

# **Life Experiences**

## Being Active, Staying Active

Bill Gramley

I suppose most boys are rambunctious. I don't know why. I mean we have a reputation for bouncing around and upsetting Mom, getting scrapped knees and such. But I was one of four boys and we were always outside playing, except at 3 p.m., when we came in to listen to "Captain Marvel" and a few other regular radio programs. In the second grade our teacher taught us how to play softball, and I greatly enjoyed this sport and played it in grade school but not afterwards except with my children and youth groups, and not again until I joined a Senior Games slow-pitch softball team when I was 78. I found out I couldn't throw far, but I was a decent fielder, so they put me at first base. I was an average hitter, still pulling the ball down the third base line as I did when I was a kid. I mean I can still see the ball when it is lobbed toward me, thank goodness.

Dad got me started with golf and I played that game with him off and on for many years and with my brothers and a few other guys later. I could hit the ball pretty far, but, you know, they usually sliced off into the woods, while Dad, with his gimpy leg and three-quarters back swing hit the ball down the middle, putted well, and, I must confess, beat me regularly. I played until he died in 1986 and only play once a year now with the Senior Games since we get to ride in carts, which I seldom did when I was younger because if I didn't play well, at least I got in good exercise walking. Funny how the course we play on is the same as it was 60 years ago, but I surely have changed! I can't seem to get many pars.

I never got into tennis or ping pong or nowadays a game called pickleball, but I did like basketball although I never played it in high school or college. But when I was working during

my 40s and 50s, I played at the YMCA with guys who came there during the lunch hour. It kept me in shape and I solved one of the arguments the guys always had about who gets the ball to start the game, shirts or skins? I finally said, "Skins," and from then on, when we played, they had what they called "Rev's Rule" (skins get the ball) since I was a minister. I did play one season during that period of time when we formed a team at my church (I was 42) and competed in the City B League where we had a referee and truly needed one because some teams played as rough as they do in the NBA! I thought I was in good shape, but found out that I wasn't and got that old "cotton mouth" pretty easily. I was taller than most of my teammates and played rather well. I think we won more games than we lost. I didn't return to basketball again until I was about 76 and we formed a "three-on-three" team for a couple of years with Senior Games and played in the State Finals Tournament held at East Carolina University. While the games were fairly short with 6 or 8 minute quarters, I was often huffing since we usually played two or three games each day. While I was 6' 2", I couldn't get the rebounds the way I used to because some teams had former college players who were 6' 6". But we beat some teams and in my final game I did outplay a former Wake Forest basketball star because I had more agility and scored 10 of our team's 20 points, even though we lost 30-20. It was a good ending to an off-and-on-again career.

I enjoyed biking although I didn't do much after grade school years until I was 40 years old and suggested to my two older daughters, 15 and 13, that we get bikes and ride from PA (where we lived for seven years) to NC instead of riding the 500 miles in the car twice a year to visit our parents. This was in 1974, and, although we didn't know what we were doing and carried sleeping bags and too much food and stuff on our 38-pound Schwinn bikes, we somehow made 465 miles over 6 days. This was before cross country biking became popular. Then in 1976

I led young people across PA to Ohio and found that PA was mountainous all the way to the Monongahela River. But that was the start of a 13-year stretch when, each summer for a week, usually in August, I led young people on week-long bike hikes to places like the Outer Banks, Knoxville, TN to the World's Fair, Cherokee on the Blue Ridge Parkway, Washington, DC to visit the museums, and Charleston, SC. I don't know if I would do that again with the increased traffic, but those were good experiences as the youth learned to deal with the elements, weariness, and several miserable nights when we had to sleep on a concrete floor or narrow wooden benches.

The last time I did any strenuous biking was when I was 65 and decided to try a triathlon, sponsored by AARP, in Pinehurst. I was slow in the swimming segment but then passed people during the biking segment, and just endured rather slowly the running part which was a 5K. It took me a total of 1 hour and 38 minutes which was a much longer and more continuous exertion than I was used to, so I decided not to try that one again.

The main sports in my life have been football and track. I did both of these in high school and college. With football I dreaded those twice-a-day early season practices and yet they got us in shape. I usually played well and we always had winning seasons. And with the track, I was not a runner but a thrower. I began with the shot put in the 11th grade and won the NC state championship. The coach handed me a discus at the end of the season and said, "Take this home over the summer and learn how to throw it." I had no guidance, but learned how to throw it and in my senior year I won the state championship and broke the state record doing so at the meet in Chapel Hill. In college I also won some conference championships, but then laid the implements aside for the next 40 years until picking them up again with Senior Games and USA Track and Field Masters meets where we are competing in five-year groupings, so that persons 70-74 aren't

trying to beat persons 65-69. I found out that I was not as strong or quick as I had been in my college days and I also found out that almost no one throws as far in the next year as they did in the year before. We lose muscle mass as we age. The main thing about doing this sport where I learned also to throw the hammer and the weight and the javelin is that it motivates me to continue exercising and training and looking forward to the season ahead (indoor meets as well as outdoor meets) and renewing friendships with athletes that also enjoy this sport. Winning is nice, but doing your best according to your potential is the main motivation.

I am 82 now and I keep going, liking the physical workouts, knowing that being active is essential for us human beings. There is something in our nature, maybe from thousands of years ago when our ancestors had to hunt for their food under difficult and primitive conditions, that calls us to move about, stretch our legs, use our minds, get off the couch, test ourselves, and, when we have finished our exercises, to be able to say, "That was great. I feel good. I'm tired and I'm hungry, but I am also quite satisfied!"

I recently read an article in The New Yorker about an "exercise pill" which has been developed so that a person could take the pill and get the same benefits as actually exercising. But the researchers themselves won't take it because it has side effects like cancer. And while the article said scientists don't yet know what takes place inside our bodies when we exercise, we already know that it is and always has been beneficial. Continuing research may explain more than what we already know about endorphins that make us feel good after exercising. There probably are more benefits in terms of keeping us healthy or preventing diseases and various forms of degeneration. Of course, no one lives forever in this world, but exercising has always blessed me, even when I never thought about its results when I was younger. I guess I'm still a

kid at heart and like to get out there and give it a go. There's nothing wrong with being rambunctious, is there? It's a guy's thing.

## A Two Weeks All Expenses Paid Vacation in Sunny Florida

Charles H. Swanson, Ph.D.



“Swanson,” I heard a faint voice from my deep slumber, “Get up. You have to go to the flight line and be there by 1400 hours.” I thought I was dreaming; kept my head on the pillow and eyes shut. There was always the remote possibility that I was dreaming. The only people on the flight line were air crews and people who were going somewhere and I didn’t have orders (the printed variety) to go anywhere.

Again, the voice importuned this time with a palpable insistence in the tone, “Wake up and get your gear together.” Evidence for the “this-is-all-a- dream- hypothesis” was quickly vanishing. There really was someone in my room nudging me to wakefulness. I was coming to my senses; it was Sergeant Brown from the Orderly Room.

“Aw, Sarge,” was my feeble reply, “We had two deliveries late this morning and I didn’t get to bed until 10.” (I was working as a delivery room technician at the 832nd Tactical Hospital at Cannon Air Force Base, Clovis, New Mexico and my duties pertaining to the delivery of newborns, were extensive and ranged from the paraprofessional (handling a newborn) to the mundane, e.g., cleaning the delivery room after a delivery) “Besides, I have class tonight.” Certainly that last retort should magically make him go away.

“Your college career will just have to wait. Duty calls and the call is for you to be in your fatigues (work uniform) and be at the flight line...now get moving.” With that last bit of motivating speech, he walked out of my room and slammed the door. I had exhausted my pertinent excuses but Sergeant Brown was steadfast in his insistence that my weary body was

needed elsewhere, and that was that. He never once said please; my mother would not have approved of his manner.

The uniformed services of the United States have this rather quaint expression that covers just about everything you can think of (or imagine) that is connected with conduct of any and all persons wearing “the uniform”: The needs of the service come first. What the individual person needs, wants, covets or prefers is way, way down on the list. When the phrase applies to any specific circumstance or situation you don’t have a lot of choice in the (military) matter: you “do it” or face the consequences of being obdurate in the face of “the call.” I got up and did what I was told. I dressed and found my place to the hangar on the flight line where I was told to assemble. If I didn’t show up I would be faced with the charge of “failure to repair.”

Carrying my bag, I walked to the flight line which was about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile from my barracks. I knew it was nearby because when the atmosphere was just right the roar of jet engines would rattle the window panes of my room; the sound could be deafening. Once passed the security station, I found my way to staging area of the 474 Tactical Fighter Wing. Like me there were a couple of hundred other enlisted personnel of various ranks and specialties dressed in their green fatigue uniforms all with their appropriate tools and luggage. They all knew about as much as I did about why we were assembled or where we would be going. These other men were support personnel as well, e.g., mechanics, technicians, ordnance handlers, just as I was support for the medical compliment for the group. We were flanked by several A.P. (air police) personnel that had very shiny shoes and white ascots and topped off with side arms and carbines with real bullets. It was not so much that we (the assembled) were going start fights or steal anything but this whole area of the base was one of strict security and they meant to keep it that way.



Cannon Air Force Base was a part of the Tactical Air Command, a major unit of the Air Force that employed jet fighter aircraft. (During my tenure at Cannon the plane of choice was the F-100 endearingly known as the “lead sled.” I can only assume that it received this moniker because of its propensity to return to earth with great alacrity if the engine suddenly stopped.) Each base in the TAC command (there were about 8 bases in the United States) was further organized into Wings. My hospital group (832nd TAC hospital) was part of the 474th Tactical Fighter Wing which consisted of 5 operational squadrons of aircraft per wing. The other wing based at Cannon was the 27th TFW.

It was an early fall day in October and the day was warm and sunny but I found a shady spot in the hangar and using my B4 bag as a pillow I laid down, and drifted off to sleep. Even as I dozed I could smell the pungent odor of jet exhaust that the open hangar seemed to capture with great ease. We stayed in that hangar for a couple of hours, milling about and passing rumors: “We were going to South America,” “We were going to the Caribbean,” “We were going...well we were all “dressed up” and pretty sure we were going somewhere! We remained in that state of collective ignorance generously interlarded with indolence until we were finally addressed by a young first lieutenant. It was about 1600 hrs. We were first called to attention and then told to stand at ease. He advised that we would soon be boarding our transporting aircraft (C-130 Hercules) and on our way. I genuinely don’t think this young man knew anymore about where we were headed than we did. That kind of knowledge existed a bit further up the chain of command. Even though I worked in the hospital squadron I knew what a C-130 was. (This plane incidentally is still being used by the current military for cargo missions around the world.) I looked up and down the tarmac for as far as my eyes could see and I couldn’t spot a single plane of this variety at least. All of this was a strong indication that we were in a “holding

pattern” or the phrase that is still operative in the uniformed services: “hurry up and wait.” We were going to sit there, stand there, lie there until our transportation got to the base and that knowledge, of when the planes would arrive, again was beyond my pay grade. I got back on the hard concrete floor of the hangar and took another nap. I was pretty sure they weren’t going to leave without me.

It was about 1700 hrs. when suddenly, above the normal din of jet fighter aircraft comings and goings, I could hear this high pitched whining sound of the propellers of the C-130s coming to transport us to wherever we would be going. The plane had a ramp for a back door and when opened it provided an easy means for loading the heavy equipment used by the ground crews. On the plane I would be taking there was a large, slung low to the ground, “yellow machine” that I could only assume was used to load ordinance to the underbelly of aircraft. After the equipment was loaded the support personnel boarded the aircraft. There were about fifty of us on this particular plane, sans any flight attendants. We sat on two long parallel rows of meshed netting benches facing each other across a space of about 10 feet. There were few windows and no magazines. All of this was quite exhilarating since up to that time as a young man who had not yet attained his 21st birthday I had only had one other airplane ride in my life.

Once the aircraft was loaded and the aircraft commander was satisfied everything was in order we taxied to the end of the runway. The pilot throttled up the engines, the plane shook; we began our takeoff roll and in a matter of seconds we were airborne. I was both afraid and excited at the same time. I was embarking on a journey of historic proportions only at the time I did not realize it. I was just along for the ride. Moreover, the ride was extremely noisy; the C-130 was not made for comfort and passengers were given short shrift and little consideration in its design. Sleep? Not on this transit.

The climb to cruising altitude took about 20 minutes and we still didn't know where we were headed. Word was passed back sometime after we got to cruising altitude that we were headed for Florida. No P.A. announcement, just word of mouth. We were advised that we were headed for McDill AFB, Tampa, Florida. It was pretty common knowledge that McDill was not a TAC base which meant this was something out of the ordinary. All things considered the deployment was unusual in the extreme. The flight lasted a little less than 4 hours and during that time I wangled a visit to the flight deck and peeked out the cockpit window. I recall seeing the channel of the Mississippi River from about 25,000 feet. Huck Finn could not have been more thrilled than I was to see this majestic waterway from that altitude.

We got to McDill at about 2030 hrs. When the ramp was lowered, and we were allowed to exit, we were immediately treated to a blast of warm, humid Florida air. The calendar said early October but this humid evening said it was "early Hades." I could hear the buzzing and roar of jet engines up and down the tarmac. The smell of jet exhaust mixed with the humid air hung heavy and was slightly nauseating. There was still some light left in the day which allowed me to see the planes and their landing lights. They just kept landing. Dimly I could see there were all manner of aircraft: fighter planes, bombers, cargo planes, spy planes, i.e., F-102. This was definitely going to be some shindig.

About an hour after we landed, blue painted school buses began showing up to take us to our night's lodging. By this time I found the other three corpsmen (Sergeant Rush and Airmen Peterson and Gent) who, like me, were part of the medical support personnel for the mission. We boarded the bus, left the flight line and were driven down a palm tree lined avenue about 3 miles to our barracks. We found our assigned room and told where to have breakfast the next morning. Even with all the excitement of the day I had no trouble sleeping. I was exhausted.

We assembled in front of the barracks at 0700 hrs. and boarded the shuttle for the return to the flight line where we met with the two physicians assigned to our medical team: Drs. Dodge and Corker. We were told to “sit tight” and await further instructions. That afternoon the first game of the World Series was televised; I found a T.V. and watched the Giants play the Yankees. There was nothing else to do. This “stand-around-and-do-nothing” went on for two more days. We were then told that on the fourth day we would assemble for the flight back to Cannon! That was it? Finished? Well, not exactly.

About two weeks later I was awakened the same way I described above. It was déjà vu all over again. Only this time when we landed at McDill there were even more planes and personnel than before. There were so many arriving personnel in fact they had to billet us off-base. We were housed at the Hotel Floridian in Tampa! The windows on the bus were down and the humid air had the pungent smell of salt water as we drove to Tampa. There was a jovial atmosphere on the bus. This was beginning to be fun.

We assembled at 0800 hrs. the next morning and were driven back to the base and the flight line. Again we unpacked the crates and the kits and set up a medical clinic and were ready for business but we were again in a “hurry-up-and-wait” holding pattern. I think, however, we all had a feeling that the first time was only a practice run and we hadn’t yet participated in the “Big Show.” Was this all some sort of exercise? No one knew. Our clinic was just feet away from an area in the hanger completely off limits to all unauthorized personnel and guarded night and day by the A.P.s. This was the pilots’ ready room where their briefings and orders were discussed. They did not include the medical team.

About 1700 hrs. we were dismissed for the day and told us to return the next morning at 0800 hrs. Getting back to the hotel room I found myself alone; my assigned roommate had yet to

show. I turned on the T.V. and was greeted to one of those messages that said: "We interrupt this program for a special announcement," We were advised that President Kennedy would be addressing the nation at 1900 hrs. The station then went back to the regular programming. Did the massive buildup at McDill have something to do with this? We were all about to find out. The designated time came soon enough. In sum and in substance the President advised us that the Soviets had ICBM missiles parked in Cuba capable of hitting almost anywhere in the U.S. These missiles could be tipped with nuclear warheads. The U.S. would not allow this situation to stand. The President averred that the island of Cuba would be "quarantined" and no further ships now on the high seas would be allowed to land. It was immediately apparent that the military personnel I could see with my own eyes were all part of a first strike contingent. We were not having an exercise we were having a showdown! (The flight time for the fighters from McDill to Havana was about 15 minutes.) They purposely eschewed the word "blockade" as being too provocative. After the President finished his message the pundits took over and weighed in. We were told that there was in fact a Soviet vessel on the high seas headed for Cuba and set to arrive in a day or two. The ship would not be allowed to cross the imaginary "quarantine" line the U.S. had established. What would the captain of the Soviet vessel do? What would "we" do if he crossed that imaginary line?! I would have an answer to the second question when I got to the flight line and my assigned duty station the next morning. I felt numb about the whole thing. The excitement and euphoria of the previous evening had faded to somber reflection on my life and future. I wondered if we were all going to all be gone in a blinding flash of light.

When we got to the base the next morning (0800 hrs.) the place was already buzzing with activities. The jets (F-100) from Cannon were all neatly lined up on the tarmac and pilots were

already sitting in their seats. The day dawned hot and bright and the pilots were already sweating. They could not leave their planes for any reason. Our medical unit was assigned a type of ambulance referred to as a "Cracker Box." (If you have seen an old re-run of the M.A.S.H. T.V. show you have seen a Cracker Box.) One corpsman drove and the other (me) climbed the ladder resting against the fuselage to reach the pilot in the plane. My task was to deliver cold water to the pilots; it was never refused. (Time has dimmed my memory somewhat and I'm not sure if I gave the pilots plastic bottles or a cup-like container; but I do recall that I gave them plenty of water.) This went on for hours. For the whole day the pilots stayed put and I brought them water. I do not know what the pilots did about their "nature calls" and I never asked. The pilots sitting in their planes in the broiling sun drove home the seriousness of the situation.

This day, October 23, 1962 ended without the pilots flying their fully loaded planes to Cuba; the next day the Soviet vessel changed course and did not cross the quarantine line. Everybody breathed a sigh of relief. What was to become known as the Cuban Missile Crisis was not over yet but it was scaled back a notch. Way, way up the food chain the powers that be (on both sides) were slowly working things out and throttling down the tension and war footing. (We in the medical team did not know it but the entire military of the United States was at "DEFCON2." This was one step removed from thermonuclear war.) Those of us near the bottom of the chain were simply left in ignorance of such matters and little to do. Had this turned into a shooting war the medics would have had plenty of business.

We stayed at McDill a few more weeks and the crisis declared officially over on November 20, 1962. We then packed our crates, boarded some C-130s and returned to Cannon. The Soviets eventually took their missiles back to Russia. But we came very, very, very close to an

Armageddon the likes of which the world has never seen. . We brushed the shadow of death in the night as a nation and as a world and never realized just how close we were to war. Decades later the real hero of the crisis became known.

His name was Vasili Alexandrovich Arkhipov, he was a Soviet submarine commander commanding a flotilla of four Soviet submarines operating close to Cuba. Each of the submarines was loaded with a single nuclear tipped torpedo each with the destructive power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. During the tense time of the standoff on the surface these four submarines operated beneath the waves in horrible conditions: the interior temperature was never less than 120 degrees Fahrenheit. The crews were short of everything...including communication with their controllers in Moscow! The sub commanders had been given “discretionary” orders regarding the time and place to fire that single torpedo. In sum, they did not need Moscow’s permission to fire. In the case of the sub known as “B59” the situation had gone past anything the world has ever seen.

The lack of communication with Moscow and the conditions on the sub probably all contributed to the decision by the sub’s Captain to fire the torpedo. There were three key players in this deadly drama under the waves that played out during those days in October of 1962: the boat’s captain, the boat’s political officer, and flotilla commander Arkhipov who, as fate would have it, was also on the B59. He would not vote to fire that torpedo and since he outranked even the captain of the vessel the torpedo was never fired. And we in the United States and the world never knew about the decision for decades.

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The noted historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. called the Cuban Missile Crisis “**The most dangerous moment in human history.**” Who can argue with that assessment?



## EQUAL

Bill Pfefferkorn

My stern father and polished mother shed  
their rule book and paddle and share  
the magic of aging, foibles and independence.  
As youngest child I become an equal.

Dad grows sideburns, Mom buys  
sexy two-piece bathing suit and learns  
to water ski — never question my adventures  
in Mexico, Washington Semester, USSR, marriage,  
Chicago Law, Free Speech and Teamster cases.

Lawrence and I crank out opinions, letters  
on local, national and international issues.  
Eleanor tells me of her college love life,  
invites me to speak with her to civic groups  
about 20th century philosophers, Winston-Salem  
History and Dickinson's poems and skepticism.

Some thought we were "up to something."  
Off the charts like labor radicals that helped  
to win the Union election in 1943 at RJR that led  
to first City election of a Black Alderman in 1946.  
We were learning to love life and determined  
to live it to the fullest and make a living at it too.

## Is It Gossip

Helen Webb

The American Heritage Dictionary defines gossip as: “Rumor or talk of a personal, sensational, or intimate nature. A person who habitually spreads intimate or private rumors or facts. Trivial, chatty talk or writing. To engage in or spread gossip.” Currently, I wonder if I am being a topic of gossip or if folks are simply chattering idly about me.

Several years ago a neighbor occasionally joined me on my daily walks. I knew where he lived and that his wife had died in a house fire years ago leaving him with two young boys to raise. I did not know his name and referred to him as “that man” just as I referred to one of my husband’s bridge partners as “that woman”.

After my husband died, I learned “that man’s” name and he often joined me on my walks. He offered to help me when my car was being repaired and took me to get my car from the repair shop. In return, I offered to take him to the outpatient clinic when he had cataract surgery. When the receptionist wanted my cell phone number, I explained that I would stay in the waiting room until he was discharged and that I was not the wife, nor the girlfriend, just a neighbor.

Nevertheless, I was told I would have to go back to the recovery room and listen to the home instructions or they would not do the surgery. When I was called to go to the recovery room, the two nurses waiting for me were trying to look professional but were having a hard time keeping from giggling.

Hank is twenty years younger than I. He is retired. Lives alone and buys all his meals as takeout. He buys his coffee at Duncan Donuts at 6:00 AM and brings it home to drink. On his way home he stops to put my newspaper on the porch. Weather permitting; we often walk in the neighborhood. Recently long time neighbors seem to be finding a reason to come out of their

homes when we walk by. They will wave me down and always have a question for me and then introduce themselves to Hank and want to know where he lives.

Once a couple I met twenty years ago and did not know their names nor which house they lived in, saw us a half a block away and waved us down. When they caught up with us, we were chatting with several other neighbors. After introducing themselves, the man said to Hank: "Do you two live in the same house?" Thunderstruck, Hank tried to explain where he lived. The man never could understand exactly where Hank's house was. He knew where mine was. Would it be fair to say I am the subject of gossip?

Last summer when the neighborhood lost power I called Hank and asked that if he was going to the K and W for supper could I go with him. Hank knows all the K and W personnel by first names. As we were going through the line, I could see the ladies working the line talking to each other with their eyes and facial expressions. "He's with a woman and eating here." Now the K and W folks are chattering idly.

If the neighbors and K and W ladies are not enough, church members are asking questions. Because I don't see to drive at night, last winter I asked Hank to take me to several different night activities at church. He also took me to the Wednesday night church suppers and programs. From the beginning, I have explained to everyone that Hank was a neighbor who graciously was providing me transportation. Last summer the church opened the Community and Wellness Building which contains a walking track. Days too hot to walk outside, we walked on the track at church. Recently at a Sunday morning coffee time, the preacher said to me: "Tell me about Hank?" Others have said: "How's Hank?" A choir member and dear friend of my husband, asked my best friend: "Who is that man I see Helen with?" No one wants to accept the

fact that we just enjoy having someone to chat with as we walk. Nor the fact that Hank is willing to take me places I want to go at night. Is the preacher a gossip?

Last winter at bridge, one of my favorite players dashed over to me and said: “We saw you last night with a man!” She could hardly contain herself.

Several months ago after the Quarry Park opened; I suggested to Hank that we check it out. On our way from the pier to the parking lot who should appear out of nowhere but Diane, a fun loving member of my writing group, yelling at the top of her voice: “Helen, I never expected to see you here with your boyfriend!” “No Diane, we just walk together.”

I feel the neighbors, the K and W ladies, the church people, my bridge friends and now my writing group have all been watching me. I wonder what they are saying to each other.

I give up. Just let the idle chatter continue.

## Being Short

Margaret Miller



When I was young, and full of energy, my hours being filled with school, sports, and boy watching I never gave being short a moment's thought.

I think coming to the U.S. possibly made me realize that at that time the English were a short race but Americans seemed very tall. It didn't bother me until these later years, knowing that I have shrunk at least one inch.

I was at the grocery store - not my most favorite task but a necessary one. I had my list and my coupons and set off to pick up the things I had run out of at home and the specials that seemed smart to take advantage of. I also had some special things on the list to make dinner for friends that evening.

I finished with the fruits and veggies, picked up the wine, and headed to the seafood department for the fish and shrimp. Fish course accomplished, then to the foreign food section. This is my favorite aisle in the store as I do love spicy and unusual foods. "Foreign" is a bit of a misnomer because in general you can only get Mexican, Indian, and Thai foods and condiments. There are other countries that have delicious foods but the necessary items you need to make them are not found in this store. I found a couple of things I wanted and was searching for one item in particular. There it was..... way up there in the clouds on the top shelf. There was no way I could reach it so I walked to the end of the aisle and peered around the stack of canned soup on special. No one is in sight. I go the other way and see a mother with two unruly children and a huge shopping cart full of groceries, so I decide not to approach her. I went back to the item perched on high. I stared at it, willing it to fall into my hands, but no such luck. I

remembered as I was standing there what I did once in the same circumstances. I stood on the bottom of the lowest shelf thinking I could just reach, but to my chagrin the shelf dislodged and the aisle was quickly strewn with all sorts of good things. It made quite a noise and very quickly someone appeared looking disdainful and shortly after that I heard the dreaded “Clean up on aisle four.” No way was I going to repeat that disaster!

I moved on and picked up the other items on my list. I checked it quickly, decided that was all I needed, and proceeded to the check out. I found one with only one cart in front of me so I waited there, getting out my store card, coupons and wallet. Soon it was my turn so I unloaded as much as possible on the counter, proffered the store card and waited.

The obliging clerk asked, “Did you find everything you need?”

“Well, no,” I said “there was this item in the foreign food aisle...”

She was on the intercom in a flash. “Assistance needed on register five.”

I glanced behind me. There was a young woman busy reading a magazine from the rack. “That’s good,” I thought. Just about then a store assistant manager came over, and I was very amused. She was shorter than me! She asked me what I needed and I started to say “But it’s on the top shelf,” but she was off to find it before I could say the first word.

I turned around again but the young woman was still reading. Behind her was another cart, with a woman scowling at me. I muttered “Sorry,” but she just turned her head away. I then heard what sounded like nails drumming on a box of cheerios. Well, I did say I was sorry!

It seemed to take forever but eventually the short assistant manager hurried back with a young man in an apron, with a badge fastened on his shirt, and who seemed to be about seven

feet tall to me, but probably is about six feet one. He brandished my elusive item. The assistant manager gave me a knowing look with a hint of a smile so I said “Thank you” and noticed that the drummer had gone to another checkout line. I paid for my purchases and wondered if I might ask the assistant manager if I could borrow the young man for a day to change a couple of light bulbs, tidy up the top cupboards in the kitchen, and dust the top of the bookcase. “Dream on,” I mused and smiled to myself.

On my way to the car I wondered what problems tall people must face. Banging their heads, scrunching up in airplane seats, maybe. I couldn’t think of any other situations. It’s not nearly as bad as being short, but that’s just my opinion. As my daughter reminds me “It is what is,” so maybe I should stop whining.

Many famous people were or are short. Take Queen Victoria for example. There was a short, busy lady who had a huge Empire to run. Did she complain? I doubt it. Then there was Napoleon who did quite well until he messed up. There are lots of others also.

As I climbed up into my SUV (and I do mean climbed) I thought about some other things that make me realize just how short I am, being not much over five feet tall. A long time ago my husband and I went to look at a sports car. I loved it except that even with the seat all the way forward I couldn’t reach the pedals enough to safely change gear. We obviously didn’t buy that car. Forget going to sports events where everybody jumps up out of their seat when a good play is made. You never see it; all you see are big shoulders, and arms raised above heads, so you may as well stay sitting down. This summer I was on the underground in London. It was standing room only, when a young man turned around very suddenly and hit me in the face with his backpack. If I had been taller it would have hit my shoulder. He didn’t even notice.

So, the next time you see a short person gazing up at the top shelf in the grocery store, take pity and offer to help them. We can't help it, we were born that way.



## A Penny for Buttons

Sue Murray

"But I have to pay you something," I appealed. "I don't feel right just taking her."

My veterinarian considered the determination in my expression and grinned. He knew me well, and although others had expressed an interest in the little runt of a kitten that had been abandoned at his clinic, Dr. Jay, as we called him, was just as determined that she would go home only with me.

"Okay then," he conceded. "One cent."

And so it was that I paid one penny for a tiny cat that would change my life—a short-haired meowing machine who made her way into the home and heart of this goal-oriented, workaholic who had no time for frivolities. Stop and smell the roses? Don't they make an air freshener in that scent?

Around the time she turned four, Buttons became quite ill. The spry in her step grew deliberate and weary, and she often turned away from her food bowl without a nibble. Her favorite perch on the windowsill was abandoned for a plastic stool in the dank and dismal basement. When Dr. Jay detected swollen lymph nodes, he suspected feline leukemia. However, those tests, as well as a slew of others, came back negative.

My husband, Tom, and I hopelessly watched our faithful little companion wither away. All we knew was that with each new blood test, her packed cell volume was diminishing, and her bone marrow refused to produce its life-sustaining red blood cells.

Buttons' condition presented me with a major conflict. As the coordinator of a small office, I had always taken my responsibilities very seriously. I made a habit of arriving early and staying late, sure that things would fall apart without me. I enjoyed the intense concentration required to keep my little world spinning and the satisfaction that resulted from doing so. Now, leaving for work every day was agonizing-how would Buttons fare alone all day?

For a month, Tom and I took turns driving home at lunchtime and often rearranged our evening plans to make time for the uncomfortable tasks of administering subcutaneous fluids and frequent force feedings. At least twice a week, when Buttons spiked a dangerously high fever, we crashed Dr. Jay's appointment schedule. Buttons was running out of time, and no matter how hard we worked at it, we couldn't seem to give her more. We began seriously considering the unthinkable: euthanasia.

Heading to my car after work one evening, I noticed a sparkle on the pavement below. For some reason, I paused momentarily to pick up what was a shiny new penny. Feeling a spark of hope, I made a wish that my one-cent kitty might survive and emerge as good as new. I tucked that penny into the breast pocket of my jacket, close to my heart, and transferred it to a velvet pouch in my jewelry box as soon as I got home.

Tom and I were determined to give Buttons all we were able to give. We set up a little wooden table near her window so she could lie in the sunshine and breathe in the fresh air while she listened to the twittering birds and watched them flit between the evergreen bushes outside. The shorter, top shelf of the table served as her perch, while her kitty bed, tucked into the cubby beneath, provided a warm cozy den where she could retreat at will.

Over the next few weeks, as I immersed myself in my duties as Buttons' hospice nurse, my dedication to being at the office through 'wind and rain and sleet and hail' gave way to a higher calling. Buttons' comfort became my top priority. Though I did what was necessary for the office to keep functioning, I discovered that most of the urgent phone calls could wait until the following day, and the reports that had once taken up so much of my attention each evening now sat idle in my briefcase. I routinely spent time each day gently grooming Buttons' dark gray fur and marveling at the wonder of her stark white undercoat. I tenderly scratched her chin and felt her melt under my loving caress as I gave her healing massages. This connection with Buttons, the result of spending my time on what was important rather than what was urgent, filled me with awe.

Time is the one thing no one can buy more of. Buttons helped me see that tomorrow truly is a gift. I'd like to think that our loving care helped to give her almost 17 more years of tomorrows-happy, healthy tomorrows. Yes, she made a complete recovery; and so did I. I not only learned to stop and smell the roses; I planted a garden! And at every opportunity, Buttons and I would spend time out in the wafting fragrance of flowers-and catnip. She'd crouch down, close her eyes, and curl up her front paws underneath her chest. In the sphinxlike position, she'd spend time dreaming, meditating, and communing with nature-clearly enjoying every minute. Life is too precious to live any other way.

Buttons would have turned 21 on the day I collected her ashes. I've never had, nor believe I ever will have, a cat quite as special. I gave her a part of my life and she gave it back to me, richer and sweeter.

Later that day, I gathered her kitty bed from its cubby, and tearfully clutched it to my chest. As I reached inside the cubby to clean, I felt something and picked it up.

When I realized what it was, a smile spread across my face despite my tears. You may not believe it, but it's true-there in my palm lay a well-worn, patinaed penny.

Hazel

Judith Ruff



She was a small lady in stature, but she made a big impression on me as I was growing up. Hazel lived two houses, or, as we always said, two doors down from us on Poplar Street. She was not just a neighbor, she was a friend. She and her brothers were raised in that house, but when I was born, everyone had moved or died except Hazel. That did not stop one of her brothers from coming to her house every night at 6 pm sharp for dinner. The house was very distinctive on my block and stood out from the rest. It was never painted, and was set back from the street and surrounded by many tall trees and bushes-kind of spooky.

As I got older, I wondered about Hazel and why she never bought herself a car. She walked to and from work downtown every day in her suits and high heels. I admired her for being a businesswoman in an office setting and also for being independent. A sharp dresser and looker, she never married, although a woman did live with her for a while. With a smile on her face and pleasant, she seemed to always be on a schedule: work, cooking dinner for her brother by six and afterward sweeping the sidewalk in front of her house.

She did, however, find time for my son, Binny, after she got home from work. After my divorce, my son and I moved back to live with my parents and he would ride his little red tricycle down to Hazel's house and wait for her to get home from work. I knew she would give him cookies, but I didn't discourage it because I somehow felt it was the highlight of her day.

When I remarried and moved out of state for eighteen years, I would see Hazel on my visits home and reconnect. But when my children and I moved back to Winston-Salem sixteen years ago, she was in the early stages of Alzheimer's. Seeing the changes that were taking place

in her was very sad. The lady I remembered with her neat hair and make-up and nice looking clothes was no longer there. Instead, over the months she became unkempt, looking like she never bathed or washed her hair, wearing old housecoats that were torn and dirty. When she could no longer cook for her brother, I rarely saw his car there except to take in some groceries once a week. Why did it seem to me like he abandoned her when she could not serve him?

Early every morning and evening, she could be seen wearing the same tattered housecoat, sweeping her walkway and talking to herself and the many cats she had acquired that kept her company. Some days she knew you, some days she didn't. "Now who is your parents," she would ask me time and time again. We could not have a "normal" conversation because she really did not know how anymore.

Hazel had always been a private person, rarely inviting people into her home. I remembered when I was very young and the neighborhood ladies would meet at each other's houses just to talk and have refreshments. They called it "The Jolly Sewing Club." I loved to go with my Mother, because they always had sweets to eat. Hazel did participate in this, but I was so young I don't remember what her house looked like inside. As her mind was deteriorating, I started talking to her about how pretty she always looked in her dresses and suits. She allowed me to come inside and go upstairs where her clothes hung in one big room. I don't think she had ever gotten rid of any of her clothes. We started looking at them and she told me stories about some of them. We came to a form fitting, black velvet dress, with a v-neck and capped sleeves. "Hazel, can i have this dress" I asked her.

"Why do you want it," she looked at me puzzled.

“Because it was yours when you were younger, and it’s so pretty,” I told her. She finally agreed and then went on to show me other items that she had saved. That day, Hazel ended up giving me the dress, a few of her cloth handkerchiefs that had colored embroidered flowers on them, and a pair of high heels that fit her tiny feet, and looked like a style that was popular in the 1940’s.

When she was unable to take care of herself, her brothers put her in a nursing home. This was not a pretty nursing home with painted walls and pictures that were warm and fuzzy. No, this was a nursing home that looked like a mental hospital, with stark white walls and ancient metal beds. It was as if she had been discarded to the cheapest place they could find. I would go and see her and cry as I left that she had to be in a place like this. I don’t know if she had any other visitors because she did not speak and always looked as if she was asleep. I wasn’t even sure that she knew I was there.

The last time I saw her was right before she passed away. Hazel was lying in her bed with her eyes closed and no movement. I began talking about my memories of her and about the good times we shared throughout my life. When I got up to leave, leaning over to kiss her, I said, “I love you Hazel.” Not expecting any response, I started walking toward the door. She uttered in a weak voice, “I love you too.”

# **Short Stories**



Snow and Sand  
Margaret Miller



A long weekend at the beach is exciting for all, but for children the last leg of the journey to get there is certainly not. It would take us about another hour to get to the house, and my maternal instinct told me that unrest was coming from the back seat. “OK you two - you have been pretty good up to now. Don’t spoil it! Get into your travel bag and get a snack bar then decide what you are going to do for the rest of the trip” I proclaimed.

“How much longer is it?” asked Martin. He is the male half of my twins, Marina being the female.

“About three quarters of an hour“, I lied. “Depends on the traffic.”

There was a rustling of wrappers and a quiet time of ten minutes or so, and then a female voice said quietly “Tell us a story Mommy.”

“Well, it’s not always easy when you are driving, and we may have to stop sometimes, but I think I can try” I said.

“Tell us the story of how you met daddy,” said Marina in a pleading voice.

This was followed by a groan from Martin. “Mar, we’ve heard that story before, and it’s kinda sappy,” he complained.

“Please, please, Mommy, I think it’s a lovely story!” begged Marina.

I looked in the rearview mirror into two pairs of amazing sapphire blue eyes, both with pleading looks in them. What to do? I thought for a minute and decided what I thought was a diplomatic decision. “Martin, if you don’t want to hear it again why don’t you plug your music in? Then you won’t hear it and Marina can hear it again.”

I thought about the remainder of the trip and wondered if I could pad the story a little to make it last to the beach house. I could but try. “Alright. Everybody happy now? Settle down and I will try and remember how it happened.” As if I could ever forget.

Remember please that I was telling this story to a dreamy nine year old, not to adults, so I shall have to keep some of it fairly simple.

“I was working my first job in a very big law firm and I did a lot of paper work, but was hoping to move up and do something exciting. I was just thinking about taking a break when one of the lawyers breezed into the office, dumped a file on my desk and said, ‘Charlie - get up to Kingsville and get these people interviewed as quickly as you can! This case is dragging on. See Laura.’ Laura was his secretary. So I did see Laura, and was given a plane ticket, a hotel reservation, a rental car, and directions to Kingsville. I had no idea where it was.

“The next day, just after lunch, I was on my way to the airport. I studied the file on the plane and landed at a small airport sometime later. I grabbed a cup of coffee and a sandwich at the small snack bar and made my way out to pick up my rental car. I was amazed at how cold it was and how the wind was blowing. The sky looked very dark and I was sure I saw snowflakes fluttering down. After I signed the papers for the car the agent said, ‘Be careful out there; a big storm is coming in.’ I thanked her, and checked on the map I was given to see where I was going. It was about forty miles to Kingsville. ‘Not too bad,’ I thought.

“I found the road out of the small airport and quickly found the road I needed to take me to my destination. It certainly was starting to snow and the wind was really picking up. I turned on the heater, drank my coffee and thought about the interviews I was going to conduct the next day. As I looked out of the side window of the car I noticed that the grass at the side of the road

was quickly getting covered, but I was still not worried as I thought I would be in Kingsville fairly soon and without a problem.

“I had gone about five miles when I saw a flashlight being shone frantically around ahead of me. I stopped and saw a small older lady waving at me to open the window. I did so and she stuck her head in and said, ‘Thank goodness! I didn’t think anyone would be coming down the road this evening.’ She was quite breathless but continued, ‘We need a favor. My neighbor is soon to have her baby and we need to get her to the hospital up the road.’ She took in a breath. ‘Her husband is stuck at the airport ready to clear the runways and the EMS are up on the other side of Kingsville helping with the big crash. She won’t have the baby right now so don’t worry, but I have her two kids and the dog, and I don’t have a car here. Please could you drop her off on your way through? It’s not very far. If she gets stuck here I don’t know what I’ll do! You know about the blizzard warning?’

“What to do? The lady looked frantic so I could do no other than say ‘Yes of course!’ While she went to get the very pregnant lady I realized that I did not know about any blizzard. I would have to drop this lady off and hurry on. She came carefully down the now snow-covered path with a small overnight bag. While her neighbor helped her into the car I put the bag in the trunk with mine. With frantic waving to two children on the porch, and hugs and ‘good lucks’ from the neighbor, off we went.

The lady introduced herself as Rose, and showered me with thanks. She told me that her neighbor, Mrs. Wilson, was getting very concerned so thank goodness I came along. I listened but was also becoming aware of the state of the road, the increasing snow and wind, and the fact that the snow was actually coating the road. I had to slow down, well aware that I had a precious cargo on board. So much for hurrying on!

After a while Rose pointed through the windshield and indicated a lighted sign a little way down the road. 'That's it,' she said, 'It's only a very small hospital - more like clinics really, but as we are so far from Kingsville's new hospital they keep it open for emergencies and twice weekly clinics. The doctors come down from Kingsville so it's very convenient.'

"We drove carefully up the drive to a big portico. You know what that is Marina?"

Both voices came back with "Yes!" So Martin was listening to the "soppy" story!

"We drove up to some large double doors and almost immediately they opened and a nurse hurried out to help Rose inside. As she went she yelled, 'Park over there! We have to keep this open for ambulances!' All of this done with a wave of her arm towards the side of the building. I was about to yell back that I was moving on up the road when I remembered that I had Rose's overnight bag in the back of the car. Not that the nurse would have heard me yelling; she was getting Rose and herself out of the weather as quickly as possible. I popped the latch for the trunk and as I climbed out I grabbed my bag with my phone and laptop. I had phone numbers and the precious file in there, so I wasn't about to leave it in the car.

"I realized when I got out that the snow was covering my shoes, the wind was much stronger, and the snow was really coming down. I trudged into the hospital through the big doors into a reception area. I walked up to the counter, but there was no one there, and no one in sight. I waited a while, but still no one appeared.

"I looked around and saw a small waiting room so I went in, sat down, and took off my wet shoes. I tried to dry them off with a wad of tissues but it wasn't very effective. So I sat shoeless waiting for someone, anyone, to show up. Thank goodness it was warm in there - that was a plus.

“I had been sitting there for a while when I saw headlights lighting up the big doors. It was an ambulance. Very quickly a nurse came running down the corridor as the big doors opened to admit two paramedics with a gurney. They hustled down the corridor. I didn’t see who they had brought here but very shortly there were more lights and then an older, kindly looking policeman came in with a two children. He went up to the counter, looked around for a moment, and then came into the waiting room. There was a boy who appeared to be about eight or nine years old and a little girl who was sobbing her heart out with her head hanging down. Like me, she had a blaze of red hair. The policeman looked at me with my bare feet, smiled, and then said, ‘Can you keep one eye on these two while I find out what is going on?’ Once again, how could I say no?

“The little girl had a tear-stained face and a very runny nose, so once again, tissues to the rescue. I mopped up her face, then she looked up at me with tear-swollen eyes and said ‘Is my mommy going to die like Fluffy?’

“I was taken aback, and then realized that it must have been her mommy on the gurney. Who was Fluffy? The boy mumbled, ‘Fluffy was our old cat.’

“What was I to say? ‘Well. I am not a doctor,’ I reassured them, ‘but your mommy was talking to the nurse, and she is not old like Fluffy, and I am sure the doctor will take really good care of her.’ I looked at the boy who looked very scared and white. ‘What is your name?’ I asked gently.

“‘Sean, and this is Molly,’ he answered. He was quiet for a minute, and then said ‘A branch fell down on the windshield of the car and fell on our mom. It hit her head, and she banged her arm too I think. She pointed to the phone and like my dad showed us I called 911. It

was horrid and it was cold, but the ambulance came quite soon, and so did Sergeant Turner. My sister was very scared, but mom will be OK now we are in the hospital. We will be fine, .and so will my mom.’ A sort of sigh of relief came from him, and he put his arm around Molly. ‘OK now Molly?’ he asked. She just nodded, yes.

“Just about then the Sarge came back into the room and sat down beside the children. He looked at them both and then with a smile he said, ‘Your mom is going to be fine. She is a bit banged up but the doc is taking good care of her. A little later he will come to talk to you both, OK?’

“He looked across at me. ‘Well miss shoeless, what are you doing here?’ He was a nice man and I could see that he was concerned about the children. I replied that my name was Charlene but everyone called me Charlie since I was known to scrap a bit at school. The girls decided I was not a girl and started calling me Charlie. The nickname stuck, and I quite liked it.

“I am on my way to Kingsville to do some interviews, and I got waylaid by the neighbor of a very pregnant lady. I gave her a ride to the hospital and forgot to give her overnight bag. And then you all came in.’ I related. ‘If I can get this bag to her somehow I will be on my way,’ I added.

“‘Oh! That would be Rose, a friend of my wife’s. We wondered when she would give us another little one.’ He then stood up and beckoned me over to the big sliding doors and the portico. He stood with his hands on his hips and his head tilted looking at me as I looked out at a full blown blizzard. The wind was sending the snow sideways and was really heavy. It was evident that nobody was going anywhere.

“We went back to the waiting room and I looked at the children. They were stranded also. I turned to the friendly policeman and said, ‘These kids are cold and scared. Can we get them a blanket to put round them and maybe something hot to drink? They are probably hungry too.’

“Just then a matronly looking nurse came in and spotted the overnight bag. ‘Thank goodness, Rose thought it might be in Kingsville by now,’ she said. We stopped her before she left with the bag and explained about the children. ‘I think we can do something about that, and William,’ she said looking at the Sarge, ‘you go and see what’s in the kitchen. You know your way around.’ With that off she went.

“It then occurred to me that I had my laptop with me and I wondered if I could hook it up and find something for the children to watch. They must be bored, hungry and tired. When the nurse returned with a pile of blankets I asked her if there was somewhere I could plug in the computer. She said she didn’t know, but would find someone to help. True to her word a young man came in and got us hooked up somehow. He was the only administrative person there and had his hands full, but was cheerful and understanding. These were nice people here - warm and caring. William, as I came to call him, came back shortly with a small trolley bearing two mugs of hot chocolate, donated by one of the nurses, a carafe of coffee and some sandwiches. Well done William!

“I was sitting on the floor, still shoeless, trying to find something for the children to watch, when a voice behind me said ‘Two redheads! It must be my lucky day!’ I swiveled around and looked up into a pair of the bluest eyes I had ever seen. He was grinning from ear to ear, and what a grin. My heart did flip flops. He turned to the children and then looked at Sean. ‘You must be Sean,’ and turning then looked at me. ‘And you must be Molly.’

“Molly jumped up. ‘I’m Molly, she’s Charlie!’

“Sean was laughing, ‘it’s a boys’ name because she used to fight at school!’

“Laughing, blue eyes sat down next to the children and asked if they had been hurt in the accident. He checked them over and then said, ‘I am Doctor David, and I have been taking care of your mother. She is OK, but I had to mend her head and shoulder and I want her to rest. In a while I will let you go and say goodnight to her and then I will give her some medicine to help her sleep. She will be much better in the morning.’ William offered him a cup of coffee which he gladly accepted, sat next to me and said, ‘Well fighting Charlie, what’s your story?’ We talked for a while until he told us he was going to check on his patient and see how the delivery of the baby was going. Then after the children said goodnight to their mother he was going to try and find somewhere to get a little sleep. I was smitten.

“Our jolly nurse came in with some pillows, William went to make more hot coffee, and I tried to make some comfortable beds on the floor for the children. They were getting tired so when Dr David came back for them to say their goodnights they made me go along also. Dr. David told them not to jump up and hug their mother, but lifted Molly up for a goodnight kiss, and let Sean stand on a chair for his. They told their mother who I was and how I helped, and then after a few minutes we went back to the waiting room, our ‘hotel’ for the night. I settled the children where they could watch the laptop screen and sat down to enjoy a hot coffee with William.

“We were all getting tired, and I wandered out to see the blinding blizzard raging outside. As I stood there, Dr David came up beside me. ‘Quite a sight,’ he said, as he peered out at a



sheet of swirling white. He said he was going to get a little rest but told me to go nowhere in the morning without talking to him. I needed no second bidding!

“When I got back to our ‘hotel room’ Molly was asleep, and Sean, while trying to stay awake, was losing the battle. I covered Molly up snugly and sat down beside Sean. Sleepily he said ‘I like mom’s doctor. He is very kind.’ With that he rolled over and fell asleep. I wholeheartedly agreed.

“William told me, as we sat uncomfortably on the chairs made for short sits, that Dr. David was not the resident doctor who was supposed to be on duty that night, but was visiting Dr. Brown who was totally tied up dealing with the horrible accident on the other side of Kingsville. Dr. David Wilson was going to be Dr. Brown’s best man at his wedding, and had agreed to meet here not long before I arrived and the accident had come in. He was put to work with helping the children’s mother and keeping an eye on the delivery. Thank goodness he had been there. What a strange set of circumstances; sounds like a story!

“Early the next morning, after a very uncomfortable night on the floor, the children went with William and me to wash up and try to look ready for the day. We went and peered out at two or three feet of snow, with bright sunlight making it sparkle until you had to shade your eyes. William went to find more coffee and something for the children. He came back with the coffee and a jug of milk, along with a big pile of toast, butter, and jelly for the children. What they didn’t eat we demolished.

“Not too much later Dr. David appeared. ‘How would you like to see the baby who came early this morning?’ he asked. We all went down a couple of corridors and looked through a window at a tiny sleeping baby, which a nurse held up for us to see.

“I went to see Rose who was tired, but happy. ‘Thank goodness you got me here!’ she said. ‘I would call the baby Charlene, but my kids have already picked out her name: Alexandra.’

“I said a goodbye and good luck to her and went to see how the children’s mother was faring. I found out her name was Bridie, hence the Irish names of the children she looked better and thanked me many times for looking after the children. With that they came traipsing into the room with big smiles. ‘Does it hurt lots?’ enquired Molly.

“‘Not too bad this morning, but when we get home you can look after me. Is that good?’ answered Bridie.

“Molly nodded her head with its wild blaze of hair wrapping around her face. ‘I will be the best nurse ever!’ she exclaimed.

“‘I can help too!’ said Sean.

“I left the children with their mother, went back to the waiting room, and found my now dry shoes. I packed up the laptop and sat down to call the hotel. They answered quickly and were surprised when I told them where I had spent the night. I told them I was not sure what was happening next but would keep in touch. It was too early to call the office so I poured another cup of coffee and thought I could look over the file in my briefcase. A few seconds later a tall man, bundled up enough that you could not really see him, came in. Coming down the hall was Dr. David. They hung together with very big hugs, and the newcomer started to shed the big jacket, hoods and gloves. ‘You made it! A little late, but am I glad to see you!’ exclaimed Dr. David. He turned to me and said ‘This is the real doctor in this neck of the woods. Meet Dr.

Alan Brown. And Dr. Brown, meet Charlie.’ Dr. Brown raised an eyebrow but said nothing. I looked out of the big doors and there, under the portico, was a large snowmobile.

“The two doctors sorted themselves and the layer of snowy clothes out, and went to deal with their paperwork and patient matters, while I went into the bathroom and tried to make myself reasonably presentable. Then it was back to the file and notes about what I was going to ask at the interview, if and when it happened. William came over and told me they were having a bad time trying to get even the town dug out, and it would be a while before the road outside would be cleared for any traffic. He had been in touch with the children’s father who was frantically trying to find a way to get to them. This had been a far-ranging storm and many flights had been cancelled. Knowing fathers we knew he would find a way.

“The two buddy doctors came back and told me that Dr. David was going to drive the snowmobile back to Kingsville with me firmly positioned on the back. I had never ridden a snowmobile, but was willing to give it a try. Clothes were found from somewhere that would keep me warm, and a spare helmet was retrieved from storage in the vehicle. So off we went, with me happily clutching the good doctor, my briefcase inside the big jacket I was wearing, and a somewhat large helmet covering my by now wild hair. “We made it safely to the hotel, much to the surprise of the staff, and were delighted when hot coffee and Danish pastries appeared. We then parted company, with a promise to try and have dinner that very evening. I went to my room, and after a very welcome shower instantly fell asleep.”

“So - that is how I met your father, and here we are at the beach!” Good timing. The children jumped out of the car the minute it stopped, and were about to high-tail it down the path but were ushered back by me. “You carry your own bags and other stuff in” I said.

They grabbed their things and went dashing down the path, yelling “We love the sea, we love the beach, and the sand!” With that, they disappeared from sight, while I said to myself with a big grin “And I love the snow!”

## THE NSDBC MEETING

Helen Walker Webb



The 2017 annual meeting of the National Society of Duplicate Bridge Cards, the NSDBC, was held in Gatlinburg, Tennessee immediately following the Gatlinburg Regional bridge tournament. At the close of the formal business, the meeting was opened for comments and discussion.

The Queen of Clubs was the first to speak. “I’m sick and tired of being called ‘sticky’. Sticky fingers make for sticky cards. Can I get a big ‘amen’.” “AMEN”

“I don’t like being called ‘slick’,” stated the Jack of Diamonds. “I may be a Jack but I’m not dishonest.”

“How about being called ‘dirty’? I certainly don’t like being called a ‘dirty King’.”

“Or just ‘dirty’ as in dirt”, replied the King’s sweet Queen of Clubs.

“I’ll tell you what”, chimed in the Two of Clubs. “They rub dirt all over me when they drop me on the floor and then take a foot and rub me around and around under the table until finally picking me up. They don’t even wipe me off.”

“What I don’t like is being flipped and snapped”, the high and mighty Queen of Spades purred. “It causes my back to arch too high.”

“Poor dear”, snarled the Queen of Hearts. “When they shuffle me, my entire body shakes with convolutions.”

“Now, now cards. We all have felt exuberant when called ‘great’ or ‘good’. Likewise we have felt the sting of being called ‘terrible’, ‘bad’, or ‘sorry’. I don’t like even being called

'mediocre'. That's just part of being a duplicate bridge card. What we need to consider is the discrimination within the community of cards. I am the King of Diamonds. Yet, even as a King, there is no way I can move up the ladder of cards. The red cards are caught in the middle between the black ones. Occasionally my family can rule, but only temporarily. There are times when we are on the table equal with the other three families. Otherwise, we are caught."

The Ace of Spades replied: "I will appoint a committee to study the matter."

The Queen of Hearts spoke up: "Your honor, please also appoint a committee to study sexual discrimination. It is not fair that all four Kings have a male assistant, the Jack, and none of the four Queens have a picture card to assistant them. We are always getting caught between the King and the Jack. I suggest that Card Ten be changed to a Jackess."

The Ace of Spades quickly rapped his gavel and declared the meeting adjourned.

## Love and Betrayal

Judith Ruff



Lynn remembers back to the first time she left William. They had only been married two and a half years. She had suspected William of cheating on her but he kept on denying it. He was traveling in his job to correspondent banks throughout Georgia, setting up programs that would tie the smaller banks into a big bank in Atlanta's computer system. Spending a lot of time at a particular bank, sometimes not even coming home on weekends made Lynn even more suspicious. It finally came to a head one weekend when the arguing was nonstop. His sister had taken the children, Lynn's son from her former marriage and William's year old daughter to visit William's parents. It was a good thing they were not there to see William kick Lynn out of the townhouse. She had no ego or self-worth left from William always belittling her and controlling her every movement. "I can't stand skinny people and I am not attracted to you at all since you got so skinny," William said to her. Lynn knew why she had lost so much weight. It was not that she wanted to but she had become so depressed with what he was saying and doing to her that the pounds fell off. Her stomach always felt like it was in knots. "Get the hell out of here before I throw you out." William called out to Lynn who was in the bathroom crying uncontrollably. "How can you be so mean and cold to me?" she yelled back. He just kept on yelling, "You worthless piece of shit, get out." Lynn could not think straight. She kept thinking that all she ever wanted was love and she sure was not getting it here.

If there was one good thing, it was that Lynn had recently gotten her car back that William had sold to one of his buddies, after a year and a half of making only two payments on the car. The car Lynn had when they got married and didn't even ask Lynn about selling it, until his buddy showed up to get it. This is how low Lynn was when she couldn't even stop this from

happening. Lynn was crying and did not know where or what to do. She had a cousin that lived in the same town so she went there. All of her other family lived in another state. Her cousin's boyfriend told her William could not kick her out and go to the local police station and get papers to kick William out. Lynn did and when he was served the next morning William was furious, calling Lynn begging her to drop it. In the meantime, Lynn had decided to leave William for good and called her sister in her hometown to come and help her pack and move out. The papers told William to leave the premises. They were to go to court in the late afternoon that day.

He came to their townhouse that afternoon, got down on his knees in front of her stopping her for a second from packing. "Please, I'm begging you not to go. Don't leave me. I was wrong," he said crying out to Lynn. "This is what you wanted and I cannot live like this anymore," Lynn yelled out. "I will do anything if you will change your mind," William came back with. "Anything?" Lynn asked. "Then call the woman you are seeing and tell her it is over," Lynn demanded, wondering if he would own up to the affair. "Okay, okay, I'll do it," William cried out. "And I want to listen to what you say to her," Lynn said as she went upstairs to pick up the extension phone. William started off saying, "There is a U-Haul truck sitting in front of my house and my wife and children are leaving and this is not what I want. I love my wife and am begging her not to go. I love her not you." The woman started crying and said, "Why did you tell me you loved me? I was going to leave my husband even though I was pregnant with his child and you said we would get married. Lynn hearing all of this thought to herself, "Married?! What kind of sick games is he playing?" It was sickening to hear the woman's desperation and to realize that this sounded serious. Lynn slammed down the phone, went running down the stairs so fast that she slipped on several, to the kitchen where he still had the phone in his hand. She was so mad and hurt, thinking how long has this been going on to get to this level, that she tore



the whole phone out of the wall and started beating it on the kitchen counter. "You sick son of a bitch! You were not only lying to me but to her." Lynn went running out of the house to go to the courthouse to go through with what she had started. Her mood had turned to anger as to how stupid she was. Driving off in a fury to escape to not even have to look at him now.

At the courthouse William showed up and the judge told him Lynn was the one who could stay in the house because of the children and he would have to leave. Lynn then told the judge that she was leaving for good and William could have it. What happened next was unbelievable! Here was Lynn going through all of this turmoil and after court her attorney stopped her and asked if she would go to Jamaica with him. Lynn almost had to laugh, even though the offer was a boost to her deflated ego. She wondered if she had "Stupid, take me and use me," written on her forehead? She told him, "No I could not do that, what would your wife say?" thinking he is no better than William is. Going back to the townhouse to finish packing, Lynn's children had gotten back from the weekend visit out of town and she told them they were leaving, William would not give up. He brought pizzas by and the next morning when they were to leave there was a dozen red roses on the hood of Lynn's car with a note, "I love you, please don't leave." The children and Lynn did leave to go back to Lynn's hometown and she thought she would never go back to him, but there William stood at her parent's front door the very next morning after they got there. Begging her to come back to him, after driving all night because she would not answer any of his telephone call. It took only two weeks of relentless perseverance for Lynn to finally agree to try again and move back. All the promises he made lasted all of two months.

# ESSAYS

## Breeding for Dummies

Sue Murray

Just for a moment, imagine you need a lobotomy. Your cousin, a top-notch machinist, has access to state-of-the-art drilling equipment, and his daughter is a first-year med student. Good enough? Excuse the pun, but this is a no-brainer. When it comes to life and safety, only a fully educated, experienced, professional surgeon has the right qualifications.

Surveys reveal that one of the common reasons pet owners neglect to spay or neuter their pet is because they want to breed it. In their desire to immortalize Fido or Fluffy's sweet personality (or to make a few bucks), engineers, administrators, welders, and even brain surgeons convince themselves that they are qualified to breed animals.

There are plenty of good professional breeders around. Although a college education is not required to become one, many do hold degrees in animal science or biology and have completed coursework in anatomy, physiology, genetics, biotechnology, animal health, nutrition, reproduction and behavior. They've made it their life's work to be familiar with standards of conformation, physical, and behavioral traits, and seemingly unimportant details such as coat cuts. Their focus is on the continuing development and selective improvement of animal populations. In fact, the AKC's motto for responsible purebred breeding is "Breed to Improve."

Tell me, prospective breeder, is that your objective? Are you an expert on the breed you intend to raise and sell? Do you know the breed's history and purpose? Can you recite bloodlines? Are you familiar with any particular health problems (physical and behavioral)? And most importantly, are you both willing and able to take back each puppy or kitten for the duration of their lives if necessary?

Although the practice of breeding itself is somewhat touchy in today's exploding pet population, it is true chaos in the hands of part-time, backyard propagators who intentionally choose to add "mixes" to an already staggering problem. The statistics bear repeating. According to the Bissell Pet Foundation, which addresses the growing problem of displaced, unwanted and homeless animals, five out of 10 dogs and seven out of 10 cats in shelters are destroyed yearly in the U.S. because there is no one to adopt them. The ASPCA asserts that 40 percent of pets surrendered to a shelter (more than any other source) are acquired from friends. One of the top 10 reasons for relinquishing pets is that the "breeder" couldn't find homes for them.

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of amateur breeding is that the rookie has absolutely no clue as to the animal's behavioral genetics. "Purebred" does not mean an animal is a good breeding candidate. Laypersons fail to consider that if their pet had been a good specimen, the breeder would have kept it for that purpose. Nancy Kerns, a blogger for the Whole Dog Journal, says it best: "...people buy or adopt these 'registered' pups when they are darling, and their defects are not yet apparent...and many, many of them wind up euthanized in shelters and vet clinics all over the country." Alexandra Semyonova, a dog behaviorist, comments, "Just as we cannot make a dog into something the dog has no genetic capacity to be, we cannot prevent a dog from being what the dog is genetically predisposed to be." And, "The heritability of abnormal aggression in certain breeds of dogs can no longer be denied...These dogs will seek opportunities to execute the behaviors they have been bred for. Because these behaviors are internally motivated and rewarded...Learning and socialization do not prevent these dogs' innate behaviors from appearing." Responsible breeding involves more than just getting a male and female together, and responsible breeders are not the ones handing out puppies to their friends or standing outside the flea market with a box of kittens.

So, for those accountants and waitresses who still think it's a good idea to breed their dog or cat, please contact your cousin. You need a lobotomy.

## Standing in Line and Standing in Need

Jessie Crockett



In today's society, we find we are standing in line more than ever. We stand daily for personal and business reasons. The age of high technology has not changed out standing in line.

There are certain times when we must stand in line for long periods of time. Near a holiday or a special sale for a new item will draw people who come early prepared to stand in line.

While we are standing in any line we also stand in need of some important things. Much patience, courtesy, strength, self-control, are essential as people tend to become short-tempered and angry.

These intangibles are needed when the lines are long and the waiting seems endless. At some time in our lives, we will probably have to stand in long lines for some reason or another. Using the mentioned intangibles can make our stand easier and have an important effect on our lives as well as the lives of others.

## THE BOOK

Helen Walker Webb



For over 75 years, I had known about the book written in 1909 by Livia Poffenbarger, my Uncle Perry's mother. A stack of about fifteen unsold copies had been in various corners of Aunt Helen and Uncle Perry's basement. The books' final resting place was in the basement fruit closet. In 2004 Aunt Helen, the last family member of that generation, died. When her estate was being settled, I asked for a copy; brought it home, put it on the top shelf of my bookcase and never read it.

Livia Poffenbarger fervidly believed the first battle of the American Revolution was fought at Point Pleasant, West Virginia. That certainly is not what the history books taught.

Recently I was at a writers' workshop. One of the presenters distributed several handouts and began by reading from one of them. I couldn't find the place from which he was reading; so I gave up looking and decided to just listen. Then he read something about the Silver Bridge collapsing. I knew about that bridge! Uncle Perry had been a frustrated engineering student turned lawyer and had built an exact replica of the Silver Bridge which he used in a law suit to prove the bridge was not constructed properly. That model was a prized possession and had a place of honor in his sunroom.

Now I was intently listening to the presenter. After several more paragraphs, came a statement about a monument to the Battle of Point Pleasant..."the first battle of the American Revolution." I could hardly contain myself. Here I was, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina hearing about a monument to the Battle of Point Pleasant and I had a book about the battle. After the workshop was over, I talked with Randell Jones about Uncle Perry's bridge and Mrs. Poffenbarger's book. He knew all about Mrs. Poffenbarger and wanted to see the book. He gave me his card.

Driving home, I wondered if last summer I had put the book with several others to be sold.

Thankfully, I had not. It was on the top book shelf. Immediately I e-mailed Randell Jones that I indeed had the book. In his reply e-mail he sent a picture of a marker honoring Mrs.

Poffenbarger. Then I sat down and began reading the book. The twelve hour battle which occurred on October 10, 1774, was between colonial troops from Virginia and the Confederacy of Indian Nations led by Chief Cornstalk of the Shawnee Nation. It's been a long time since I've heard of Chief Cornstalk. After reading the book, I read the seven folded yellowed pages of information which someone had placed in the book. There I learned a copy of the book had been placed in the capstone of the battle monument which was dedicated October 9, 1909.

Livia Poffenbarger was a historian, the owner/editor of the Point Pleasant State Gazette, and was politically active in the Republican Party as well as the women's Right to Vote movement in West Virginia. She also founded the Point Pleasant Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. On the title page of THE BATTLE OF POINT PLEASANT, Mrs. Poffenbarger has listed her name as Mrs. Livia Nye Simpson-Poffenbarger. I find it interesting that in 1909 women were hyphenating their maiden and married last names. She died in 1937.

When I think of that stack of books on the floor in the corner of Aunt Helen's fruit closet, I wonder why I was never told of the fascinating story it held or of its author. I remember Aunt Helen saying rather disparagingly: "Uncle Perry's mother thought the Battle of Point Pleasant was the first battle of the American Revolution." I guess Aunt Helen either didn't like Livia Poffenbarger or she believed the history books.



## Presidential Qualities

Bill Gramley



I have paid fairly close attention to the demeanor and actions of President Donald Trump during his first year in office, 2017. I have kept a file of clippings related to Mr. Trump and I have read many of the columns and letters-to-the-editor about him both favorable and unfavorable printed in The Winston-Salem Journal and a few other periodicals. While I have been both a Republican and a Democrat in my life, my main concern at this point in time is about the qualities of this President.

I have also written two letters-to-the-editor of the Journal in 2017 because a couple of his actions struck a sour note with me. I didn't like the way the President used a National Prayer Breakfast to say we ought to pray for Arnold Schwarzenegger because he wasn't doing as good a job with a certain TV program as he had done when he was the star of it. To bring this topic up at a prayer breakfast did not seem appropriate to me and sounded like an effort to aggrandize himself. That isn't what prayer is about, especially when I think about the time Jesus noted how a certain Pharisee touted his own greatness compared to a lowly publican. The prayer for mercy uttered at a distance from the Temple by the publican was heard by God and the man went home justified whereas the demeaning comments of the Pharisee were a misuse of prayer. In addition, Mr. Trump has touted his unique knowledge or relationship toward many subjects and topics. He said, among other grandiose statements such things as, "Nobody loves the Bible better than me," and, "There's nobody that respects women more than I do." (Actually if he read the Bible, he would note that God's truth challenges greed, power, and idolatry, but I suspect he would probably say that it, too, is fake news. And, so far as women are concerned, he has been a sexual predator of women and often disrespects them.) I think Mr. Trump is egotistical.

In my second letter I objected to the way the President lambasted some professional athletes because they chose to kneel or in some way disregard the usual hand-over-heart standing posture that people take when the National Anthem is played before games. He called one of the protesters “a son of a bitch.” I believe citizens of all classifications have a right to protest faults in our country because it usually takes protests to bring about changes for the better. I think of Rosa Parks who refused to sit in the back of the bus when the laws of that era really were meant to keep the races separate and unequal. These athletes were continuing the effort to change police tactics when at times blacks are shot when such actions were not necessary. They, and other protesters, believe that “black lives matter.” President Trump's reaction to these signs representing the ongoing struggle to make America just seemed like an effort to curtail protest and the civil rights that our Constitution permits. I believe he is intolerant.

Conditions in America may not be as terrifying as the situation was in Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 40s when Dietrick Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church in the Barmen Declaration spoke out against what Hitler was doing that ultimately led to the persecution, imprisonment, and execution of millions of Jews, gypsies, and handicapped persons. And we may not live with the terrors and harsh restrictions of Apartheid that put Nelson Mandela in prison because he protested this system. The belief that the white or Aryan race is superior to other races was behind both these forms of terrorism in Germany and South Africa. Eventually, by war in one case and by grass roots organization and protests in the other, those policies and practices were ended. But President Trump in the aftermath of the march in Charlottesville, VA where neo-Nazi's and White Supremacists showed how violent and hateful they are, failed to condemn those groups. His support of Hispanic-hater sheriff Arpaio of Arizona (whose

illegalities he commuted) and the sexually abusive and court-order defying U.S. Senate candidate Joe Moore of Alabama makes me conclude that Mr. Trump is a racist.

Quite often President Trump attacks those who question his actions and his Executive Orders. Rather than say that he disagrees with those who oppose his decisions and present reasons why he takes the stands he takes, he makes personal attacks or derogatory snipes about them. He has consistently claimed that most reports and views that question his decisions are “fake news.” He uses Twitter almost daily to attack his opponents. His barbs do not enhance him and the office he holds, and his method and manners exude hatred.

Related to this is the fact that the President simply tells lies, beginning with the statement that the crowd at his inauguration was the largest ever. A fact-checking organization reported late in 2017 that something over 350 of his statements during the year were false, which requires the public to stay awake and leads to a lack of trust in him and in anything he says. His usual rebuttal is to bounce the truth away from himself and to point out what others have done rather than correct his statements. I can't recall any heart-felt apology he has offered for his words or deeds. This refusal to be honest is certainly a negative quality in a President. He lacks integrity.

Some people praise Mr. Trump for his shoot-from-the-hip spirit, his maverick style in which he unilaterally decides to withdraw the United States from international treaties and other friendly forms of cooperation. He clearly does not follow traditional patterns of Presidential decorum for the most part and truly believes he can do whatever he wants to do without restrictions. Some aspects of his life and routine really don't matter, but his habit of “firing” people as he did earlier on a TV program has continued into his Presidency. He is often childish and petulant.

When I look at him, I never see him smile. He apparently never laughs, at least not in public, and he has a rather defensive look and he is quite ready to denounce leaders of his own party, federal judges, or leaders of other nations, even those who have been traditional allies of the United States. He acts like a bully and has pushed at least one prominent person out of his way so that he could be front and center for a photo opportunity. He likes to be the focal point. Once he had his Cabinet take turns going around the room and testify to how much they like serving him. (I thought of that well-known hymn, "How Great Thou Art," when he did this, although I think that hymn was intended for someone else.) He is clearly narcissistic.

Another thing that bothers me about Mr. Trump is the way he announces what the punishment ought to be for some persons who have been accused of a crime. He seems to be taking over the role of the judicial branch of our government. To do such a thing is to move our country closer to an autocracy and away from democracy which is, by the way, a government by the people and for the people, as Abraham Lincoln once put it. And I am one of those people who believes that freedom of speech and assembly and freedom of the press are absolutes.

I have read the views of some writers and journalists who like and support Mr. Trump. I even corresponded with one of them and said that I think the morality of a President is extremely basic and important. This writer responded that he personally ignores the character of the President and simply supports his policies and accomplishments. That's all that matters. Some of the other supporters make a similar point. And, while they didn't say it, I think they meant that he may be a scamp, but he is their scamp.

In summary, I believe Mr. Trump has dismantled the respect and dignity and honor that the office of President of the United States of America has long held. The qualities that he has displayed during his first year in office reflect the nature of his soul, and because he is always in

the spotlight, his attitude and his demeanor do not bode well for the future of the people and the decency and compassion of the nation's reputation that he was elected to represent and serve.

# POETRY

## Mysterium Tremendum

Peter C. Venable

When at the ocean's vast expanse,  
I could barely discern with glance,  
The mammoth storm front drowned the sun;  
Light sank into oblivion.

Two miles up the dark clouds came  
As lightning pierced with white-hot flame.

I pondered well mortality,  
Beneath the storm's ferocity.

But here is calm. I lay, looked deep  
At stars so wide, so far, so steep  
Their hidden planets spin, revolve.  
I felt my bookish mind dissolve.  
Our solar home? A little dot  
In this Milky Way's backyard plot.  
Between the stars, the coldest space  
Fills me with dread and chills my face.

I lay awestruck in awesome stare,  
Eternity gave awful glare.  
Submerged beneath colossal night,  
I am a ghost clothed in moonlight.  
The universe moves in ballet.  
My veiny hands, uplifted, pray  
Not to infinite space and death,  
But to Father's life-giving breath.

## Summer Nights

Judith Ruff



Where did those carefree summer nights go?

The ones growing up that gave us the freedom to stay out until the street lights came on

To rush eating supper so we could run out of the house with the screen doors slamming behind us

The smell and feel of fresh cut grass as you are running thru it with bare feet

The sounds of frogs croaking in the pond

The whisper of the leaves in the trees swaying in the breeze

Finding the flattest rock to play hopscotch with to win

Playing hide and seek with your friends at dusk

Catching lightning bugs in jars to take with you to bed to light up the room

The hot summer air so thick it was sometimes hard to breath

Riding your bike all over the neighborhood to meet up with friends

Then the street lights come on and you have to hurry home

Only to look forward to the next summer night



## Just A Military Cat

Charles H. Swanson, Ph.D.

He was not your ordinary cat,

He wouldn't deign to chase a single rat!

His eyes were wide and bright and nothing

Missed his steady sight.

He had six stripes upon his sleeves and

Tail erect when taking leave.

Enormous...Fur Covered Gentle Paws

And when you'd pass, a gentle Claw

He was our Sergeant Major, true

And stood his post when day was through.

To us he loved and gave devotion,

But now he's had his last promotion.

Taps have sounded, soft and hushed,

He's crossed the bar: From Dust to Dust.

To him we give our last Salute

And bid a fond --But Sad--Adieu!

He was our Military Cat and all who loved him knew

His Memory will make us Smile as he sleeps

Forever

Neath the Morning Dew

Have You Ever Had a Love Like Mine?

Bill Gramley



I remember October in her daddy's woods years ago,  
so why not go walking among those amber trees  
and let the warm wind wave the oaks and sift the sunlight  
onto the moss and twigs beneath our feet? Why not? Why not?  
She and I did just that, hand-in-hand, easy, natural, lovely.  
Then we saw a beech tree by the branch and ran and carved  
our names upon its smooth gray skin, circled it with  
a heart, so smitten, knife folded, fingers kissed, tender touch,  
our journey engraved and firm, so firm, you know. You know.

You know.

The leaves are mostly gone now and it's a bit colder this autumn day  
and cloudy, too. And where's that tree?  
There, there it is! Our names? Where? Where are they?  
Oh, yes, I see them up higher, and deeper, too, kind of gnarled and  
burnished like old silverware they are. Still there! Still. Still.

Have you ever had a love like mine, etched with passion on

a silly old tree? Have you? Have you?

I was just trying to capture her laughter, her love, her October eyes,  
and if she were here, surely she would kiss my fingers again. Surely.

Surely. Surely.

## Remembering

Deborah Streeter

Partner dancing...hmm,

I can remember going to a dance, of holding hands and embracing each other.

This style has been going on for centuries.

Yeah, the man leads and woman follows.

Couples did the two-step, the salsa, swing, ballroom, jitterbug, and the rock & roll groove, etc.

Now the pleasure of dancing in the arms of a man is gone.

What has happened to our society?

I want to dance with somebody and not with a bunch of women.

The dance craze is now populated by women.

They are on the dance floor doing the line dance, Cupid Shuffle and the good old Electric Slide.

The Electric Slide was formed to give ladies a chance to dance if they did not have a partner.

Now men are not available.

Men on the sideline holding up the wall, watching females get their boogie on.

There's only so much line dancing women can do.

Can we please get the men back on the dance floor?

## COLOR THE HEART

Bill Pfefferkorn

And the sun goes down driving a stake through the black heart of Andrew Jackson from

Homeland by W S. Merwin

Andrew Jackson at 13 fought the British, was captured,  
slashed and scarred for refusing to polish  
the British officer's boots. An orphan at 14, he went  
to tobacco field school, taught school, studied  
law near Yadkin River and moved West.

Admitted to Bar and handled land claims and assault  
and battery cases in Tennessee.

Elected Senator and Judge. Acquired Hermitage  
Plantation and many slaves in 200 square foot cabins.

He supplied slaves with guns, knives and fishing gear  
for hunting and fishing. At times he paid  
slaves with monies and coins to shop at markets. He permitted  
slaves to be whipped for serious offenses.

As U. S. Major General he defeated the British troops  
at New Orleans; led U. S. troops and Cherokee,  
Choctaw and Lower Creek warriors, Sam Houston and David  
Crockett against Red Stick warriors who had killed settlers.

His troops attacked Seminoles in Florida in response  
to their attack on settlers. His forces

captured Pensacola, deposed Spanish governor  
and caused Spain to cede all of Florida to the United States.

Elected President in 1828, he negotiated treaties  
with 70 tribes to trade their South land  
for land in Oklahoma. He stopped South Carolina's attempt  
to secede from the Union. He adopted two Indians  
and was guardian for eight other children.

He lived his last 39 years with a musket ball  
in his chest from an arranged combat engagement  
he won against a prominent dueler who defamed  
his beloved wife, Rachel.

In 1970 and 2015, groups divided on the question  
of whether Jackson was guilty  
of genocide in Indian removal or paternalism toward tribes.

Professor Zinn argued that Jackson was "exterminator of Indians"  
while Professor Wilentz answered that paternalism  
drove Jackson, "not genocide."

So how should we color the heart of such a complicated  
aggressive and historic figure?

## Secrets

Rosemary Graham

They say you're as sick as your secrets so here's some I am letting out. When I am alone, I do this a lot, I pray, I cry Dear Lord, let the real me come out

Ever since I was a little girl I wondered what I was put here for. I couldn't comprehend the mental, the physical or sexual abuse, and at some point, I felt I couldn't take it anymore

Ashamed to say my first attempt to end my life was at the age of eight and there were so many times there after remembering the last time, the doctor telling me ten minutes later would have been too late

Over the years I did everything to be expected only to realize, I set myself up only to be more used and more neglected

You see everyone comes with an agenda, rarely do you find people who are genuine, all they want to do is control and manipulate your mind and before you know it, it's medicating time

Over and over the cycle continued until in desperation I decided to surrender. I took that first step to my Lord and He took so many back. As a result, I am gaining insight into my personality, I am processing the reality, which will prepare me for new and future possibilities.



## Silver Moments

Renee Butner



Silver was the note of delight in the laugh  
of the baby Jesus as were the nails used in his  
hands and feet a mere thirty-three years  
later

Silver winged the angel of death swooped  
throughout Europe amassing millions of  
plague victims under her skirts as she  
soared

Silver is the sheen on glorious paintings  
Michelangelo Raphael Da Vinci wondrous to  
behold a wealth of talent for which the world is  
gratified

A shining needle of silver triumphed time and  
again its tiny piercing large as a boot stomping  
out smallpox typhoid plague a beacon of hope for  
humanity

Tears left silver tracks down the faces of  
countless Native Americans displaced from beloved  
land betrayed as they signed treaty after  
treaty

A bullet of terrible silver felled Abraham Lincoln  
abolisher of slavery greatest of presidents man of  
large heart while attending a play on Good  
Friday

Streams of silver water poured from a pump as  
Annie spelled w-a-t-e-r into young Helen Keller's

hand over and over until at last comprehension  
dawned

Auschwitz lay beneath a silver coating of ash  
drifting to the sky covering the grass layered on  
the roofs of each building trembling in the survivor's  
minds

Silver is the trail threading through the sky at the  
tail of the spacecraft launched from earth into the far  
atmosphere necks craning in awe and excitement to  
behold

Silver is the poem echoing in your bones raising  
the hairs on the back of your neck beating in  
time with your pulse drifting into your  
dreams

Life is not forever

Scott Hooper

We should

(For one night)

Drink in the Champaign

And contemplate the moonlight

Take in the sparkle

Of small lights

And think about bubbles.

Dream away the world and its melancholy

Find the secret

Born in the heart of a flower

Look for the stars that guards our hearts

Look for love and forget our past

Listen to the music, let it be our soul

For life is too short

And this will not last forever.

Dance away the night

In all out finery

Bring on the diamonds

Bring on the gold

Or dance in nothing at all!

Music or no

It makes not a difference

Just dance the midnight dance

For this day is too short

And this life will not last forever.

We should

(For one night)

Drink in the Champaign

And contemplate the moonlight

Take in the sparkle

Of small lights

And think about bubbles.

Dream away the world and its melancholy

Find the secret

Born in the heart of a flower

Look for the stars that guards our hearts

Look for love and forget our past

Listen to the music, let it be our soul

For life is too short

And this will not last forever.

Dance away the night

In all out finery

Bring on the diamonds

Bring on the gold

Or dance in nothing at all!

Music or no

It makes not a difference

Just dance the midnight dance

For this day is too short

And this life will not last forever.

# **FAVORITE MOMENTS**

## My Favorite Memory: Boy Scouts

Bill Gramley



I was 11 years old and wanted to go on an overnight hike with my older brother, Hugh, and the Scouts from Troop 16 where we lived in Bethlehem, PA. They were going to the Catskill Mountains in New York State, but you had to be 12 to join the Scouts. I begged my parents to let me go and they said I could, so we got permission for me to go. This was just after World War II and we had Army surplus sleeping bags, back packs, and cooking kits. I also happened to have a pair of boots suitable for hiking and I rubbed them with Neatsfoot waterproofing grease to make them softer, not knowing that we might also get into some rain.

But we did get into a rainstorm as we began to climb up Thunder Mountain that Friday night. Our fine and stalwart Scoutmaster, Ed C. Laubach, was struggling as we got part way up, so my brother, a strong ninth-grader, carried his pack. We got to the top, soaking wet, fixed some supper in the dark somehow and settled into a wooden lean-to for the chilly night.

In the damp and foggy morning we tried to get a fire going to dry our clothes and make some bacon and eggs and pancakes or something like that. It was very smokey and my eyes watered, but somehow we got enough heat to make a meal, although our wet clothes stayed pretty wet. Then we sat on some nearby rocks and our Scoutmaster read the Sermon on the Mount which impressed me a good bit since I knew of Jesus from my Sunday school classes and thought this was so appropriate for where we were.

Our Scoutmaster liked to go camping quite often and we were glad to go along. Once we went to the New Jersey coast, slept on the sand (I remember one guy digging in the sand and the sound carried a goodly distance, enough to disturb our sleep!), and then in the morning we got on

a deep-sea fishing boat. I had had donuts and orange juice for breakfast and it wasn't long before I got seasick and upchucked my meal into the ocean over the railing. We caught some mackerel and my brother knew how to clean them, put them in an ice bucket and take them home for Mom to fry a day or so later.

Another hike was in the winter and we went to a place called Deep Lake near Tannersville., PA. Even though I had a goose down sleeping bag, I can still remember how I balled myself up inside it to try and get warm. I was miserable. I hate the cold. The ice on the lake was 10 inches thick and we slid around on it and had a good time sliding along or throwing snowballs.

Then there was the time we went camping at Lake Wallenpaupack so we could practice our cooking to earn our cooking merit badges. I can still see the large number "16" we pasted onto a rock with the biscuit batter that somehow was too thick and didn't turn out quite right for making biscuits. It's probably still there, hardened over time or fossilized. While we wanted to earn our badges, we felt consoled as we laughed at our folly and figured we could go again another weekend somewhere and do a better job with the batter.

On one of our hikes we basically ran out of water in our canteens and I recall licking rain drops off of bushes because I was so thirsty. Our Scoutmaster eventually showed us how to put Halazone tablets in whatever water we found so that it would be safe to drink. During my scouting years I learned a fair amount about first aid, got my swimming merit badge when I went to Scout camp for a week, learned how to steer and paddle a canoe, and make lanyards out of plastic strands. I also realized I was basically homesick, yet got through it all. When I got home from our hikes, I was always worn out and grungy and appreciated the blessings of getting into the bathtub and soaking in the hot water for as long as I could. So what is better than the balance



between certain discomforts of outdoor life and home-cooked meals that Mom always made for us, whether spaghetti or sauerkraut or good old French Fries? Hiking and camping are good, but so is home. I was always glad for both.

## The Pocketbook

Helen Walker Webb



Dressed in drab olive green crop pants and a new knit shirt of complementary colors, I was ready for grocery shopping. But the solid navy blue pocketbook trimmed in red would clash with my attire. One never knows whom you might meet in the grocery. I immediately thought of the pocketbook I had made long years ago. It was perfect: just the right size and color. The pocketbook is small to medium in size and rectangular in shape. Two wooden rods run through a casing at the top of the bag. Each end of the rods has an opening through which ribbons of material are threaded and tied. Although made of cotton material, this is a very strong bag and will hold all my pocketbook necessities.....cell phone, folding umbrella, rain scarf, change purse, check book, bridge book, sun glasses, keys, coupons and when necessary a small bottle of water and pack of crackers.

The outside of the pocketbook is khaki colored and the inside is lined with a tiny multi-colored print on a green background. This is a special pocketbook. It represents my best sewing. Its crowning glory is the hand painted green turtle on the front side. The happy turtle, strutting across green grass with his head high on his long neck and a bright yellow flower fluttering on a long stem extending from the brim of his hat, is a picture to behold!

Opal spent hours teaching me to sew. She had many talents. Her granddaughters delighted in the charming dresses she made for them as well as the doll clothes. Her oil paintings hang in several rooms of my house. She sang many a solo in the church choir. And so it was that I asked Opal to paint something on the plain khaki material I was going to use to make a pocketbook.

My heart skips a beat every time I carry that pocketbook because happy memories of Opal flood my mind. She never criticized me nor did she allow anyone to criticize me. She was always warm and loving as a grandmother. In times of need, she answered the call for help. She loved me as a daughter. She was my mother in law.

## FOOTBALL CAPTAIN'S FIRST ATTEMPT AT LOVE

Bill Pfefferkorn



Finally got a high school girlfriend.  
A brown-eyed girl from South Carolina  
Got to know each other in her basement playroom  
after the homecoming game  
when I was captain of the unbeaten team.

The parents of my new girlfriend required  
that she study in her bedroom every night.  
I climbed a poplar tree in her backyard,  
inched out on a limb to the sill of her window.  
With one foot on the limb and the other on the sill,  
I took her hands and she pulled me into her room.  
We worked on her homework and had  
quiet conversation about Myrtle Beach.

My successful climbing became a regular  
event until a nosy neighbor reported  
my ascent to her father. The next night  
as I had one foot on her window sill  
for my nightly visit, her father came  
around the corner of the house shouting,  
“What is the meaning of this?” I meekly answered,  
“Friendship?” He gave a sinister laugh!

I shimmied down the tree and ran  
for my life. She was never able  
to see me again.

He thought!