I was a lousy Christian...that I went to church only to please my wife...that I would daydream the service away, and that I couldn't wait until the service was over so that I could visit with friends.

All of this ended on October 14, 2015. I was involved in a near fatal head on collision sustaining a compound fracture of the tibia/fibula, a crushed foot, seven broken ribs, and multiple cuts and lacerations.

I was taken to the trauma center at Wake Forest Medical Center located in Winston-Salem, NC. The trauma surgeon told me later that his first inclination was to "chop" my ankle off as it was being held on by only skin and tendons. Instead he drove a rod up through my heel into my tibia. He then drove a rod laterally through my ankle and another laterally through my upper tibia. It was referred to as an External Fixator, an ugly device that I had to wear for several months.

When My wife and family arrived at the hospital they were told I wouldn't make it through the night. They were further told that the only way I could survive was to have permanent tubes placed in my lungs, a tracheotomy performed, and a robotic device placed in my throat.

My family unanimously voted "Do Not Resuscitate"!!

God stepped in and decided that He had plans for me yet. When morning came my oxygen level rose and I was off to begin an incredible journey. I stayed in ICU for two weeks and was transferred to a regular bed.

At some point I was sent to a rehab facility where I spent several months. It was a miserable place. During this interim I was taking pain killers, sleeping pills, lots of antibiotics, and a number of other meds.

My wife was a real champion during this time. She took exceptional care of me, the house, the cleaning, clothing, and anything else to make me comfortable.

I was hallucinating so badly from all the meds that I had crazy thoughts including ending it all...but just couldn't figure out how. I even recall soliciting my wife's help in this endeavor.

After six months of being an inpatient I was asked to leave the rehab unit, not because I was ready, but because my insurance ran out.

The ordeal was just beginning. I was sent home in a wheelchair and my wife had to take care of my every need...and what needs I had! How she was able to do this, I do not know.

Prior to coming home unbeknownst to me, I had contracted a disease known as C diph. It is a disease that is contracted when staying in institutions for a lengthy period of time. It was so bad that my wife had to take me the hospital via ambulance in a snowstorm.

Another adventure was just beginning. I was placed in ICU and a team of five gastroenterologists took my well being on. After due course, they called Palliative care to send me on my way.

My poor family! Once again they had to live through my seemly departure. During this event my family was told "not to go home as this will over in a couple of hours". They were chased home thirteen hours later. God is indeed good!

As Sue related to me, they hooked me up to a special machine that would deplete my blood pressure medicine in my system. At this point the meds were the only thing protecting my "core" consisting of heart and lungs.

Poor Sue was then asked by the Palliative Care people to throw a series of three toggle switches that would send me on my way. When she threw the first toggle switch...nothing happened. She then threw the second switch...and according to my oldest son...my hands became completely white and he could see the bones much like an x ray. (Glad I wasn't there). When it came time to throw the third switch Sue screamed and refused to do it. She was told that the system can't be reversed and she would have to. When she did, nothing happened. What a brave woman!! Thirteen hours later the hospital chased everyone home.

A week later I celebrated my 81st Birthday...if you consider feeling poorly, being so weak, with barely the energy to pick up a newspaper, then I was celebrating.

An interesting thing.

It was the custom of the hospital to deliver a local newspaper along with your breakfast. I was so weak I was barely able to pick up the paper so I pushed it off the tray into my bed.

There was a headline on the front page that caught my eye. It read "Daughter thanks Father for his act of Kindness"...see page 6. I rumbled through the paper until I found the article. Much to my surprise was a picture taken while I was in the hospital and a beautiful article written by a seasoned journalist in collaboration with our daughter. It was a love letter between father and daughter in which she expressed her thanks to God for keeping around so that she could tell me how much she loved me.

On Amy's 18th birthday 30 years' previous I had written a similar letter and had it published in the local paper. It was a lengthy letter. A very brief synopsis.

Amy Dear:

When did it all begin...Was it the first time I saw you in your mother's arms and I baptized you with my tears?

Was it in the nursery where the nurses had taped a pink ribbon on your bald head so that we could find our one and only daughter?

I believe it was that very first moment. Despite the trauma of birth your mother experienced only a few minutes previous...the happiness on her face was beyond description.

Where have these 18 years gone...from diapers to bras in so short a time is difficult on fathers...and so the letter began. It ended like this.

Amy dear, go after your life with gusto. Make it do what you want it to do. Never compromise your principles nor take the non-existent shortcuts in life...for anything worthwhile has to be earned.

And so our dialogue began. On Amy's 18th birthday and culminating on my 81st.

In Amy's letter she deferred to many things. Lost jobs. Broken engagements. Homesickness. Losing confidence. It seems she was a pokey thing getting ready for school and how when I did take her...we would stop and have breakfast instead of going to school. Our time together was more important than missing a class. She could always make up a class, but we could never make up the time we spent together.

I honestly believe her letter kickstarted me...and I began moving forward gaining strength with each passing day. In due course I was again released from the hospital. You guessed it. My insurance ran out!

Sue was now facing her trial by fire by having to take care of me as I convalesced in my wheelchair for months. We had Physical therapy ladies, Occupational therapy, and nurses visiting our house twice a week for months. We even had a lady come by twice a week to bathe me. How Sue handled all this company I do not know.

As time passed I slowly began to get better and graduated to a walker which made life worth living again. While in the wheelchair Sue had to take me to, what seemed like, endless doctor appointments. We were quite a sight, I'm sure. Sue weighing in at a 100 pounds pushing me in and out of doctor offices and local restaurants.

After months of this lifestyle we had an appointment with our trauma surgeon. He walked in with a form in his hand and flipped on his X-ray unit. He said the X-ray showed no healing...and since it showed no healing after a year plus...and because I was 81...and because I was diabetic we had only one option. Surgery!

The form he handed us exonerated he and the hospital of any responsibility emanating from the surgery including death. He said it was the only option left and was insistent on performing the surgery within the next couple of weeks. We signed the form.

Think about this.

After subjecting my family to all the worry, the sacrifices, the misery I was subjected to, the thought of another surgery was beyond comprehension. Sue and I decided to get a second

opinion. We made an appointment with another surgeon...and yes he agreed with the first surgeon that it was the only option we had. Drat!!!

A few days later a pastor from our church visited. This pastor had visited me every week for over a year. He actually became a member of our family over time.

After expressing to him my frustration that I was facing yet another miserable future, he offered a second option...that we pray God would heal my bones. Wow, a second opinion.

I must confess sweating blood deciding which way to go. God won out. I canceled the surgery and will say that both Sue and I had real peace about it.

The good part.

Our orthopedic surgeon set up an appointment for two months later. With a certain amount of trepidation I hobbled into his office to view another X-ray. The surgeon brought it up on his screen and said. "Your bones are completely healed. There is no need to come back".

It was a long journey from collision time to this moment. But I wouldn't take anything for it. I gave up one year of my life for eternity. What an incredible deal!!!

I believe with all my heart that God intervened and spared me from undergoing another difficult surgery and all it's ramifications.

It is my hope that this testimony will move someone, somewhere to take a leap of faith knowing that God is alive. He is truly an awesome God and is always watching over us.

Farm Work

Bill Pfefferkorn

The short white-haired man looked level at my five foot height and made a humming noise. He took the half-smoked cigar out of the right side of his mouth as he said, "So this is Larry's boy, huh? Your mama's daddy was the biggest man in town 'til the depression. Your daddy out foxed me when he bought that swamp land at the bottom of the hill for \$400 in 1936. Then he turns around and builds two houses on it and moves into the best part of town. Got to give that little fellow from Georgia a lot of credit. Well, I'll pay you \$3.00 a day, six days a week to work at my farm on Robin Hood Road. If you're half the man your daddy is you'll help me get that old farm in shape."

"Yes, sir," I mumbled.

"I'll pick you up at 7:30 in the morning at the corner of Arbor and Robin Hood."

I sat in the grass beside the sidewalk on the west side of Arbor at the corner. Two colored men, one old and short and the other young looking and tall were sitting on the curb at the east side of Arbor where the bus stopped. It was 7:15 a.m. I was just looking over at the big house where the Baxter's lived. Mr. Baxter was president of a trucking company. A rock hit just to my left and bounced into the yard behind me. The two colored men started laughing at me as I looked around to see where the rock came from. One of them must have thrown it. They kept laughing. I just took a deep breath and gripped my paper bag with a peanut butter sandwich and a hard-boiled egg that my mother packed for my lunch.

Then the sound like a motorcycle in first gear came up Arbor hill. A blue 1950

Oldsmobile 88 drove up in front of the two men with old Mr. Duncan and his cigar at the wheel. The men got up. I got up and started across the street. They got in the right rear door and I started to get in behind them.

“You get up here in front,” barked Mr. Duncan.

I got in and sat next to him. The two men didn't say anything. Mr. Duncan said it was going to be a hot day. His cigar ashes fell on his khaki pants but he didn't pay any attention. They eventually blew onto the floor. All the car windows were open.

“Mr. Dixon will tell you what to do,” said Mr. Duncan when he got out. We were supposed to stretch and put up the fencing, clear the creek for irrigation dams, clear rocks from the fields, dig ditches along the roads, mow fields, tend the garden around the house, load and unload blocks, bricks and lumber, and anything that Mr. Dixon wanted us to do that was outside. I thought it was really fun. My daddy made us work around the house a lot and this sure beat washing and drying dishes and cleaning the house. I could lift more than the old-looking one and who said, “call me Pee Wee and call him Benjamin.” They called me ‘boy’ like Mr. Duncan did and seemed to like it. I liked it too.

Benjamin was over six feet tall and plenty strong. After a few hours loading blocks, Pee Wee came over to me and said that I needed to learn not to work like a horse or I would have a sunstroke.

“Work like a mule, son, slow and steady and you will last all day and the rest of the week.” He was right

At lunch time I sat next to the hay rake that was attached to a tractor. Pee Wee and Benjamin sat together under a tree. After a few days Pee Wee said, “Come on over here, boy. It's nice under this tree.”

I walked over and sat with them. Pee Wee asked a lot of questions. I told him that I wanted to be a lawyer and he told me to hurry up cause he needed one next week on a nonsupport charge from a woman who beat him up and left with his boy. Benjamin said he paid a lawyer \$100 and never heard from him and couldn't find him.

When we worked around the farmhouse I could hear the radio speeches at the Republican Convention of 1952 when Eisenhower and Taft people were having a big scrap.

In the rest of the summer we worked together and talked about my doing the work to be ready for football and high school and their legal and woman problems. They liked working for Mr. Duncan cause he paid in cash and the courts couldn't get hold of their pay.

Pee Wee was from South Carolina. He came to work at Reynolds Tobacco but got fired for going to a funeral when he was supposed to be at work. So he tried construction work but he was too little to lift the mortar buckets up to the mortar boards for the brick masons.

They asked me if I had a girlfriend. They laughed when I told them I had only kissed a girl playing spin the bottle and ended up kissing her on the front teeth cause I didn't even know how to do it.

"You got a lot to learn," Pee Wee said with a big smile that showed a lot of gold fillings in his mouth.

Pee Wee looked like the picture of Gunga Din in my literature book at school and I thought about the last line from the Kipling poem we had to memorize. "Through I belted you and flayed you by the living God that made you, you're a better man than I am, Gunga Din."

WELCOME TO MY WORLD – My 81st Year

ANNETTE COLLINS

Welcome to my world! My 81st year. How could this be? I never thought I would live to be this old when my youth was in full bloom. I was indestructible and I thought I knew it all. Oh, I have made some many mistakes and poor choices, but life is a learning process, isn't it?

I live with my two daughters in a house large enough to accommodate us all. One of my favorite things to do, as the weather allows, is to sit on the front porch and exercise my memories by rocking. Some are new, and some are old. Come sit awhile and let's reminisce. Would you like a cup of coffee or tea?

How far back can you remember your childhood? My earliest memory is from 1945. I was seven. We never had to lock our doors. We had no television. Our telephone was on a party-line. My father had a bird-dog name Bep. I lived in a house on top of a hill. There were many neighborhood kids to play with. We could stay out all day and play until called for lunch or supper. Mother would tell me not to go and bother the neighbors. Note that they would hurt me, but that I would be bothering them. Favorite games back then (remember no TV) was playing school on the front porch, or store where we would be a clerk selling things. We picked bouquets and pretended to get married. We used our imaginations back then. Marbles in the back yard, hop-scoth on the road, double-dutch with a jump rope, roller skating on the sidewalk. We had no fear of strangers back then. I remember jumping off the garage roof in the neighbor's yard with an umbrella. All I broke was the umbrella.

On the lot beyond my yard was an old grey house. A man lived there with his mother. My mother told me his name was Happy Rathburn. She told me not to go over there since there were

no kids to play with. Our gang of kids on my street numbered eleven, age's five to ten. At the bottom corner of my yard grew a thicket of bamboo. By cutting a path into its center we created a fort. We hauled boxes to sit upon, and even a flashlight just in case we need to hold court while it was getting dark.

An old grey barn stood near our fort on the neighbor's property. We stacked our boxes beneath the windows to have a peek inside. I was thinking a hiding place for bank robbers, a coffin, a treasure chest full of gold and jewels. One day that barn burned to the ground. It had been struck by lightning. Father told me that they lost an antique automobile stored inside the barn. Our fort did not burn. After the barn was demolished, the kids and I would examine the ground for burned treasure. Finding nothing more than an occasional burned bottle, a coin or two, a few beads from a necklace, we gave up. Our attention was now on the Rathburn's house. One of our games was pretending that an ogre lived there, we took turns watching the house. There were plenty of bushes to hide behind. Happy had a dog names HEY-YOU. Every evening Happy would call HEY-YOU until the dog came home for supper. Happy never smiled. I was eight years old now, and to me Happy was a very old man.

I joined the Brownies. Mother said this would expand my circle of friends and I could earn badges. We were invited to participate in projects that would make a difference in the community and beyond. One of our projects was to sell Girl Scout Cookies. Mother told me many times not to go to the Rathburns' house and bother them, but to me, this was good enough reason to go over there. I gathered all the kids for a meeting in our fort to discuss my selling cookies to the Rathburns. One kid said I would probably get eaten by the ogre. I really wanted to meet the old lady in the house. Of course, they all decided that I should go and that they were going to hide in the bushes and watch what happens.

Happy's house had a big front porch with a rocking chair and old barrel, a small table with a fat cat sleeping on it. One door was open but a screen door was closed. I knocked and no one came to the door. I knocked again and I heard a voice calling for me to come in. While opening the screen door I heard a woman's voice call again. "Come in to the living room. Come in." I ventured towards this voice, and there was an old woman sitting in a hospital bed which was raised to a semi-sitting position.

I introduced myself as her next-door neighbor and advised her that I was selling Girl Scout Cookies. She asked me to speak louder as she was hard of hearing. I was nervous, thinking I had made a mistake coming here by myself. Old Mrs. Rathburn took my hand and said she was happy to have my company.

I used my outside voice to tell her I was there to sell cookies. She told me to come back when her son was home as he handled the money. I felt more comfortable the longer we chatted. Pulling up a chair, I sat holding her hand. I asked her why her son Happy never smiled.

A very sad story unfolded from her lips to my most eager ears. Several years ago, July 6, 1944 the Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus was in Hartford Connecticut. Happy worked for the circus for years as a roust-a-bout and a hobo clown with his dog. Happy was friends with Emmett Kelly, a famous clown back then. On that day 6,000 – 7,000 people were in attendance at the afternoon show. A huge fire broke out and 167 people died in the fire, with at least 700 injured. The newspapers called it "The Day the Clowns Cried". HEY-YOU was injured, but survived. Happy never went back to work, nor does he smile much anymore.

I was in the house for quite a while on my first visit. The kids in the bushes had gone home as there was nothing to observe. I went home and told my mother what I had done and where I had been. She lifted the ban about visiting the house in the back of ours.

I visited Mrs. Rathburn quite often after that, bringing her flowers picked from our garden. One day when I got home from school mother had baked a cake and she asked me to go with her to the house next door. I wondered why she was going with me. She told me that old Mrs. Rathburn had died. I think this cake was for Happy and his relatives who may stop by to visit him.

Happy introduced me and my friends to HEY-YOU, and on occasion he would have HEY-YOU show us something special. I saw happy smile a few times. I learned from this experience that sometimes being nice to a stranger can be a blessing to us both.

THAT OLD TIME ROCK N'ROLL

Sue Murray

I turned 67 last year; and although I wondered how in the world it came to this, I had no desire to go back. That was until my husband surprised me with a cherry red 1972 Honda Scrambler just like the one I purchased at age 20 back in 1971. Well, it's not exactly the same; it's a little bit heavier, but then again, so am I.

The CL175 K6 'Peanut' was my only means of transportation for several years in the city and suburbs of Buffalo, NY. I bought it in lieu of spending a half year's salary (\$3,000) on a new car. Unless there were more than a couple inches of snow on the ground, I rode it downtown to work and back year round. Heated grips? Ski gloves. Heated seat? My own 'seat' warmed it up eventually. CE armored suit? Huh?

The chrome shines just as it did 47 years ago. I take hold of the grips and swing a leg over the CL350 K5. It feels instantly familiar. I sit quietly for a moment to take it in as a smile accentuates my laugh lines. I turn the key, rotate the fuel petcock, choke it, and kick. A metal key, a manual choke, and yes, a kickstart. Although the big wave toward universal electric starts began in the late 60s, only the wusses used them.

My 'tours' consisted of trips to Niagara Falls, Fort Erie and the beaches along Lake Erie in Canada. Of course I had a luggage rack—a 10-by-12-inch metal grate affixed to the shocks and rear fender—and my towel fit perfectly! Compartments big enough to carry two full-face helmets? I've got hooks under the seat for that. GPS? Sounds like a radio station on that new FM dial.

I put on the retro open-faced helmet and strap it under my chin. There's no long beautiful, long-as-I-could-grow-it hair to tuck in this time. Bluetooth? I see my dentist regularly. Headset? Yes, the helmet is securely set on my head. Communication system? Ah, the lung capacity to yell!

I'm sitting on a running motorcycle. Get your motor runnin' ... head out on the highway ... lookin' for adventure ... The memories come rolling back like rapidly successive curves on the road. My friend John on the really big bike (a 650 twin-carb Yamaha) patiently teaching me the ropes. Failing my first road test by driving onto someone's front lawn. Discovering I can't go up a steep hill in fifth gear with a passenger. Teaching my dad to ride it.

In 1990, three kids in four years and the call to homeschool them from kindergarten through high school ended my motorcycling days. I sold the Peanut; and looking back, I wouldn't trade those minivan years for all the Hondas in Japan. To everything there is a season.

I shift down from neutral, roll back the throttle a bit, slowly let out the clutch, and I'm off down the street. You truly do never forget.

The analog odometer reads 6,413 miles. Next to that is the analog tachometer. Yup, that's my dash. Phone plug in? The phone is at home and still attached to the wall. Gas gauge? When it starts to sputter, flip it to reserve and head for the nearest gas station. But instead of parking the bike at the pump, walking in and watching my dollar bills fly away, I stayed on the Honda (didn't even put down the stand), swiped my card, filled the tank, grabbed my receipt, and was off—all in one fell swoop.

Stereo? Yes, I have two wheels, and they're spoked.

By the third outing on what's now affectionately known as the Walnut, I'm diggin' it. It's 50 degrees and I'm totally invigorated by the experience of riding once again. Windscreen? Why would I divert at when the answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind?

Liquid cooling, disc brakes, and tubeless tires? Evel Knievel, Woodstock, and Paul is dead. Progressive suspension and shaft drive? 'One small step for man' and Watergate. ABS, EFI, and LED? JFK, LBJ, and MLK.

Call me a relic, call me what 'cha will. I like that old time rock n' roll.

WHITE RABBITS

Margaret Miller

I was feeling sorry for myself. My nose was running, my throat was sore and I was beginning to get a cough. The cat and I were snuggled up on the sofa, the TV was on and I had a book close by. I was wondering if I should have something to eat. Maybe some soup would be good. I then thought about the saying, “feed a cold and starve a fever”. Well I had both so what to do. Maybe it was “starve a cold and feed a fever”. I couldn’t remember. If my mother were here she would set me straight. She was a very superstitious person who managed to come up with a saying or tale just about every day. She was born and raised in Ireland so I wondered if she had heard many superstitious tales there. She was also an avid reader and remembered a great deal of what she read. There was also the thought that she could have made up some strange sayings to keep my brother and I amused. She passed these tales on to my children and they loved it.

I spoke with my son on the first of the month and jokingly asked if he had said “White rabbits” that morning. He laughed and told me that he said it every first of the month in his grandmother’s honor.

On the first of every month when you woke up, before you greeted your spouse or said a friendly good morning to the cat, you must say “White rabbits”. If you were sleepy and acknowledged the cat first, and then remembered while cleaning your teeth that you had forgotten the white rabbit you could only say “Rabbits”. It certainly is quite a puzzle for you to ponder.

Another thing she seemed to really believe was if you accidentally crossed knives when putting them on the table, you must gently pull out the underneath knife. If you didn’t it was bad fortune. On a lighter note, if you dropped a knife a man would visit. If you dropped a fork a woman would knock on your door.

One strange thing she made us all do was to take our purses out when there was full moon and bow three times while turning your purse over three times. What the neighbors thought if they saw us I dread to think. One thing I recently found out was that Campbell Duke of Argyll would do something very similar with the coins in his sporran. He was very superstitious.

If it was a Friday we were told not to cut our nails as a sprite or goblin would collect them for some strange purpose I wonder what he did with them.

In the kitchen we had more things to watch for. If we spilled salt, a pinch had to toss over the left shoulder... We also had to pay homage to the kitchen fairy that took care of the oven and all good things cooking in it. Woe betide us if we didn't because the Yorkshire pudding would not rise and Sunday dinner would be ruined.

I could tell many more of her strange beliefs but it would take up too much of this memoir. Lying here feeling miserable I began to wonder how many of these strange customs originated. I could see that the crossed knives could come from dueling or fighting with daggers but the full moon and the money? Most perplexing was the custom with the first of the month and the white rabbit.

I thought about dropping a knife on the floor but then wondered if the man would be a goblin in disguise coming to collect my finger nail clippings. I don't think I will risk it, one can't be too careful.



POETRY

PIEDMONT PLUS

SENIOR GAMES & SILVER ARTS

THE GROCERY LIST

Sue Murray



Tuna

Bread

Milk

Coffee filters

Cat food

Tomato soup

Depends

MY LADY LAKE

Bill Gramley



My lady lake lives just outside my kitchen window's view,
And if you saw her shimmer there, I know you'd like her, too.

In winter's cold she wears a robe of warmth against the ice,
and when the geese land on her back, she treats them very nice.

Oh, yes, they splash her chilly flanks and all across her face.
She doesn't seem to mind her guests and welcomes them with grace.

In spring she dons a sweater green to match the nearby forest,
and after dark in formal gown conducts the croaker's chorus.

I love to hear those evening chirps that lull my soul to sleep.

My lady lake's most magic wand brings peace I want to keep.

In summertime, you'll see, she wears a nifty-looking bathing suit,
then lies upon her cotton towel and doesn't give a hoot.

An egret stands so calm and still not very far away
and hopes to catch a fish or bug before the end of day.

When autumn comes and shakes her many-colored skirts,
the leaves come down, her limbs are bare, my heart within me hurts.

A hawk swoops low at water's edge and snares a little frog.

"It would'na happened," the lady says, "If I had kept the fog."

SCARLET DANCE

Barbara Satow



Profoundly aware and on-guard
Magnificent Birds dance in our yard.
The Zorro-like mask the male wears
Round his face, from his eyes he stares.

His mate's cape of brown catches his eye
With her he knows he will always reside.
The scarlet feathers of his breast
Arise to the very tip of his crest.

Being a right plump little fellow
Many musical notes he can bellow.
Where there is one, there will always be two
Keeping tabs on what each one will do.

As they flit to—and—fro
From the bushes that grow
They dance to a song of an uneven beat
In a blazing sky of midsummer heat.

The sunflower seeds from our garden they devour
More fruits and insects with relish they sour.
In winter they perch on snow-covered brand
With family and friends they rest from the dance.

The feeders are filled so that we may peer
On their wondrous radiance, brilliant and clear.
From species of Sparrows they choose to stay
This Cardinal pair the Family Fringillidae.

THE SOUTHERN YANK

Bill Pfefferkorn

After thirty years of work a local lawyer

decides to take up an outdoor hobby.

He had never ridden a horse except the merry-go-round.

“Left foot in the stirrup. Swing right foot up and over

my thoroughbred, seize the reins and sit tall,”

she said. He marvels at the power of the steed as he struggles

to keep his heels down as his teacher instructed.

In the riding ring he follows his teacher over one,

two, three and then four-foot jumps.

Fred, the horse, struts toward each fence, then leaps

into the air, floating his smiling passenger above the earth.

The new world of beast and man escapes

the fenced ring onto the narrow trails, hills

and creeks, awakening the lawyer's body

to the outdoor life. Fred accepts

that an assertive personality has taken charge.

Six months later the newly born horseman, closely surveilled
by country and city riders mounts an English thoroughbred to ride
to hounds of the Blackmore Vale in a cold English rain.

For more than three hours, in the wake of many a faller,
the American interloper pounds

across soaked grass, leaps over high rock walls, flies
over hawthorn hedgerows, braces for impact

in the muddy wet fields and gallantly races on, spurred

by the surprise in the Master's voice as he shouts,
"The Yank's still up." At the end of the four-hour run, standing
in the saddle of his second mount, the Master gives

the Yank a wink and a smile--his congratulations

to the most successful hunter from the states
a Brit could remember.

BEAUTY IN MOTION

Betty Weatherman

Waving proudly for you and me.....

Furling, unfurling for all the world to see.

Then quiet, still and serene as it rests,

Hand over heart, standing tall

With honor and devotion,

Heads bow, and hearts vow

To do our part.....

To keep its beauty forever in motion.

EARLY FIFTIES

Peter Venable

“It hurts!” I tell mom point below my tummy
at my right side “It hurts!” she made me drink
that pink gunk didn’t help I throw up and bend over
mom drives us to that doctor I hate sticks needles in my butt
a lady wearing a dumb white hat wipes my forehead
“Take him now” doctor needle said dad comes home
he never comes home during the week frowning
lifts me in our Pontiac on mom’s lap window open

we zoom to some big building dad carries me inside
not on his shoulders “Room seven” a man says
not the Good Humor man who drives on our street
white room white lights mom keeps wiping tears
with white tissues smiles at me a man wearing
a rubber black snake shoves it on my chest
“It’s cold!” pokes down there “Ouch.”

“This afternoon.”

Mom flicks a tear away soon Good Humor men
me on a cart pushes me into a white room
white lights like flashlights everyone wears white masks
a lady paints my lower right side with yellow
stinks like dad’s after shave a man pours smelly stuff
into a mask and holds it over my nose and mouth
“Are you sleepy?” “No.” “Are you sleepy?”

I blink and mom and dad look down at me
“Son, they had to cut it out we’ll go home soon.”
Mom hands me Rinny my floppy raccoon
one black-button eye and black paws dad says
“Rinny needs you Peter.” He kisses my cheek
I shut my eyes squeeze Rinny under my arm.

IT'S ALL ABOUT TIME

By Annette Collins

It isn't always easy being free
This person without roots
This person "ME"
Alone
Where is home?
There is no home
No one is waiting anywhere
Time is to me a gift
Were it not so
I would be bitter
So, moving on
This poor but happy spirit
Travels with the wind, adrift
When time no more have I
To leave this shell
That I call "ME"
No regrets be
For treasured friends await
Together we will live eternally.
Measuring Time
Darkness to light
Shadows, tides
Tree girth
Seasons
Human height
Spiritual growth

THE CLINTONWOCKY

Robert Dixon(with apologies to Lewis Carroll)



Twas Monday, and the Clintonites
Did gyre and gimbal in the wabe:
All mimsy were the Democrats,
And News Anchors did outgrabe.

Beware the “Clintonwocky”, my son,
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
The teeth that lie, the crooked trail.

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought;
And Tues faced the uffish beast:

One Two! One Two! And through and through
His vorpal sword went snicker-snack,

And the “Clintonwocky” will never come back.

Callooh! Callay! Trump wins the day,

When all the Pundits said, no way!

(Never Dreamt of by Edna St. Vincent Millay)

‘Twas Wed and the sullish Dems

Did gyre and gimbal in the swamp

And rivers filled with tears,

Of frumious freeloaders and sobbing swamp dwellers.

ROOTS OF LIFE

Judith Ruff

People are a lot like trees

Every one of them are different

Some stand tall, while some are short

Some are thin, while some are thick

Some stand straight, while some are bending

Some have smooth bark, while others are rough

Swaying in the wind, or rigid like a rock

All have leaves that change color depending the season

But some lose them while others are kept

As in people, some lose their way while others find their path or roots

There may be knots on trees where injury has occurred or damaged by storms

Just like in people that have been hurt or mentally or physically abused

People and nature are always connected in many ways

People help cultivate the trees to grow, so they can give off oxygen for people to live

Let's try and help

Both to continue

To survive

THANKS' MOM

Carolyn Prince Cotton Gillis

Thanks' Mom, For Praying For Me,
When I Didn't Take The Time,
To Pray For Myself.
"Please GOD, Take Care Of My Prodigal Child,
Please Add A Touch of Your
Mercy And Grace
Send Her Home Alive And Safe!

Thanks Mom, For Helping Me To See The Tree,
In All Its Natural Beauty!
For Only GOD Can Make A Tree!!

Thanks' Mom, For Having Faith In Me,
When I Had No Faith In Myself.
She Would Say, "You Can Do Anything
IF You Would Only Try!!!!

Thanks' Mom For Getting Your Education,
Therefore, Conferring Me The Strength
And Determination To Toil
And Sacrifice For My Future,
Which I So Desperately Needed To Prepare For!!

Thanks Mom For Being My MOTHER
AND MY FRIEND!!!!



SHORT

STORY

PIEDMONT PLUS

SENIOR GAMES & SILVER ARTS

Flying without Wings

Margaret Miller



For many years I have wanted to tell this story but because it is so strange and inexplicable I have kept it locked away in my memory. I also thought no one would believe me but that is for you to decide.

I should begin by telling you about myself and where this occurred.

My name is Angela shortened by most people to Angie. Not my parents though, Angie was their choice and Angela I would always be to them both I also have an older brother John, shortened to JD. The D is for our name of Drummond. We lived in a small town in the Berkshires, a town where everyone knew each other so you watched what you said or did as it would get back faster than you could count to ten. Gossip was inevitable and what some people didn't know they made up.

My father owned the local hardware store which he inherited from his father. Through hard work and a little business acumen the store thrived. My mother volunteered at the library and helped raise money for the local hospital. As you can see we were a very average family living in a very unpretentious town

My brother and I were fairly good students, he leaning towards the sciences and math while I loved English and history.

At school on Mondays I always had a test on two or three chapters of the book we were currently studying. Wanting to check a few things I decided to see if the front porch was empty. I grabbed an apple from the dish in the kitchen, my book and headed out to the porch. Luckily no one was around. I settled down, munched the apple and opened up the book. After a few minutes I began to feel very strange. I felt as though my mind was leaving my body it was like nearly fainting or nearly falling asleep but more peculiar than either, nothing I had ever experienced before. I then realized I was not on the porch anymore, I was several feet above the railing and moving up and away. I was terrified and wondered if I was dying. I glanced down and realized I was now quite high up and moving down the street towards town. I tried blinking my eyes but they were wide open. What was happening? I looked down for a brief moment and saw Mr. Patton sweeping his driveway, a Sunday ritual, and then I looked the other way and saw Mrs. Blakely Tending her front

garden, she was on her knees pulling a few weeds and planting some small flowers. It was hard work for her as she would have a tough time getting up. Her cat was nearby and then I realized that no one, not even the cat looked up. They couldn't see me. A feeling of panic swept over me. I told myself to calm down easy to do under the circumstances, I surely must be dreaming. We turned down the street that led to the ball park and there was Eddie Felts in his driveway washing his father's car. He looked grumpy and then I remembered the boys met at the ballpark on Sunday afternoon. We kept going and then I saw Dennis Smith pushing his bike in the direction of his house, He was not happy, kicking every stone in his path. Then I saw his problem, a flat tire. No ball park for him either. We turned towards downtown and I saw the line for the matinee at one of our two movie theaters. There in line were two of my classmates trying to look very adult and sophisticated but not succeeding very well. We turned back towards the ball park where several boys were "practicing" showing off and flexing muscles that were not quite developed. The girls there were flirting and flicking their hair while eyeing the boys and letting out the odd giggle. I smiled to myself and then I remembered what was happening to me and I shivered in terror... Suddenly with no warning at all I was back on my porch, apple half eaten and book in hand. I sat for a moment. Had I been asleep? I was mystified and very disturbed. What could cause such a thing? Was I sick? Maybe I had a tumor in my brain like you often hear about, I then heard my mother calling me in for supper and wondered if I should tell them what happened. I could then imagine my brother calling me "bonkers" or "nut case". Better to keep quiet.

At school next day I was feeling a little tired after a restless night's sleep I sat as usual with my friends in the lunch room I was still very nervous and mystified. I was aware of the "ball Park" boys behind us and then noticed the girls sidling up to them. One of the girls was questioning Eddie about not showing up yesterday. He turned red and admitted he had to wash his dad's car, just then Dennis butted in grumpily saying he had a flat tire and not only that but would have to pay to get it fixed if he couldn't fix it himself.

My heart stood still. This could not be happening. I must have looked very strange because my friends, Delia and Annie leaned over and asked if I was OK. I had apparently turned deathly white. I made an excuse of some sort, went to the bathroom came back and tried to act normally but they were giving each other very concerned sideways glances. Thank goodness it was time to go back to class and I knew I had to pull myself together to do well in the test.

When I got home I was still very shaken and unnerved by what had occurred. I looked up the word “clairvoyant” and saw words like “insight” and “prophet”. I certainly didn’t feel like a prophet but “insight” held my attention. But it didn’t explain the flying or whatever it I could call it.

Although I kept thinking about it I realized there was nothing I could do without being hauled off to a doctor. So I tried to put it out of mind.. Not too easy to do. I just hoped it would not happen again. For a couple of weeks nothing did happen and I was feeling hopeful it was over. No such luck,

It was a Saturday, my father was working, my brother was at a soccer match and my mother was going to console a friend over the death of her husband. As she left she asked if I would shell the peas for dinner as it would save some time. I went out and sat at the big metal table and was joined by our big spoiled cat. I was happily shelling the peas when I felt that strange feeling coming to me. The next thing I knew I was sailing away down familiar streets watching the usual Saturday activities, shopping, chatting and choosing plants for gardens. I saw my father trying to persuade a customer to buy a new leaf blower. I flew on and was surprised to see the boy I considered to be my boyfriend hand in hand with Delia. They were heading for the drug store that still had a counter for soft drinks and ice cream. I was furious as I saw him buy her an ice-cream. He never did that for me. What a wretched thing to see. I was very upset... However I sailed on and watched as two kids were trying to take a puppy for a walk. It just kept sitting down. It didn’t like the harness and leash. We then turned down another street and there was Sgt. Wells sitting in his police car having a cup of coffee. Very suddenly he say up, dumped the coffee onto the road, put on the siren and lights and sped off towards the interstate. Probably off to sort out an accident we had quite a few since the road opened, mostly speeders and some drunk drivers. We turned away and I saw the swimming pool busy having a meet, a bit cool for that today. Once again with no warning I was suddenly back at the table, shelling the peas and looking at the cat who hadn’t even flicked a whisker. I sat back and wondered if this would ever end. I felt like an alien or something. What else could it be? I remembered people on television talking about “out of body” experiences. But why me?

Next morning my father was reading his newspaper and called to my mother that we had a hero in town. Sgt Wells was being hailed as a hero for getting a mother and child out of a car up on the highway just before it burst into flames. That was where Sgt Wells was doing just after he sped off from Town yesterday

Monday came along and as I walked through to my locker I saw Colin and Delia talking. I breezed by and asked very pointedly if they had enjoyed their day out, and did Delia get the chocolate ice cream stain out of her blouse? They were surprised and a little bashful as I wondered out loud what flavor ice-cream Colin had chosen. They began muttering about not seeing me there but I was already into the classroom. Nevertheless I was still miffed.

Life went on and my brother then took the spotlight by announcing he was not going to college but was going to enlist in the Air Force and hopefully become a pilot. This brought a slight smile to my lips when I thought of my “flying” experiences. The discussion of his choice went on for some time but he was determined to make his own future and things quieted down when everyone realized that was what was going to happen He was graduating at the end of this year.

Things quieted down for me and I was beginning to think about my choice of colleges. I also joined the field hockey team at school and really enjoyed it. I had been feeling good and had not been flying for a long time. Was it over? Not quite.

I had one more sessions the summer before I was getting ready for college. I was walking down town to get some more shin guards when I stopped to look at the roses in our lovely little park. I sat on one of the benches and thought about leaving our little town. I was looking over at the school where I had spent a lot of happy years. Suddenly I felt that odd feeling again. I was off and away, not seeing anything unusual but able to see the town from above that made me realize I would miss it when I left. I then saw something that really did surprised me. There was my brother, home on his first leave, with his arm firmly around a girl that I did not know. They stopped under a tree and he kissed her very fondly. He then went on one knee and produced a ring. Getting engaged? He was far too young and was not even in the Air force yet but he put the ring on her finger and once again gave her a long kiss. Wow! I realized that I knew before anyone else probably by a few years so my flying this day was somewhat off a bonus. Suddenly I was back on the bench and wondered if this time it really happened. I would have to wait and see. This time there was no explanation certainly no talk about getting engaged or even dating. Happily he did get engaged to the girl in the park three years later. More unexplainable happenings.

I went to college the following fall and settled in fairly easily. I joined up to play field hockey and was thrilled to be picked for the second team. I had only one brief fly over at the time, seeing kids

smoking pot in the woods at the park near my dorm and saw one of my instructors getting very cozy with the soccer coach. Nothing very exciting this time.

One Saturday we were practicing at the hockey field when a very hard fast ball hit on the side of my head. I was knocked out. After being checked out at the clinic I was hustled off to the dorm with one of my team mates and told to take it easy, not to go to sleep. I sat in the chair and was trying to look at a magazine. My care giver was fussing a bit and was going to make coffee for us both. She went to get some milk and while she was gone the feeling came over me again, this time however, I didn't go flying anywhere but had flashbacks to the past encounters. This time the people, cats and dogs all looked up at me, some waved and then they all began to glide away quietly and slowly into what looked a bit like the northern lights... The picture was like seeing underwater and then suddenly it was gone. My coffee arrived and I was able to contemplate what had happened, I knew somehow this was the end of my flying and was on the whole quite glad and yet a little nostalgic. Although I was very scared when it first happened, I knew I would miss it especially flying over my home town. I then thought about my brother who was about to get his wings in about a week and I smiled as I thought how I had my wings long before him.

I look at my children and wonder and hope that nothing that happened to me will be passed on to them. How would they handle it? Would they tell me if they experienced it? Probably not, because, like me, they would most likely have the same secret fears of not being believed.

I don't know if you believe this tale and I have no way of proving that it happened but it did and I am glad to have told the story and wonder if anyone else has ever experienced flying without wings.

OH, THOSE EYES

Betty Weatherman



For years I have been taking a “Sentimental Journey” in the night sky with my guy, and now I’m here to tell you and the whole world why. All I can say is, “Oh, those eye!”

Sometimes in the evening when I wish upon a star, it’s as though you are so near--and yet so far. I will never stop wondering just which star you are. And when to my delight the night sky ignites with all it’s tiny little twinkling lights, it brings back memories of you. From the corners of my mind, etched in time, it’s as though each is that special wink from your “big brown eyes” and, of course, it still leaves me with that feeling that always sent me reeling so many years ago.

Oh, how I would love to linger just a while longer to ponder all these endearing thoughts. But it is now growing very late. I must go in, alone, and very quietly, so as not to break the spell of this special time with you. I reach out and ever so softly close the door. It’s in this silent space, again I know--I love you now, even more. Oh, that I could reach out and touch to tell you so, as before. But for now I can, I will, I must be content with your “winks” in the sky above from now to eternity.

Oh, by the way you know I’ve never been bold. But now I want to propose.....

Let’s make a date, tomorrow night at eight--please don’t be late cause I can hardly wait. I’ll be standing by the garden gate. Just you and me under a starry night sky as we have our last dance, cheek to cheek.

Now goodnight my love, see you tomorrow night at eight. With your eyes still a’ winking at me.

DID JESUS LIKE IT HERE?

Bill Gramley



Recently I was driving along and looking at the wind blow the last leaves off the autumn trees. I thought it was especially beautiful with a fading blue sky and scudding clouds fleeing in the cold and clinging to their colorful coats. And then for some reason, I wondered if Jesus liked it here, that is, when he was in this world. I mean I like it here most of the time, but did he? It's the only world I've ever known, so I have nothing to compare it with.

Jesus came from another realm called heaven, but I'm not sure he remembered too much about it as he was growing up. I don't know. Maybe he did sense the glory or knew what it was like, but then I realized he was here and he had to deal with what was at hand. He had wonderful parents. They were poor, but they nurtured him and loved him right along. They trusted him when they went to the big city for Passover and they missed him when they realized he had stayed behind, apparently to discuss the Scriptures and maybe begin to suspect he would be that special Messiah. I don't know.

He lived in a dusty little village with fishermen and a baker and maybe a merchant or two. He worked hard with his hands. Some scholars think he might have been a farmer, but the tradition says he was a carpenter like his father. Life was hard, food was simple: bread, fish, grapes and other fruits, olives, local plants and herbs, maybe a goat or a sheep on very special occasions. It was hot, the soil was rough, firewood and charcoal were scarce and so was oil for their little clay lamps. He had meager clothes and an all-purpose cloak like everyone else. That was all he knew and I have to believe he liked it and accepted his home and his heritage and the sweat of his brow.

But then I remembered that he certainly was intelligent and very observant. He listened to stories, oral traditions, and what the rabbis taught and believed. He certainly had a good

imagination. He had a way of telling parables later in life, vivid and graphic tales of sowers and seed, wedding feasts, fishing nets, treasures buried in a field, of vines and the vineyard, of plowing, and he saw the lilies of the field and how glorious they were and told us how deeply God knows us in every detail and cares for each of us--even more than the birds of the air. And he spoke of landlords and workers and talents we are given, and rich men who ignored beggars at their door, and of a prodigal son and a sheep and a coin that got lost. He watched people. He liked people and he hung around with them when he started walking the countryside. He loved a good meal. He made friends, especially those who seemed to be forgotten by the religious upper class. He had compassion on them, even fed several thousand with a couple fish and some bread, but shied away from letting them crown him as some kind of king. He watched the religious leaders go through their rituals and utter long-winded prayers as they sought adulation in the market-place. One Pharisee, he said, even stood in the temple and bragged about how generous and righteous he was compared to some lousy publican outside. He explained what true religion really is compared to the sham that the Pharisees promoted. I mean he called them white-washed tombs--looking good on the outside--but full of dead men's bones inside! I mean he really smacked them!

He said that we have to make a radical decision about who he is and get on board or get left behind. That sort of challenge has always made me quiver, at least when I think about it. Am I going to be left outside the banquet hall when the bridegroom comes, I mean out in the dark where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth? Oh boy. I wonder. I don't know. What should I do? Really.

I think he was surprised at how much resistance he met. The scribes and Pharisees accused him of being a devil--a Beelzebul--and they hated him for healing a demon-possessed man on the Sabbath, and then they said he was committing blasphemy when he healed a blind

and deaf man and forgave him of his sin--because they said no one but God could do such a thing!

He was disgusted with the way some of them wanted more pay than they were promised after working in a vineyard all day because the workers who came late and worked so little got the same payment! And that's when he said something that has always stuck with me. Do you know what he said? He said, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" That word "begrudge." Wow! These fellows were trying to limit God's inclusive and all-embracing love! Imagine that!

He saw a poor widow make an unbelievable offering. He was sad when a wealthy young man walked away because he couldn't get rid of his possessions. And several times he said we simply have to get rid of anything that gets between us and our devotion to God! No rivals. No idols. No earthly treasures. No mammon. No lust. No hatred.

So he lived fully into this world. Deeply. He himself had faith like a tiny mustard seed. I think he really liked it here. He went to a wedding or so and liked to relax with Mary and Martha and Lazarus in their home over in Bethany, or go apart to pray and know that his Abba was looking after him. He loved the little children and blessed them and that centurion and that Syrophenician woman and that Samaritan woman and that sick woman who touched the hem of his garment and the one out of ten lepers he healed who came back to say, "Thank you!" Oh my!

He answered lots of tough questions. I think he got tired of those. But I don't think he liked leaving or being misunderstood or being seen as a threat to the powerful and the self-righteous who could not accept the all-embracing love of God for outsiders and the unworthy: you know, tax collectors in cahoots with Rome, and winebibbers, and prostitutes, and that guy named Legion with all his demons, isolated and left by the tombs. He had to be sad about being betrayed, then put on trial, then mocked, and rejected by the crowd who turned on him just like

that, and then taken to a cross to die like a criminal, so worn down that another guy had to carry his cross. They ganged up on him, got him one night in a garden. And yet he liked it here because it was his world to redeem. He knew his mission and fulfilled it and that had to be extremely satisfying. But it was so costly, so painful, so sad. His friends wept when he died because they loved him and knew he loved them so much. I don't know. I mean I don't know why it had to be that way. It's hard to explain.

He liked it when he was here for just those few years--like a split second--and then went to prepare a place for us in another realm. That's what he said anyway. I got to believe him.

I said I like to look around as I'm driving along, and I do. Sometimes I wonder how this place got here and why. Some people say that fellow made the whole thing, the entire cosmos, a long, long, long time ago. I mean in the beginning with God. I don't know. I got to think about that one. And I will because it could very well be true, and that would be something beyond amazing. In fact, it's enough to make you put the brakes on and get out of your car and watch that evening sun go down and think about it for a while. Really.

THE APPLE THAT SAVED BEA'S LIFE

By Annette Collins

Into the woods walked Patty and Bea

With a fine picnic lunch and mild tea.

Four deviled eggs, some bread and ham

Three apples, crackers, cheese and jam.

Behind the woods several fields lay

Bathed in the bright warm sun today

Spring is lovely time of year

The song of the birds a joy to hear

After they ate, Patty got up and ran

Chasing a butterfly, blue, gray and tan

One lonely apple was all that was left

Tucked in a pocket of Bea's pretty dress.

A great mama bear from the brush appeared

Her two little cubs tumbled playfully near

Bea climbed a tree, what else could she do?

Then upon the same branch sat the tiny cubs, two.

Two tiny cubs sat up in a tree

Up in the tree, two wee bears and Bea

Patty returned and saw Bea in the tree

With two tiny cubs, Oh my, oh me!

She spread the cloth quickly, upon it she lay

The fine picnic lunch Grandma made them today.

One apple was missing.

Bea had tucked it into the pocket of der dress.

“Toss the apple” Patty called. The cubs will follow.

“Humph... humph... Harumph” mother called angrily.

The cubs scrambled down as fast as they could

Chasing the apple Bea tossed towards the woods

Bea climbed down from the tree and ran far way

While the bears ate their fine picnic lunch today.

Guess What?

No berries, no pie! But grandma baked gingerbread cake

And they had a good story to tell her.

1945

Bill Pfefferkorn

It was 1945. The tobacco union had won the election at Reynolds. Our next door neighbor, Helen's husband, Captain Bonin, was still in the Pacific. People on the buses were talking a lot about how long the war was going to last. My daddy was home from Washington. He took us all to church. We missed jumping into the bid bed and reading the funny papers.

We were going to hear the new preacher from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We sat on the second row on the left side of the bi sanctuary. Mother went in first in her blue dress followed by my sister, then my brother with a coat and tie, and me with a coast and no tie next to my daddy on the aisle. I like the hymns which I could read and sing real high and better than my brother and sister. Daddy used a marker for the paces in the hymnal which we would read or sing. Mother scrambled around looking for the page with my brother and sister when it was time to stand up and sing.

During the prayer we children just bowed our heads and looked around at all the praying people. Mother closed her eyes and Daddy leaned way forward and put his head won onto the top of his fist right hand. The blood vessels in his head stuck out like when he did exercises in the morning beside his bed. Nobody else in the church got all down like that, but their heads were bowed and so they didn't see him like that.

The preacher talked too fast for me. He was talking different than anybody I had ever heard. Daddy introduced me to a man from Indiana one day who also talked funny. He squeezed my hand too hard, but he didn't talk like the funny looking little man who was preaching away. The new preacher looked like a little bird on our window feeder that couldn't sit still---jumping around look-in around snappy like. He had big ears for a little man and kept moving his head and looking from side to side at the congregation. I heard him say that God was no foo and that Jesus was plenty smart about things. My daddy liked it a lot. Daddy said we finally had a preacher with a brain.

After the service, we got in our Plymouth and drove real fast to get in line at the YWCA lunch. It was not as expensive as other places to east so Daddy liked it best. He was a determined driver when he pulled out of a parking place. He would edge out and keep going when the other

cars would hesitate to compete with his strategy of getting out first and on the road. We had chicken with rice and gravy and plenty of turnips and greens. We ate greens at home a lot because they grew most of the year and were cheap. We raised our own chickens, but Daddy said that because the war about over we could out of the chicken business.

When we got home Daddy read the paper and started cussing again. He sounded like Mr. Carrington when he visited Helen next door and told her about all the trouble he was having in the tobacco factories. The rest of the family had gone to the side porch. I liked to listen to Daddy comment on the news. He was like Fulton Lewis, Jr. who was on the radio every night arguing like my daddy about how the Communists in Russia would take all the private property.

“Those folks tried to recruit me several years ago after I won the North Carolina Chess Championship. I guess they thought I was part Russian. I told them I would rather build a business and make my own money. “

The next day the radio played serious music all day long. The President had died of a stroke in Georgia. Daddy had been worried that the President was being fooled by the Russians. Now he seemed real upset by his death. “Roosevelt was beginning to see the light about Stalin. I think the Communists had him poisoned. The Russian woman who was painting his portrait must have given him a type of poison when she was in his place in Georgia. “I loved to listen to my daddy. He knew all about stuff that no other daddy in the neighborhood could talk about.

I went over to Helen’s house next door. “We went to church. We heard the new preacher, the president died, and Russians are coming, “I blurted out. The children started laughing and Helen said, “You are a sight. When did you folks start going to church?”

“My daddy likes the preacher from Pittsburgh because he makes a lot of sense. He doesn’t beat around the bush and wail and moan like the others. I’ll bet Captain Bonin will be coming back pretty soon.”

Helen answered. “I don’t believe he’ll ever come back. I told him he didn’t have to go because of his age and having two children, but he said it was his duty. What did duty eve do for anybody except a lot of heartache and death? Don’t you ever leave those you love for duty, you hear! My husband’s family is in the gas business, but I don’t get any help from them. They won’t even speak to me anymore.”

“But won’t the Captain straighten everything out, Helen?” I offered.

“I’m afraid the war has changed him, Bill. His letters don’t come very often and he only talks about the children. Never about me.”

My brother and I had seen different cars in front of Helen’s house for the past year. We even saw a big black Cadillac parked in front when we got up early to carry the paper route.

A few months later, a sheriff came to our front door and handed a big piece of paper to my mother. She said my brother and I had to go to court in the case of Bonin versus Bonin and give testimony. My daddy got upset about the subpoena, but my brother and I thought it might be fun to tell everybody about all the things we saw in the neighborhood during the war. But the case got settled before we could tell our war stories. Captain Bonin got custody of the children and Helen married Mr. Carrington.

THE PARCHMENT

Mitchell B. Doub

After scratching out the earthen hole with his bare hands, Jacob sat back onto the ancient log and stared into the tiny crater. The evergreen canopy above him was still, as still as he'd ever seen it. In fact, the only discernible movement in the forest came from the rattling of the parchment he held between his now trembling fingers.

The paper held 15 words: each benign in its own right. But it was their collective configuration that had driven Jacob deep into the forest. He tried to drop the oaken-colored sheet into the waiting grave but his grasp became a death-grip.

His wife had at first wept, and then cursed him for what he planned to do. "You will destroy our future!" she had screamed.

"Better to destroy our futures than to damn our souls to hell," he had replied.

The grave beamed again, only to remain unfilled. The pitiful shell of a man shed a tear and looked up to the single ray of light that had made its way through the thick, leafy cover.

"Help me God..."

Earlier that day, Jacob sat in the black leather chair and rubbed his palm sweat onto his dress-pants. His nervousness was due more to Molly, his impatient wife, who waited at home than to any curiosity he held for what might be in the business envelope that lay on the lawyer's desk. His wife's main thought had been for Jacob to get the "secret" as quickly as possible and come straight home. The secret to family wealth they'd been told. Didn't she care that his only brother had just died from a painful bout with cancer? Well, HE cared, and he was at least going to show a bit of compassion before he reached across the antique table and took possession of what his brother had called 'the secret to his success.'

There it lay, a simple business envelope with Jacob's name neatly typed on the front. Boy, wait until Molly gets a load of this. With all his wealth, this was all Jacob's brother was leaving his only sibling. He picked up the feather-light envelope. Unless it contained a single million-dollar bill, Molly was not going to be happy.

The lawyer broke the silence.

"As I stated on the phone, Mr. Anson requested that you be alone at the distribution of property."

"Property?" Jacob mumbled to himself. "What property?"

"Mr. Anson also asked that I instruct you to leave this building and go to a private place before you open the envelope. He said that the contents of the envelope had been passed down in your family for over seven generations and that wealth had always followed".

Only one family member could receive it at a time. Now it was Jacob's turn; there weren't many of his family left to contest.

"I believe one of your ancestors acquired it while in southwestern England many years ago. While visiting the city of Bath, I am told." He rose to go. "Have a good day, sir."

Jacob left the building and sat silently in his car. He ran his finger across the top of the envelope and then pried open the glued flap. He pulled out a single piece of ancient parchment, which contained what appeared to be a strange looking type of poetry.

"OK, I'm more than a bit surprised."

Jacob slowly read the hand-written verse:

For riches untold:

Seek those in whose bequest you reside.

Now lay them down early.

Jacob read the verse several times before his breathing halted and his heart began to pound. He knew this feeling, he had felt it twice before... once as a boy when he had been told that his grand-parents had died in a boating accident... and then again several years ago when the policeman had called to inform him that there had been a fire at his parents' house and that no one had made it out alive... Jacob froze. "Oh no. God no."

Jacob slowly walked up his sidewalk and entered the modest home that he and Molly had rented for most of their seven-year marriage. He quietly closed the front door and just stood still as he stared at the floor. Molly came out of the bathroom and jumped with fright as she realized that she wasn't alone.

"Ah! You scared me! Why didn't you let somebody know you were here?" There was no reply. "Jacob, I'm talking to you. Jacob!"

Her husband continued to stare at the floor but began to walk across the room and slowly lowered himself onto the second-hand sofa. He laid his arms across his knees and rested his head on his forearms.

"What is wrong with you? What happened? Why aren't you telling me what happened?" Jacob sat in silence until Molly loudly clapped her hands. "Jacob! Snap out of it! What's wrong!? What did we get?"

Jacob sat up only enough to retrieve the parchment from his back pocket and hand it to Molly. He then returned his head to its resting place. Molly took the paper and looked at her defeated husband with a dumbfounded stare. She unrolled the parchment and read the simple verse. She cast the same puzzled stare at Jacob and read the paper again.

"What the heck is this?"

Jacob kept his head down and mumbled his reply. "It's my inheritance...our inheritance." "What!?" The now enraged woman screamed. "Are you crazy!? Is this some kind of sick joke?"

Jacob finally sat upright. "You got part of it right, it's sick, that's for sure."

Molly sat down next to him. "What do you mean this is our inheritance? It's just an old piece of paper with some nonsense scribbled on it. Where's the money? The property? Your brother was rich!"

"I don't know. I'm just as confused as you are. I showed up as instructed and this lawyer lays an envelope on the table and tells me this is everything my brother is leaving me and that I'm supposed to go out to my car to read it."

"There's no money?"

"I guess not."

"But your brother told you before he died that what he was leaving you would make you rich." She read the parchment again. "This doesn't even make any sense. What does this mean? 'Lay them down early.' How do we become rich by putting somebody to bed?"

Jacob's eyes began to turn pink. "That's not what it means..."

"And what's this, 'Seek those in whose bequest you reside.' It doesn't make any sense."

"Trust me, you don't want to know."

"Bequest. What's that?" Molly threw the paper to the floor. "I can't believe you screwed up an inheritance. All you had to do was sit there and take what is rightfully yours. And you couldn't even do that. You leave with a stupid piece of paper and don't even protest? What happened to all the money? You told me that your brother inherited everything that your parents and grandparents had. Where did it all go?"

"I don't know!" Jacob screamed as he leapt to his feet. "How am I supposed to know? I hadn't seen my brother for over ten years before he died. I don't know what he did with it all. That paper is all that's left."

"But what does it mean?"

"I told you, you don't want to know."

"Tell me!"

Jacob turned to Molly and she took a step back as she saw the rage on his face. "It means that my brother killed them all! He murdered my grandparents and then stood there and watched as my parents were burned alive!"

"What?"

Jacob retrieved the parchment and thrust it into Molly's face. "Read it again! Slowly."

This was one of the first times in their relationship that Jacob had taken control. In a strange way, he sort of liked it. Molly took the paper as instructed and scanned the verse. "'For riches untold.'" Molly looked up. "Okay, I've got that part. 'Seek those in whose bequest you reside?'" She looked at Jacob as if to ask for an explanation.

Her husband complied. "Find out who has named you in their will."

Suddenly the light bulb came on and Molly began to comprehend. She finished the verse. "Now lay them down early." She looked at Jacob squarely in the eye. "Surely not."

Jacob returned the stare and did not flinch. Molly raised her hand and covered her mouth. "My God."

"That was my reaction exactly."

"He killed them all for their money?"

"That's the only thing I can figure out."

They both sat on the couch and stared at the blank, white wall for what seemed an eternity. Molly was the first to break the silence. "What do we do now?"

"The first thing I'm going to do is burn this." He reached out to grab the parchment but Molly pulled it away.

"We can't destroy this! It's evidence. What if someone were to blame you for your parents' deaths? This is proof that your brother did it. No. No way do we burn this. In fact, I'll keep it. You'd lose it or something."

It was a week later, and Molly couldn't wait for Jacob to leave for work. She hurried him out the door and ran back to the bedroom to begin what had become her daily ritual. She had hidden the parchment in her underwear drawer and as she had done each of the last seven days, she carefully removed the ancient paper from its resting place. She unrolled the parchment, sat on the bed, and as she had done over a thousand times, she began to read the verse. She read it slowly, savoring every word. The perfection of the three hand-written lines mesmerized the young wife. She sat in the seclusion of the bedroom all day and did nothing but read the parchment. Not even hunger could break the spell of the wonderful page. She read it again, and again, and again. Her obsession was broken nine hours later with the slamming of the car door.

"Oh come on, give me a break. He's back again. Why can't he give me a minute to myself?" Molly quickly rolled the parchment and walked over to the drawer. It took all of her strength to let go of the paper, but finally she was able to put it back in its hiding place. She dreaded the next twelve hours, for she knew she would have to be without the parchment and would have only Jacob's mindless ramblings to keep her company.

As was the custom, Jacob brought home pizza on Friday night and he placed the food on the table. Molly entered the room, unchanged from when he had left her that morning, and plopped down at the kitchen table. She reached into the box, grabbed a slice of the plain, cheese pizza and began to eat.

"Don't you want something to drink with that?"

Molly blankly stared out the back window. "Sure."

Jacob poured two glasses of iced tea and set them on the table. Molly had started in on her second piece. Jacob sat down.

“Molly, what’s wrong?” His wife didn’t speak, so Jacob tried again. “You’re not acting like yourself. Is something the matter?”

“I’m just tired I guess.” She snapped back. “All I do all day is slave around this house. I don’t even have time to take a shower!”

Jacob glanced around the house. It was in its usual state of dishevelment. Nothing had been cleaned, no clutter had been picked up, no dishes had been washed. Molly looked up and saw her husband’s wandering eyes.

“Don’t start with me.” The half-chewed pizza crumbs flew from her mouth. “You’re always so critical. Maybe if you’d get a job worth anything we could afford to have a decent house!”

Jacob sat in shock as his sweetheart turned shrew, crammed the remaining crust in her mouth, and washed it down with three gulps of tea. She pushed her chair away from the table and turned for the bedroom. “And don’t come trying to touch me tonight, those stupid ‘Friday Love Nights’ are off!” Molly stomped into the bedroom, slammed the door, and turned the lock.

Jacob sat in stunned silence for what seemed an eternity until the loud scratching at the back door broke his oblivion. He recognized the hunger calls of Arnie, the couple’s pet dog, and went outside to fill his food and water bowls. After placing the water bowl, Jacob stood up and could see in the half-open shades of the back bedroom window. Molly was opening one of her drawers and slowly removing a piece of rolled-up paper. She sat on the bed and began to read the single page. Within moments the scowl on her face lifted and was replaced by contentment. She held the page to her heart, closed her eyes, and laughed. She then read the page once again.

Jacob froze. He recognized the paper. It was the parchment. Then, to his further amazement, Molly kissed the paper several times and stood to return it to the drawer. Jacob stepped aside so as to avoid being seen and quietly re-entered the house. He heard the bathroom door close and then the familiar sound of the shower nozzle come to life. In the earlier days of their marriage he would have sneaked in and joined his wife for a playful shower, but now, he knew better. His marital reminiscing was broken by the sound of the telephone, which hung on the wall to his left.

“Hello?”

“Yes, Mrs. Anson please.”

“Uh, she’s busy right now. This is her husband, may I take a message?”

“Surely. Please tell her that Mary from Long-way Life Insurance Company called. I have the answers to her questions. Do you have a pen?”

Jacob opened the ‘junk’ drawer and retrieved a pen and a scrap of paper. “Yes, Ma’am, go ahead.”

“Mrs. Anson wanted to know how much she could increase the life insurance levels on the two of you without having to submit a new application. Please tell her that that amount would be \$250,000.00.”

Jacob stood silent and struggled to not drop the phone.

“Hello, Mr. Anson. Did you get that?”

“Uh, yes. \$250,000.00. I’ll tell her.”

“Thank you sir. Have a good evening.”

Jacob returned the receiver without a reply. His jaw began to slowly drop as he walked from the kitchen, through the den and into the bedroom. He pulled open Molly’s underwear drawer and produced the parchment. He opened the paper and read the familiar verse. Then he read it again. He walked back into the den and read it several more times. He could feel a strange, yet intriguing tingle rise up his spine.

“What are you doing!?”

His towel-clad wife who was exiting the bathroom broke Jacob’s serendipity. She lunged for the parchment. “Give me that!”

Jacob pulled away.

“I said give me that!”

Jacob pushed her back and turned for the door. “I don’t know what kind of weird hold this thing has on you but I’m getting rid of it!”

“NO!”

Molly lunged again at Jacob and began flailing at his face and body in an attempt to grab the paper. She had the wild look of a desperate animal. Jacob pushed her back and sent her sprawling to the floor. He raced out the door, started the car, and quickly backed out of the driveway. Molly burst through the doorway and clutched her towel to her chest as she frantically raced across the tiny front yard.

“No! You’ll ruin our future!!”

Jacob looked in his rear-view mirror at his sobbing wife. He shifted to second gear and looked back at the road. “Better to ruin our future than to damn our souls to hell.”

Jacob drove to the edge of a small clearing and parked the car. He stomped through the tall grass, oblivious to the beggar-lice and other weed pods that found his trousers. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the paper. As he neared the stand of ancient evergreens, he could feel the seductive call of the parchment. He struggled to remember why he had such a sense of urgency and shook his head to focus on the task at hand. He knew he had to get rid of the terrible page and broke into an all-out run as he searched for an appropriate burying place. The tingle in his spine increased as he proceeded into the ancient forest.

Finally, next to a fallen evergreen giant, Jacob collapsed to his knees and began to dig.

THE PROSPECTOR

Kimberley Grenier

I, Henry Owen Sherman, was born September 1st, 1882 in Beattyville, Kentucky. At the age of 15, I felt that I had as good an understanding of life as anyone. Since that day, I have changed my views often.

It was on a clear and sunny day, late in May of 1897 that I stumbled, headlong, onto a path that would lead me to see all things differently. As was my routine, I was walking through the woods not more than five miles from my family's humble farm. Being done with chores and school for the day, I felt free to indulge my wanderlust.

Customarily, I kept my eyes to the ground looking for treasures in the form of interesting rocks or broken arrowheads. On this particular day I had found a shard of pottery to my liking and stored it in the pocket of my trousers until a more suitable location be found. Eventually my roaming brought me to my favorite climbing tree, an old and hideous geezer with long, inviting branches. Before beginning my climb, I determined to hide my fragile treasure in a hollow, under an exposed root at the base of the tree. Finding the hole to be obstructed, I used a stick to excavate the intruder. To my surprise I came up with a small, shiny machine. It looked to be a clock of some sort, and I felt a flutter of excitement to find it working. It had several dials and, unfortunately, appeared to be faulty, for it was running backward. In any case, a treasure it was and, all thoughts of climbing gone, I loped home with my prize. As my parents' only son and oldest child, I managed a private bedroom, small, but protected from the consuming eyes of my sisters. In this haven, I spent the better part of the evening examining my new trinket and unraveling more mysteries than answers. One thing I did grasp, with no little jolt of pride, was

that the malfunction I originally attributed to the clock was not a mistake at all, but by design, the clock was counting down to a predetermined moment.

That evening I turned my lamp down to the lowest flame and stayed awake late, watching the dials of the clock slowly approach zero. To my mock relief, nothing happened, except that the disappointing contraption seemed to reset itself for one week hence. With that mystery solved, I carefully placed the object in the back of my sock drawer and proceeded to wipe it from my mind.

The following week found me with more odious chores, tedious school and a larger propensity to wander than ever. My travels took me well past my favorite climbing tree, but one day by chance, my eyes fell on a certain exposed root and reminded me of the clock. I determined to have another look at it the minute I returned home. I found the object much as I left it, ticking still in anticipation of a future event later that evening. I wondered if something would have happened had I not removed it from its home. With no better guess than that, I determined to return it to its habitat before the due moment and wait patiently for I knew not what.

I retired early that evening hoping my parents and sisters would follow suit and waited patiently until the house and its contents lay quiet. I slipped out the window, as I had done on several previous occasions when the moon beckoned, and was soon on my way into the forest. It was dark and, as much as I hate to admit it, my steps faltered several times upon hearing startled noises in the brush. My valiance, however, was rewarded as I reached my destination. Little did I know the great wonders that I would see quite soon.

As it happened, the moment the dial reached zero, an eerie light shown from the clock, the ground vibrated and a man, to my disbelieving eyes, materialize from the light. I would have run had my legs not turned to water. The mere act of trying to walk took me no more than a few

steps to the side. Even my speech seemed to forget its training for I heard myself gibbering incomprehensibly.

Eventually, the man looked up at me from his prostrate position, a look of which began to quiet my nervous reactions. I recognized him at once as a prospector who disappears for months up in the hills and only returns occasionally for supplies. He looked to be out of breath and in some need of nourishment.

In the end, my curiosity overcame my fear, and I responded to his begging eyes with an offer of assistance. With some effort I helped him to sit, not enjoying the odor that the close proximity brought me. Prospectors aren't known for bathing often and apparently this fellow was no exception. I moved a few feet away and waited for him to speak. After taking some long minutes, breathing deeply (and with some relish), he looked back at me.

“Was it you that moved the timing machine last week?”

Being caught, there was no better course of action than to be honest, so I simply replied, “yes.”

“It's well that you decided to return it. I would no' ha' lasted much longer.”

“Where were you?” I asked, thrilled to have an opening.

He nodded, slowly rose to his feet, brushed off his pants, and said, “give me some time lad and I'll tell you all. Would ye walk with me into town and help me get some vittles?”

I looked at the sky and realized we would reach town around daybreak, and briefly looked towards my house hoping my parents would assume, unlikely as it was, that I was out of the house before they awoke. By this time the old man had started down the trail towards town and there was nothing for it but to follow him if I were to get my answers.

“What's your age boy and your name?” he asked as he walked.

“I'm Henry Sherman and 15 at my last birthday,” I replied.

He nodded. "I know the Sherman's. Farmers ain't they?"

"One and all," I replied.

"You want to be a farmer too I s'pose," said he.

I shrugged. "Don't know, never gave it much thought I guess. I reckon my parents expect it though. You trying to get out of telling me where ya come from?"

He smiled, "Ye be a quick one all right. I'm gonna tell ye a story boy, the way 'twas told me when I was but a few years older than ye are now."

He proceeded to tell me a most amazing story, which I chose, time and anon, to chalk up to an old man's imaginings. Then, as I remembered his unusual appearance under the old tree, I scratched my head and wondered if my eyes were suspect as well. It wouldn't be long before he would present me with unquestionable proof and I would lose the indulgence of disbelief, but until then, I wondered.

The story goes this way. Years ago, 200 or so, a creature from another corner of the universe was traveling in a vessel through the heavens, among our neighboring stars. Lost and alone he perceived the population on Earth and anchored his craft above the clouds. From time to time he would leave his refuge and wander on our world, replenishing his supplies with what he could find.

After several years he found a lone trapper whose partner had been killed. Our alien friend chanced an introduction, and eventually worked out some limited communication. Claude, the trapper, being agreeable, spent much time over the next few years learning everything his guest would teach. Eventually, the creature passed into the next realm, leaving Claude alone in the world with the knowledge and ability to visit the strange ship in the heavens.

Claude spent many years using the vessel as his home, coming to the Earth for supplies and visiting with the natives. As the years passed and he felt drawn to the inevitable end that age

takes us all, he determined to find an apprentice to teach the unique secrets of the ship in the sky. He chose an intrepid Indian maiden and taught her all that he knew. Several years passed, as did Claude. Since that time, and including Claude, there have been 11 guardians of the sky ship, Mike, the old prospector, being 11th.

As day broke, I found myself walking in step with the old fellow, pondering the fantastic story he told me. We spoke lightly of events that had passed, he being deprived of news, and did not re-enter the subject until several hours later when we departed town in a horse-drawn buckboard laden with supplies.

As we reached the old tree, he extended the invitation to visit his home, assuring me of a painless trip and a guaranteed return. With some trepidation I agreed and, leaving the horse to graze in a nearby glade, we embarked on this most unusual journey. The trip was quite short; indeed it was over before I had fully decided to go. Upon placing my hand, with Mike's, on a silver gadget he carried, we were instantly transported to his ship, along with a great load of boxed goods.

My first impressions were not favorable, but he explained the arduous odor and uncomfortable heat would dissipate as soon as he was able to connect a barrel of water to a contraption that creates air and fuel from the liquid. I felt chagrined as I realized that it was my interference with his clock that had prevented him from getting necessary supplies last week. Fortunately my new friend was forgiving and chose not to belabor the point.

After storing the other goods, Mike gave me a tour of his amazing quarters. The walls were smooth, like a knife's blade or an ax-head. In the back, if front and back have meaning in the heavens, was a room dedicated to a full garden, the fruit a bit peeked due to lack of moisture. Again, I felt the pangs of guilt, but Mike was quite cheerful, so we moved on. He showed me interesting valuables his predecessors had brought aboard including old flintlocks, Indian rugs

and pottery. He attempted to explain numerous controls, dials and knobs and assured me that in time I would understand them.

Of all the wondrous things I saw, the most memorable had to be from the window where he pointed to a luminescent sphere and proclaimed it to be our Earth. I could have spent days gazing at that jewel, but alas, Mike had other plans. He showed me his journal, started by his first predecessor and added to by all. He even made an entry on the spot, explaining my visit and describing my reactions.

As far as his vittles and such, Mike relayed to me an enterprise (not at all like prospecting) that gave him the custom he needed to trade for supplies. He would come to town, where good supplies could be had and buy a load and take them up to his waiting ship. Then he would drop back down by the tree, take up his clock machine and travel out to distant camps where supplies were sparse. Then, away from curious eyes, he would retrieve supplies from his ship to trade for pelts or silver or whatever would bring a good price in town. Using this occupation, Mike had stowed away a tidy sum for himself and enough to leave as a starting sum for an apprentice.

We discussed the awesome responsibility of the future occupant, where I began to perceive part of Mike's agenda for me. He described the creed written by one of his progenitors who viewed the alien's vessel as a gift to be maintained until such a time as civilization had real need for it. Until such time, of course, no one felt it prudent to present the gift.

A good part of the day being spent, Mike suggested that I return to my family to avoid the consequences of being absent overlong. He cautioned me to avoid mentioning today's activity in the interest of keeping the hounds at bay so the foxes could breathe (we being the foxes). He invited me to return the following week to discuss the possibility of my tenure. He

even spoke fondly of the widow Miller with whom he wished to make better acquaintance once he negotiated an apprentice.

We made our parting arrangements, among which he encouraged me to take the horse and buckboard as a gift to my family from the prospector who I had helped this day. It was an extravagant gift, but one meant to soften a future blow to my parents that Mike anticipated and I had not yet fathomed. I agreed to meet him the next week at the appointed time, and took one last look at the gem through the window and stepped out by the old tree in my forest near home.

The week dragged as I held my tongue and mulled over my secret. The events of normal life seemed colorless to me. At night the vision of my pretty Earth hanging in the dark of space lulled me to sleep. It was with much excitement that I greeted the following week. I ticked off the hours as the anticipated night approached.

Farming, by now, had lost any appeal it had ever had for me. I could barely face my father knowing this thing that would bring him great disappointment. I now understood Mike's generous offering to my parents. In an attempt to soothe my own self-reproach, I quietly encouraged my sisters to look for suitable sons-in-laws to help father with the farm. My guilt still ate at me sore, but was inevitable as my mind was set.

The day before the expected event, I made camp by the tree, giving some lame excuse to my parents, and kept vigil over the clock. As the hour approached I paced impatiently back and forth, never removing my eyes from those dials.

At last the moment arrived and I readied myself to greet my friend. The dials reached zero. Nothing happened. There was no light, no vibration. In a panic, I wracked my brain trying to remember the terms of our arrangement. Could the clock be in the wrong place, I thought not. Could the time or date be incorrect, the clock assured me this was not so. I sat for

an hour watching and waiting, willing this mistake to correct itself, but to no avail. The clock had reset and my friend had not appeared.

It has been three weeks since and each appointed hour I return to the old tree. At this point, I must assume the worst, that my friend met an untimely end. My heart aches as I despair the loss, not just of a kindly old man, but of an extraordinary legacy. I write this journal and vow to pass it privately to my descendants in hopes that some one of them will have the wherewithal to reach this lost inheritance, so close yet overwhelmingly distant. I approach my studies now with renewed vigor. The truth of the thing weighs on me. I am alone in my thoughts. I know that I understand life more perfectly than my peers, yet I constantly wonder and worry about those things I do not understand.