

A low-angle photograph looking up at several trees with dark trunks and branches. The leaves are in various stages of yellowing, suggesting autumn. The sky is a clear, vibrant blue. The text is overlaid on the image in a yellow, cursive font.

Voices and Visions

*The UCONN OLLI
Annual Review*

The UCONN OLLI Annual Review

Volume 2

August 18, 2012

Editorial Committee

The 2011-2012 OLLI Review Editorial Board

Bob Grady

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Jerry Joyell

Chuck Miceli

Sandi Noel

David Spinner

With special thanks to Brian Chapman, Director of OLLI, Rita Quinn, Assistant Director of OLLI, Nancy Via, President of OLLI and the OLLI Leadership Council for their support, guidance and encouragement.



Cover photograph by Sandi Noel

From the Editors

OLLI programs across the country annually publish journals of their student work and Waterbury UCONN OLLI claims its place in that larger arena. We are proud yet humbled that our OLLI Review is a continuing part of the OLLI family of annual publications. We would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge that this Review has its seeds in the many classrooms filled with enthusiastic learners and committed presenters. It is the “*voices*” of persons in those classes and the “*visions*” of what is seen through the artistic eye of students, that gives rise to the content of this publication.

This annual publication provides OLLI students a place to share their passions, stories, creativity, artistic talents and discoveries. As a place where our “*voices*” and “*visions*” are highlighted and shared, this publication demonstrates the aim of OLLI—learning for the joy of learning, encouraging creative expression, and keeping in touch with a larger world.

The Editorial Board is continually at work. As one academic season closes, another begins with the anticipation of new creativity by OLLI students and the request for submissions repeats itself. The response to our call for submissions for the Fall2011—Spring2012 season was heartening! Your willingness to share your passions inspires and motives us to commit ourselves to this second annual OLLI Review. In compiling this publication, we continue to build and expand upon the foundation presented by our first annual publication in 2011. We also draw from our own backgrounds as presenters, teachers, writers, and students. We review with admiration the prose, poetry, artwork and photographs that were submitted.

It has been a wonderful undertaking to shape this second volume of *Voices and Visions*, the UCONN OLLI Annual Review 2012. We thank every contributor, and hope you will enjoy reading this edition and that it will inspire and delight you.

The Editorial Board
August 2012

From the Director

It should be the goal of any quality, enriching learning program to build a sustainable foundation for a long term future. It gives me and many others a great sense of reward to witness OLLI at UConn demonstrating its commitment to intellectual activities and creative pursuits through ongoing projects. *Voices and Visions* is a clear example of the commitment of our members toward the goals of deepening, recording, and sharing the voices and visual expressions of older adults in this learning community. To preserve these expressions, it is noteworthy every edition of *Voices and Visions* will be placed in the archives of the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center as part of the University archives. The Editorial Board is committed to providing a special and honorable place to feature the creative works of members that are fueled by rich life experience, passion, and discovery. I know that that Dr. William Pizzuto, Campus CEO, the leadership of this campus, and the whole OLLI family are proud of the dedication and meaningful effort put forth by every contributor and each Editorial Board member. I am personally humbled by the zest for learning and the commitment to service demonstrated by so many OLLI members. Thank you all for engaging in this wholly worthwhile effort—you are enriching lives, archiving human experiences, and changing the community! Wishing everyone meaningful journeys in learning!

Brian G. Chapman, Ed.D., Director, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Connecticut
August, 2012

From the President

Another OLLI Review success story awaits us in the unfolding of the pages to this anticipated second volume. On behalf of the Leadership Council and entire membership of our OLLI community I offer congratulations and a sincere thank you to all of the people who had a role in bringing forth this edition. I know it has been a labor of love for each and every one who has worked on this publication. Let me assure you that your readership will cherish the fruits of your labor and join me in congratulating you, wishing you continued successes, and thanking you for this quality OLLI Review.

Nancy Via, President of OLLI/Waterbury

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Voices



ONE DAY OF JOY

Spring has sprung.

Colors bloom around us -
Lime green newly-born leaves unfurl,
Pink cherry blossoms wink at us,
White petals sail from dogwood trees
Under the robin egg blue sky above us.

The yolk- like sun
Warms our day.
Powder puff cotton balls of clouds
Float in the distance.

Multicolored tulips lining the walkway
Stand at attention for all to notice.
Purple hyacinths, crocuses and sun-kissed
Daffodils bring smiles to our faces.

People walk with a renewed energy,
Children run to meet the day with enthusiasm.

Yes, spring has sprung.

Thank Heaven!

~ **Marjorie Fitzgerald**

News today has left me floating
In the void of space and time.
Friendship, love and compassion
consume my existence
My professional life-long companion
A friend, a partner, a soul mate
Reports devastating news,
Diagnosed by pursuing foreboding signs and symptoms.
The diagnosis is in the realm of his specific expertise;
An irony too painful to bear.
I'm drawn into the whirlpool of angst
Searching for a straw of hope.
I profess the dictum "take one day at a time,"
And believe that the elixir of living is in the moment.
Our medical lives and experience were interdependent,
A source of mutual comfort and security.
I shudder as the earth gate closes between us.
Extending my hand,
I yearn for perpetuation of our spiritual and emotional connection.
.
With this unpleasant news, past and present encounters
Are evolving into memories
First recalled by both of us
But soon to be recalled only by me.
As a friend I can ease his loneliness
By absorbing some of his emotions through increased sympathetic
contact.
Enhanced connectivity is a source of beauty in life,
Expanding both of our spiritual existences.
Emotional connections developed during our lifetime
Are the spiritual substance of the meaning of life.
Person to person caring and love
Transcend all other worldly concerns.
Having experienced this friendship and interdependency
Aggravates my heartfelt pain today yet enhances the pleasure
Of both of our times on earth.

~ Ira Mickenberg.

April 2, 2012 A Birthday

A bright blue sky, a sunny day
Temperate temperature, the wind caressing my face
My muscles contract, I spread loam
An exquisite existence, my heaven on earth.

But I do not exist alone
I have casual and close connections
That through the years have
Enhanced my being.

Today, this very day
This gorgeous clear sunny day
My close friend has a birthday this day
And for the occasion he is to receive a Hickman catheter.

A catheter to give venous access for chemotherapy
That therapy is sure to devastate his physical being
If he is fortunate.
Tolerance of this form of therapy will give hope for cure
Intolerance means acceptance of the last stage of life.

I exist with these discrepancies
Life is a checkerboard of red and black squares.
Thoughts of my work outdoors and it's a red day
Thoughts of my friend's ordeal and it is a black day.

Thoughts oscillate and our affect responds.
Life one moment is secure and serene
Despite repressed thoughts of global inequities and suffering.
Now human suffering confronts me starkly,
Before I've summoned the resources to soften the pain.

The process of acceptance is slow to evolve.
Put aside passive lamentations and prayers
Promulgate active interest, compassion and offers of help
To ease suffering as we both adapt to the new reality.

Everyday is a new life for each of us
Bringing unanticipated joy and sorrow
Live the emotions of today with a keen awareness
While suppressing the cares and worries of tomorrow.

~ Ira Mickenberg

June 1, 2012

The Day of Reckoning

The shades are drawn.
I slide open the glass hospital room door.
His eyelids are closed.
The blanket is drawn up to his neck.
His arms rest on pillows
No tubes are present.
“Comfort measures” are in place.

His spouse’s face is drawn
She is concerned, fearful yet determined
To carry out his wishes of “no heroics”.
Earlier today she was rewarded
He opened his eyes and recognized her and their daughters,
And told them that he loved them.
All are experiencing the fruits of comfort measures.

I can’t believe it.
I can’t bear it.
I’m content that he has stayed in control
And is having his ultimate wishes met.
I shake him, shout at him.
He recognizes me, smiles and greets me.
His eyes close again.
Respirations are shallow.
I notice global alopecia of recent onset.
Beads of perspiration moisten his scalp.

A piece of my professional ego hangs in suspense,
For we practiced medicine together during our adult lives.
We supported each other when caring for dying patients.
We supported each other regarding ambiguous decisions.
He now faces his demise
With a loving supportive family.
I squeeze his hand
Letting him know that I'll carry on
And remain a part of his global imprint.

Just ten weeks ago he was vibrant,
Looking forward toward his 75th birthday.
Talking at our monthly breakfasts
About failing retirement
By helping others on local boards, on committees and
As the CEO of a national river network.
He impacted positively on everyone he met.
He reveled at the thought of helping others.

Now as I share his last moments
I remember those breakfasts and his western omelets.
I remember his concern at answering his 200 daily e-mails
And attending three daily meetings.
I remember his evanescent goal of slowing down.
Most importantly at those monthly breakfasts
He affirmed that he never regretted devoting his life to others.

The greatest blessing after a lifetime of effort
Is looking back,
Reviewing the highs and lows
And saying "I have no regrets".
His self satisfaction assures all of us who care.
He will rest in peace.

~ Ira Mickenberg.

HEMINWAY POND

Gray, white and black,
The geese, like majestic sailing ships,
Move gracefully
Over the waters
Of Heminway Pond.

Little ducklings,
Shooed by Mama,
Trail vees on the surface
As they scoot away
From the big gray ones.

The sandbar,
Growing larger every year,
Serves as shelter
To the many denizens
Of the peaceful pond.

Raccoons, deer and turtles,
White cranes, black buzzards, and frogs
Populate the edges.
Even a fox comes
To visit-or to hunt!

Nature survives
And prospers
Despite the intrusion
Of the town
Surrounding the pond.

~ **Bob Grady**

MARRIAGE

Marriage is "I do" and then wondering, "what have I done?"
Marriage is loving your husband.
Marriage is hating your husband.
Marriage is losing your freedom.
Marriage is finding a new kind of freedom through love and trust.
Marriage is an institution in which you sometimes feel
institutionalized.
Marriage is bringing home the bacon and having *him* cook it.
Marriage is double, queen, or king-size beds....
and a warm body next to you in whatever size you choose.
Marriage is not winning or losing, but playing the game with
honor.
Marriage is painful and frustrating, but also fun and exciting.
Marriage is never boring.
Marriage is being so close to someone there's nothing between
you but skin.
Marriage is hard work.
Marriage is hard.
Marriage is.

~ **Kathe Reimold**



AUTUMN IN NEW ENGLAND

Autumn - a splendor of color
Red, brown, golden leaves
Making a breathtaking entrance

Crispness in the air
Some warmth, some stillness,
Trees disguised as overdressed Indians
Magnificent colors setting the world afire -

A sensational temptation to any artist's canvas.

~ Pinky Gelada

TINY MIRACLE

Whispering your name, thanking God for your presence,
Tiny cherub face, beautiful rosebud smile,
A countenance suitable to be called Prince.

Wondering what's to become of this miracle from God -
Will you be gifted, what will be your talents?
To whom will you utter your first word?
When will you take your first step?
Which will be your favorite nursery rhyme?
And what bird will you first hear sing?

So many dreams I yearn to share with you -
Drifting into the depths of sleep I whisper,
Christopher, my tiny grandson - I love you.

~ Pinky Gelada

ODE TO AN AUDACIOUS TUBER

Oh, Truculent Tuber,
I watch as you send forth your tenacious tendrils
across the garden path, searching out your prey.
You rumbled roots in the rhubarb bed, ravaged
the raspberries clinging to their vines, tortured
the tender tomatoes trembling on their trellises.

Is it not enough that you have mulch, fertilizer and water?
Do you have to devastate the delicate delphiniums dancing in the
sun?

The cabbages saw you coming and gathered up their skirts lest
you plunder them, too.

The carrots were corrupted by your corpulent,
cantankerous, curvaceous, curling vines.

The lettuce was devastated by your nightly demonic,
deadly nightshade debauchery.

Your cousin, the eggplant, had its ego engulfed in an
eddy of your eccentric ecstasy.

The zucchini and crookneck saw you coming, and
failed in their attempt to zigzag across the path.

The dandelions roared their retaliation, but you ignored
them, rambling on in your search for range land.

Let it be known, dear Tenacious Tuber,
that I am not intimidated by your reaching, ruminating,
ravaging and rabble-rousing.

I shall revel in my own retaliation.

You shall be my dinner, drenched in melted butter,
sour cream and chives.

~ Nancy Whitney

A SPECIAL ALPHABET POEM ~ An Abecedarian

Archibald Aloysius Anteaters best friend is Zak Zebra
Because he could Yowl at the moon
Causing Xanadu denizens to zigzag in terror while they
Drank their Warm Weak tea and laughed in delight.
Emmaline Ermine, Voluptuous in her Velvet Vest,
Flaunted her talents as she rode her Unicycle
Gathering Groups of Tom's around her, all
Happy to Stay round Serving her every need.
Iolante Raced for the door, as
Jared, unusually Quiet and Quaint in his uniform
Kissed her Passionately on her neck.
Last October they Opened a bottle of
Merlot they had saved and Negotiated a wedding date.
Nasturtiums will make a Marvelous Madcap bouquet.
Ophelia wants to make Lavender Lollipops for their reception.
Percival, Please Pass the Kaleidoscope, asked
Quentin, as he tried to contain his Jangled, Jumping bean nerves.
Rachael giggles as their Intertwined fingers touch, and
Sadie, Hiding behind her book, watches them, Humming to Herself.
Tomorrow there is to be a Grand Gallop through the Glen
Unless, of course, Fergus Forgot to send out the invitations!
Vats of Elegant, Expensive comestibles will be consumed
Without a Doubt! Without a Dot of care.
X-citement was bubbling like a Cauldron.
Young Mr. Crane was Bursting with Bravado, expecting his
Zenith star to be Accepted by the Aristocracy.

~ Nancy Whitney

AFTER THE STORM

Tumbled trees
Haphazardly cover
The receding beach.
Pelicans veering the blue skies
Look down
On the vanishing sands.
Palms, perched precariously
On the besieged banks,
Listen to the wild winds
Lashing the foam-tipped waves
As they crunch the white sand,
Eating away the doomed dunes.

Change is inevitable.

Time and tide
Stop for no one.

~ Bob Grady



SNOWFLAKES

Incredible designs of lace
Never conceived by Belgian artisans
Suddenly appear
On my winter windows.

~ **Ann C. Hodges**

OBITUARY

When I am dead please do not say
"She was an avid gardener."
Say instead
"The smell of the earth in springtime
Brought her joy transcendent."

~ **Ann C. Hodges**

ROYALTY

Queen Ann's lace in a concrete crack,
Tossing her tiara of delight
With hothouse disdain.

~ **Ann C. Hodges**

WITHOUT WARNING

Age, that ancient kleptomaniac, eases slippery fingers
deep into our pockets, snatches out nuggets
of conversation - names, dates, relatives' whereabouts,
the treasured memory of a lover's cheek in moonlight.

We dangle, exposed, indignant at the intrusion.
Absurd not to recall last night's movie, our granddaughter's
name. Overnight, it seems, svelte, Revlon-lipped women
and their tanned, muscled men evaporate into the ether
like outworn Hollywood stars,

reappearing as puffier people with wider waists,
blotchy hairlines, sagging upper arm flesh.
Legs and thighs become maps in which spidery blue
tributaries flow aimlessly about.

With Grinch-like fervor the kleptomaniac raids our personas,
stripping us of the familiar - a knee, hip, body hair, a job,
often a home, or a loved one - leaving us humor and wisdom
with which to rearrange our lives.

~Suzanne Plein

CHANGES

As

Beautiful as it was in Minnesota, he

Couldn't stay there forever. He moved east where he would soon be
Doing what he wanted most, writing poetry and music. He now was
working on something

Extraordinary, knowing that he must still put the

Finishing touches on what was to become a

Great harbinger of change sweeping the country, an

Inspirational masterpiece that in

Just a few weeks would define him as a

Kind of reluctant living

Legend whose protest music would soon be stored in the

Memory of a generation of Americans. He was to become

Nationally known after his humble beginnings at an

Open mic in a little known

Poetry coffee house where he would often form his ideas and read
his words

Questioning the establishment in his unique style of

Rhythm and rhyme which he was now using to write one particular
folk

Song that would go

Temporarily

Unnoticed but then would surge to the top of the charts because it
was

Very

Well written reflecting a depth of thought, a melancholy tone,
and an

Xquisite haunting theme of protest. The

Young artist whose name was Robert Allen

Zimmerman, would take the name Bob Dylan. The times, like his
name, they were a-changing!

~ Tom Melesky

GRAY

Is there a link between gray hair and gray matter in the brain?
The young say with age, on your IQ there is a big drain...
Seniors, unequivocally, reject this "old refrain."

With every gray hair, they believe, greater wisdom appears,
As gray matter then grows more rapidly between the ears...
Seniors and younger guys debated this over some cold beers.

The young said things they thought were wise - raised a glass and
yelled, "Three Cheers!
To the unimpressed seniors listening it soon became quite clear,
No wisdom emanated from still maturing cerebral hemispheres.

Then one senior winked his eye and said to all... "Forget it, I say!
We can't decide about our hair and wisdom today...
It's an area that is...way... too ...'Gray!'"

There was a pause, then roars of laughter as all got the word play.
Seniors slapped each other's backs, raised a glass, yelled,
 "Hip, hip, hooray!"
This gave them clout,
There was not doubt-
The seniors, yes, had won the day.

~ **Tom Melesky**

THE LOCKED DOOR

We still cannot unlock the veined
and blistered door
that leads into the room
where one day in June—
just as the roses spiraled into bloom—
you hanged yourself.

Sometime since that timeless day,
the heavy oaken door slammed shut.
The handle simply will not turn.
The pin seems atrophied, rusted in place;
the brass knob burns like fire
at the very touch.
More intense:
the grief that sears our hearts.

No matter how we try,
We are helpless against it.
Its merciless facade
mocks us with a lifetime
of accusations
and blame flaming beyond reality
or resolution.

We withdraw
into ourselves and down
the
stairs,
the skeletal remains
of a promise.

~ Phil Benevento

APPARITION

One morning just about a month ago
I spied her sitting at the kitchen table
in her stained brocaded robe,
a cascade of pink plastic curlers
tumbling down her head.

Of course, I knew that she was dead,
buried nearly fifteen years ago
beside my father and under
the watchful eye of the Blessed Mother.
And yet I beheld her sad blue eyes
tearing in the early light of day.

Since then I have caught glimpses of her
petting the cat, playing the piano,
staring forlornly at the family photos
gracing the mantle piece,
even rearranging the collection of cups
adorning the glass covered tea cart.

Just yesterday a package arrived,
sent anonymously,
addressed to her
in script both foreign
and
familiar.

~ Phil Benevento

SUNDAY'S AT NONNI'S HOUSE

On Sunday's we go to Nonni's house,
I always put on a pretty new blouse.
The ride over can be a bit long,
While we're in the car, we all sing songs.
Before you know it, we are there.
Nonni's out sitting on the stairs,
She's waiting for us to arrive,
Now that we're here, we all go inside.

Her Sunday dinners are just SOOOO good,
And I like the kids in her neighborhood.
Courtney lives across the way,
Sometimes she'll come out to play.-
My brother says he doesn't like girls.
He often pulls on Courtney's curls.
I think that's just because he likes her,
When she's around, his words, they slur.

Nonni says, "Dinner's on the stove."
We're all so happy that we drove
To see my Nonni, I love her so much.
I like all those tea cups in her old hutch.
We'll take some out and have some tea,
Nonni will always play pretend with me.
She has time to sit and to just be silly.
Is that sauce on the stove, or is it her chili?

"Nonni, what smells so good today?"
She's setting tea cups on her silver tray.
"Your favorite, my darling, pasta and meatballs."
As she says it, a tiny tea cup falls.
I move in quick, try to catch the cup,
But in no time at all, it's all broken up.
"Oh, SHOOP," is all she has to say,
"These old bones get clumsier every day!"

I stop, wondering just how old Nonni can be.
She doesn't look that old to me.
I get out the dust pan to help clean up
All the pieces of the broken cup.
When that's all done, we head on in,
To see what's cooking in Nonni's kitchen.
Her big wooden spoon stirs the pot,
"Careful," she says. "It's really hot."

Nonni and I, we set out the dishes.
She whispers to me, "Any special wishes?"
I tell her I want lots of ice cream for dessert.
She smiles, "A little extra ice cream NEVER hurts,"
She laughs, then gets down close to my ear,
"Quick, look outside, do you see the deer?"
I turn and look outside to see
A doe, over there, eating Nonni's pine tree.

We're laughing. Mom asks, "What's so funny?"
Nonni says, "Time to fill empty tummies,"
She winks at me and we find our chairs.
Mom's looking at us, with a funny stare,
"Spaghetti and meatballs!" my brother yells.
He ran in so fast, he almost fell.
Sundays at Nonni's, nothing is better
Than being with family, all together!

~ Denise Whelan

EARTHEN MINDSCAPE

Peeking out the window I see

Mounds of silken snow
Gently caress the earth
Blanketing new life waiting
To emerge.

Looking within I observe

Glimpses of velvety silence
Openly listening to a heart
Beating to a rhythm dancing
With time.

Tiny tendrils push their way
Through barren spots
Looking up breathing in
The slightest warmth.

Minute thoughts tiptoe
Between the gaps
Seeking recognition,
A small acceptance.

One life ends.
Another begins.
Seasons, ideas.
Similar yearnings.

~ Marie T Maag

MIRAGE

Old man sitting proudly, sitting sadly
Hoping the picture doesn't reveal his thoughts.
Never in his life has emotion been revealed.
All within shall remain his treasure, his pain.

The story of this line-etched face
Speaks of hard work, weather, tragedy.
Look closely. See pride, steadfastness,
A willingness to prevail, to accept.

He feels the arrows of life,
Sometimes tempered by joy.
For those to whom he has given existence,
For those who remember him, he waits.

~ Marie T, Maag

SMOKE

It was the beginning. . .
of a bright and moonlit night.
A town settled itself down
in the middle of a large river
in the northern end of a small Western country.
Trees surrounded the town, hemmed it in so
you couldn't see it from the outside.
It was winter and the snow
had begun to pile up and
drift here and there.
The sun slid down
behind the hill.
chill settled over the town.
Night slipped out
from under the trees
in the forest and crept
into the town.
The wind muffled itself
as it wandered through
the streets and alleys and
up and down the driveways.
Here and there
It tossed a snowflake
into the air,
but had to content itself
with freezing
the slightly melted puddles
left from the day's sunshine
Smoke from fireplaces
curled up in plumes like
giant rings,
hung on the air for a moment
and then banded
together to race up
and down all the
empty chimneys
in town.
The wind
would be busy later
It was a night
for
flying
things.

~ Nancy Whitney

THE DANCE OF THE TREES

Strong winds and heavy rains have shut down all Connecticut's power,
Hurricane Irene's ferocious weather has enticed the trees to dance for hours.

From my front seat I watch this magnificent show,
As the huge boughs of the trees quickly sway to and fro.

Towering trees costumed in leafy green are wildly moving in the wind,
The stage for this mighty storm's curtain call is set. Let the dance begin.

The oak and ash trees now choose to be partners, touching branches as they go,
Bowing curtseying to each other and dancing their own do-si-do.

Gracefully the boughs sway to an allemande left and a turn to the right in their dance,
Suddenly, a gust of wind sends them circling around in a spectacular prance.

Then the fluttering boughs begin to slow, as they bow to the left and to the right,
The dance of the trees has curtained. In the dark now, I'll say good-night.

~ Gail Sweet

Visions

Artwork from Collage Class: *Painting with Torn Paper*



Two pieces
By
Patricia Goode





**By
Rita Wolfe**

**By
Judy Cousens**





**Two pieces
By
Judy Cousens**





**Two pieces
By
Joyce Leahy**



**By
Betsy
Antonucci**

**Two pieces
by
Betsy Antonucci**





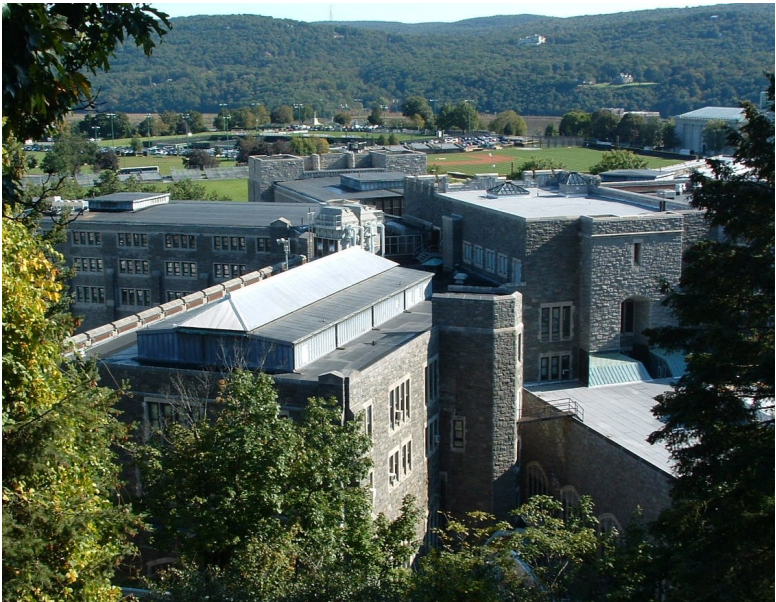
English Countryside
by
Judy Jaworski



Venice
by
Judy Jaworski



Naugatuck Green
by
Judy Jaworski



West Point
Photograph by Dave Angelicola



Theater in Nîmes

Photographs
By
Ira Mickenberg



St. Paul, Provence

Inspired by Nature...



Tree Frog
Photograph by Carol Moore



Orange Amaryllus



**Photographs
by
Sandi Noel**

Bloom Where Planted



A Lily's Offering

More Voices

Short Reminiscences in English with Lithuanian Teachers

One spring day in April 2000, in Lithuania, I was invited to give a class of Continuing Education teachers, who were learning English from my university colleague, an opportunity to listen to another speaker of English. All eyes were upon me as I began:

Once upon a time, I, too, had to learn English. However, before I did, I had to learn German. My family and I left Lithuania in 1944 during World War II, and we found ourselves in the city of Hannover, Germany. We spent the last year of the war there under constant bombardment day and night. I started first grade, but school was often closed because there was no fuel for heat. When I was eleven, I successfully passed the exam to enter high school—5th grade, where I started learning English. Learning, in general, at this high school I found stressful and not much fun. Teachers expected us to know the subject matter, but there was no one we could turn to.

One year later, in May, 1950, my parents decided to emigrate to the United States. After arriving by ship in New York harbor, we settled in the state of Connecticut in Fairfield County. My parents found jobs right away and were gone most of the day. I had to take care of my eight year old cousin and my two year old brother. A lot of time that summer was spent getting used to my surroundings and how Americans talked—especially some of the slang that the kids used. The three of us would make daily trips to the playground where I tried to understand: "Do you wanna play?" or "Are you gonna come back tomorrow?" What was this "wanna" and "gonna"?

That fall I started junior high school in seventh grade. I don't remember that the transition period was particularly difficult. I could communicate pretty well by then, and understood most everything said to me. The

friendly support I got from everyone helped me a great deal. The teachers would ask classmates to help me or told me to come see them after school if I needed something explained.

One thing that remains in my memory as causing me headaches was the weekly vocabulary list. As I recall, we had to look up the words and then write sentences. When I looked up the words, I came upon many other words that were unfamiliar to me and I had to come up with a meaning. Often I made a guess and wrote the sentences according to whether the dictionary said it was a noun, adjective or verb. I was not always correct, but my teacher seemed to understand my difficulty and helped me make corrections.

I consider it my lucky break having landed in America when I did. My school years here really let me blossom. I found school a challenge, but had fun learning. I had no anxiety feelings about getting up in the morning and going to school. I was not afraid to make mistakes or to ask questions when I didn't understand something. I recall hearing: don't worry about making mistakes, you learn by your mistakes. Another saying stuck in my mind:

Don't worry about failure. Worry about the chance you miss when you don't try.

I don't ever recall that anyone ever hurt my feelings by making fun of me because of the way I spoke English. Non-English speaking persons often say that Americans are known for being polite and not correcting mistakes in English. After high school I successfully completed college and some years later got a master's degree.

I married my Lithuanian husband in 1963 and became the mother of two children, Jonas and Ruta. In 1991, forty-seven years after my husband and I had left Lithuania as children, the four of us returned for a visit

after independence was reestablished following fifty years of Soviet domination. In 1995, I returned, alone, to Kaunas, the city of my birth, to teach German, but mostly English, at Vytautas Magnus University and at Kaunas Seminary. Six months later my husband joined me and worked as a finance director for a large mill.

My recollection of how the Lithuanian teachers reacted to my English presentation, I feel, was positive, although I don't know if they understood everything. I don't recall any questions. Usually Lithuanians are reluctant to ask questions in public, more so in English.

Looking back on our time in Lithuania, our original thought of staying only for three to four years expanded to fourteen years. We are both happy and grateful to have had the opportunity to experience life in independent Lithuania. We never imagined that it would become a reality in our lifetime. However, we thought it also important to come back to our family and relatives here in the States and we returned in 2008.

~ Irene Zemaitaitis



Home on the Sea

As the sun rises warm and bright, the day begins. No sounds prevail upon the secluded cove where the yacht is anchored. Small terns flutter overhead en-route to their morning feeding grounds. The sea mirrors the clear blue sky. The morning breeze has not yet awakened. All is well.

After a lazy breakfast of scrambled eggs, crisp bacon, fried potatoes, toast and coffee, morning chores begin. Dishes are cleaned and small leftover scraps are deposited overboard for the myriad of tiny colorful fish to feed on. The boat is anxious to sail. The wind emerges from its slumber and creates symmetrical ripples on the once still sea.

It's time to get underway. We set the main and jib sails and raise and secure the anchor. With a south wind fully blowing, we set a westerly course. Moving out from the secluded cove, we begin our daily voyage. From the shallow, crystal-clear waters we venture out into the deep blue sea. With all sails fully set, the royal-blue yacht, Dream Dancer, responds like the thoroughbred she was designed to be. It does not take long for a white bow wave to generate. A clean, clear, straight wake astern shows that the course is true. Dream Dancer knows where she is and where she is going. Every so often flying fish leap out of the water to give us room to pass and occasionally a school of playful dolphins comes alongside, just checking to see if we are alright.

Throughout the day, the only sounds heard are the gurgle of the bow wave, an occasional creak from the boat, and the murmur of the breeze in the rigging. Together they speak in a gentle voice saying "Welcome home sailor – to your home - home on the sea".

~ Fran Escott

Chicago Daze

Memories of my childhood are blurred, like watching a movie out of focus. But once in a while a clear impression comes through, particularly of certain week-ends when I was about five years old. Almost every Saturday morning, my father drove me to 2121 Sedgewick Street in downtown Chicago on his way to making rounds at the hospital. My mother's parents owned the building and lived in one of its apartments.

That city street was magic. Brick and stone buildings were packed tightly together, with people constantly going in and out. Steps with iron railings in front of each door were a perfect place for a little girl to sit, look, listen, be smiled at and patted on the head. Everybody's English was different and had strange sounds mixed in with the words I knew. Next door to "my" building was the beauty shop that my Banka used to run, where women always came out pink-faced with tight curls or waves molded to their heads. I remember Grandpa in his overalls and painter's cap, constantly building or repairing something. Sundays were special because we picnicked at Lincoln Park Zoo, which was only a few blocks away. But it's the memory of a certain time of day in that place - nothing important or exciting about it, just the sweetness of the moment - that really jolts the picture into sharp clarity. And I'm back there, in that time, re-living it:

CLANG, CLANG.....Zzzz-tttt! The sound of the streetcars seemed more noticeable at night. Having dunked my last piece of cookie in my tea sweetened with TWO sugar lumps, I kissed Banka and Grandpa good-night and walked the few feet into their bedroom, the only other room of their tiny apartment. The room held a dresser and a huge double bed pushed up next to the window. Lying across that bed with my chin on the window sill was my favorite place for watching my weekend world go by. I had the bed to myself until I was gently led half-asleep to the couch for the night.

CLANG, CLANG.....Zzzz-tttt! Another streetcar went by, bells ringing, blue sparks flying into the air from the wires above. The summer evening was turning dark and I was supposed to be asleep, but I knew my grandparents didn't mind. I heard the soft drone of their voices through the thin door. It didn't do any good to strain to hear the conversation, as I sometimes did at home, because they spoke Dutch to each other. I loved the sounds of it, and rolled the syllables around in my mouth just for the feel of them. I slipped down into the middle of that bed, already thinking about the next day's trip to the zoo - running across the grass to the animals, then to the gardens, then the merry-go round, opening the prize inside the Cracker Jack box, and the cool water bubbling out of the marble fountain into my eager mouth.

Looking back, I am filled with envy for that little girl's enticing descent into peaceful sleep.

~ Kathe Reimold



A Late In Life Confession

I have to sing.

There, I said it, finally. All my life I have had this deeply instilled drive to sing. It makes no difference what time of day it is, what mood I'm in, or how grave the situation I face: sing, I must. I frequently wake up with a song going through my still partially numb brain. And, like most addictions, it is sometimes maddening. If I don't feel I have sung a particular phrase properly, even when I am alone, I must reshape it until I feel it sounds correct.

A few years ago, at the tender age of sixty-four, I was encouraged to sing a country western classic, Hank Williams' "Your Cheatin' Heart" at a jam in Woodbury. I had asked Jack Daddona of Oakville, who had just finished singing it, how he knew in what key to tell the musicians to play the song. Jack explained that he sang almost everything in the key of D. He then asked the leader of the group to replay the tune and to "let Bill sing it." I damn near died, but sing it I did. Without the words in front of me, without a rehearsal, I, for the first time as a soloist, sang. The enthusiastic applause from the audience and the musicians indicated that both groups were pleased and they made me promise to return another night. I believe that I blushed.

My wife, Judy, who knows well of my addiction, was asleep when I arrived home shortly after eleven that night. I gushed as I woke her with, "...guess what I did tonight? I sang at a jam, in front of people, and, and they want me to come back." Was this the big time, or what?

After an hour or so of mentally reviewing my performance, and tossing, I realized that sleep was fruitless and eased my way out of bed so as not to disturb my sleeping bride. No sooner had both feet hit the floor, when I heard her sleepy voice say, "I knew that you wouldn't be able to sleep tonight." Damned if she wasn't right, but man it was worth a sleepless night.

I sing therefore I am.

~ **Bill Butterly**

Commemorative Stamp: Tribute to the Coal Miners

Several years back, the Post Office was thinking of having a coal miners' commemorative stamp. After reading about this, I immediately wrote to my representative hoping he would help to make this happen. I told him about my grandfather, Milolaj Hnatusko, a victim of black lung disease, who worked the mines from 1908 to 1928. When he died, he was forty-seven and left a family of eight. The oldest was twenty-one, my father was ten, and the youngest, who were twins, were seven. Luckily my three uncles, aged twenty-one, nineteen, and sixteen, were working in the mines to help support the family.

I never realized how hard and treacherous their work was until I took a tour of the Lakawanna coal mines in Scranton, Pennsylvania. My Aunt Dorothy, who was eighty years old at the time, went with me. She wanted to see where her father and brothers had worked. I was scared going down that three hundred foot tunnel, and started to hyperventilate when we could no longer see the light to the outside. My aunt, on the other hand, took it all in stride. I got hold of myself and started to realize this is what they were doing every day of their lives, never knowing if they were going to see the light of day again.

After we descended and started to walk around, we could feel the cold dampness permeate our clothing. It was dark, with dim lighting mounted on the walls. Big fans circulated the air. The tunnels were bigger than I anticipated, and I could visualize my Uncle Joe guiding the mule through the scant lighting along the tunnel tracks, and my Uncle Walter hammering away in confined spaces to get at the precious coal. The youngest, my Uncle John, the door tender, or nipper, waited with the glow from his carbide lamp for the mine cars, weighing about four tons when full, to come down the tracks. He had to open the heavy wooden doors and make sure they closed tightly. If he fell asleep, as many young nippers did, he was in danger of being crushed by a loaded car blasting through the door.

The silence and the isolation of this dangerous work was not for daydreamers because miners' lives depended on their alertness. Eruptions of poisonous gases, periodic cave-ins, and the prospect of life-threatening explosions were constant dangers. All they could hear was the sound of dripping water. The walls absorbed all other sounds, and if that wasn't bad enough, the miners had to contend with the hungry rats that were after their lunches. My uncles had metal lunch pails, but my Uncle John told me he always saved the crumbs for the rats. He teased them in order to keep awake at his monotonous job.

Years later, the mines took my Uncle Walter when he was thirty years old working for the Hudson Coal Company. When the mine's roof and walls settled, the timbers were squeezed, a beam split and he was crushed by falling rock.

So, yes. we should honor all the miners. A stamp would be a fine tribute for their hard and dangerous work, as they tirelessly contributed to make America what it is today.

~ **Marjorie Fitzgerald**

Waiting

Somehow it never crossed your mind that having children wasn't a God-given, inalienable right. You worked hard to get the good job, the house, the cars, the dog. The white picket fence.

And you waited. And waited. And waited.

Nothing..

Months and months of doctors, nurses, hospitals and procedures. And all that poking and prodding. Everyone thinking they had an answer, a solution to "the problem", a way to fix things. A way to make IT happen.

Months turn into years, and during that time, things change. You change. Your thinking changes. Your relationship changes. You become so concerned with test strips and things like counting out days on a calendar. Spontaneity becomes a thing of the past. You find yourself falling into an abyss each month where a color tells you "No".

What else can you do? Surely there has been some new development that can save you?

Nightly syringes plunge into your thighs and bottom. If anyone could see, they'd surely think you a junkie. But, no. Your pain is of a different sort.

Who would know, really? To the outside world, there is the job, the house, the cars, the dog. The white picket fence. You're living the dream, right? You don't dare open the door to your private hell.

You shudder as you watch couples pushing baby carriages, children playing in the park, mothers suckling newborns. Your head feels ready to explode! WHY?...Why?...why?...

Casual looks, quick nods and acknowledgments, feigned smiles. Pick yourself up, dust yourself off. Go about the day's routines. But cling to hope. It is for now, your only ally.

*The writer is now 20 years older and has two grown daughters.
Time. What a mystery.*

~ Denise Whelan

First OLLI Meeting

What the hell am I doing here? That is the first thing that enters my mind as I walk into the OLLI luncheon. OLLI, for the uninitiated, stands for Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. It's a program for "older folks" who are trying to keep their minds from atrophying. Great idea, I'd thought when I first read about it. I figured I'd just go to this one meeting and get a free lunch out of it and maybe a few laughs. This program isn't for me, though. I am a young guy who is wondering - what the hell am I doing here?

The luncheon is held in a large meeting room. I walk in with few expectations except that I am going to be with my peers – young guys like me. Startled doesn't begin to describe my first reaction as I enter the room. I hadn't seen so much gray since I attended a reenactment of the Battle of Bull Run a couple of years ago. There, the gray was on the Confederate soldiers' uniforms. Here it is on everyone's head – the men, anyway. Many of the women have cleverly escaped the gray. Well, I think to myself, truth be told there might be a little gray in my hair but certainly not so much as I am seeing in this crowd. I certainly don't belong in this group. I am a young guy. What the hell am I doing here?

Standing at the front of the room and contemplating how to make my escape, I take a deep breath. Coffee! They are making fresh coffee and I can see some mighty fine looking cookies on the table with the pot. Maybe I can delay my escape, I think, at least until the coffee is ready. A couple of cookies will be good to tide me over on the ride back to Stratford. I have the beginning of an answer to my question of - what the hell am I doing here? I'm having a cup of coffee and some cookies before heading out. Not exactly an existential answer, but

I carry my coffee and cookies to an empty table and sit down. A few people join me and introduce themselves. They seem a little odd to me. As we sit and sip and munch, I can see each person's thumb. Why is this so disconcerting, I ask myself. Then I realize that no one is texting as we talk. People are looking at each other and responding to each other in full sentences. We sit and talk for about a half hour and not one person says, "LOL" or "OMG" or other

modern neologism. It begins to feel comfortable and familiar. Shocking thought: maybe these people aren't so different from me after all. Thought quickly rejected! The old, familiar refrain comes back - what the hell am I doing here? It's not so powerful anymore, though. A horrifying thought: maybe I do belong here.

Several of the people at the table begin discussing "the war." Another shock! No one asks, "Which war." Everyone at the table has only one "The War," and everyone understands the reference, including me. Then someone brings up "meat coupons" and "gasoline tokens": no explanations needed. Everyone knows the references. Realization! I have so much in common with these gray-haired guys I could be one of them. We all speak the same language and speak it in the same way. Maybe I can hang out with them; maybe they'll let me even though I certainly don't belong.

Our guest speaker is introduced. She's written a book about growing up Italian in Waterbury. She tells stories from the book, some hysterical and some very moving. We are all enjoying her talk when she reaches for a reference to place her story in time for us. She says, "You all remember the blizzard of '47 don't you?" I find myself smiling and nodding "yes." I look around at my new friends and they are all smiling and nodding, "yes."

I take a deep breath, let it out slowly, and realize - I've come home.

~ **Barry Davis**

The Phone Call

My mother never perfected the art of packing lightly. She crammed into her suitcase a cosmetic case bulging with a kaleidoscope of eye shadows, a compact of rose dusk blush, and two brand new bottles of Chanel Honey Beige foundation, their seals intact. Her destination was New York Hospital for a second bout with open-heart surgery. I don't know what possessed her to carry such a frivolous load the fifteen hundred miles from North Miami to New York. The same suitcase held a skeleton crew of clothing, sensible for the itinerary of her journey. I sometimes think the stuffed cosmetic bag was her talisman--and her bluff--against the risky business of the surgeon's knife and the silent recognition of her failing heart. It did not work its magic and I have in my bathroom vanity the still unopened jars of Chanel's honey beige liquid makeup and the rose dusk blush, shades that do not suit my coloring.

"We worked on her for a long time." The voice over the phone registered as calm, soothing, professional. "Yes," I said, "and how is she doing now?" The brief pause on the other side did not alert me to danger. Barely two hours ago, I had visited her in intensive care. Intubated, but fully conscious, she looked worn out, her jaw slack without the false teeth in place, the wrinkles on her face more visible without foundation. But she was alert and every muscle in her face conveyed the frustration she felt when I could not interpret, without benefit of speech, the question her eyes implored me to answer.

After a lapse of three or four seconds, the soothing male voice said softly, "I'm afraid we lost her. I'm so sorry."

I thanked him, not quite sure who the voice belonged to--some resident on the surgical team? ---and hung up the phone, more disoriented than grief-stricken. How could death intrude upon our carefully crafted script? Her doctor in Florida had handpicked this cardiac surgeon --one of three surgeons in the country capable, he said, of performing a second bout of open-heart surgery. It was risky business. The artificial valve implanted seven years ago was leaking. It had replaced her own leaky aortic valve, a slow, silent, and surreptitious time bomb.

We had visited the famous doctor's office for a consultation a few weeks earlier and heard a resounding chorus of Hallelujahs from the patients in the waiting room returning for their post-surgery checkups. In 1988, doctors were still considered demi-gods and here was one who had performed miracles with patients' failing hearts. They assured us all would be well. After the doctor examined my mother, studying the most up-to-date and detailed information technology could provide, he assuaged our fears and set a date for surgery. I delivered her on that day to the hospital and to the surgeon's skill, secure that I would be taking her home soon.

And then the phone call.

~**Suzanne Eisner**



The Graduation Dress

We are shopping for my sixth grade graduation dress. For once we are not going to Klein's in Hempstead where the racks of clothes are jammed together, oblivious to size or color or function. Troops of shrieking women tear the clothes right off the hanger, elbowing anyone who invades their space. Are these the mythological Furies, I wonder, reincarnated as bargain shoppers at Klein's?

We have, for once, left behind my mother's depression mentality and switched tracks, traveling without incident, into foreign territory, the female version of Tress. The clientele is sophisticated, the salespeople are attentive and the quality of clothing much more upscale than anything we could buy at Klein's.

It must have been my father who recommended Martins; he buys his clothes at Tress, the fancy men's store in the Green Acres shopping center where he sometimes takes my brother. Martins is a fantasy world of soft, incandescent lighting and plush beige carpeting which mutes the click click of high heels. The store smells of jasmine-scented perfume and gentility. Solitary shoppers speak in hushed tones and move gracefully, seemingly in rhythm, in between the well-spaced arrangements of one-of-a-kind outfits.

It is a cast of ballerinas working in harmony. The sales lady floats out to us buoyed up by her good pearls and perfect French twist. She escorts us to the pre-teen section where a small selection of party dresses stand at attention, awaiting our approval, each encased in a shiny plastic cover that zips over the wooden hanger. "I think this might work for the young girl," she intones to my mother and slips away discreetly.

My mother's voice, normally loud and grating to my ears, is lowered by an octave or two. She has been transformed into Margaret Anderson, the genteel Mother of Betty and Bud from "Father Knows Best." Soft-spoken, decorous, dressed in her one expensive suit from Saks, she examines each dress on the rack, for once not looking at the price tag.

Carefully, she removes a size 12 dress, glancing at the sales lady for confirmation of her good taste, and holds it up for my inspection. Swiss dot, my mother calls the pattern of tiny raised white dots against the robin's egg blue. The sales lady leads us to the dressing rooms, a celebration of privacy and good taste, each with its own door and mirror, padded hangers and little packets of lotion to remove all traces of lipstick and makeup.

We both admire my image in the mirror. The organdy fabric billows out gently from my waist. It has little cap sleeves and a pink satin sash that ties around the waist. It is, we congratulate ourselves, the perfect graduation dress. Much more elegant than anything we could have found at Klein's. I cannot wait for the evening when I will model my dress for my father.

The drive home jolts us back into reality. My mother, as usual, clutches the steering wheel too tightly, nervously veering in and out of lanes, misjudging her timing and her distance. The hush and stillness of Martins, the pristine party dresses, and my mother's cameo appearance as a woman of gentility, evaporate into the blaring car horns of impatient drivers. We pull onto Sunrise Highway, heading away from Garden City and back to Valley Stream. The curtain is lifted, the house lights are turned on, and the players take their last bow, departing into the wings.

~**Suzanne Eisner**

Symphony at Wolthill

The trees now look downcast without their bright golds and reds and pinks of a few months ago, which they had displayed with such pride - like tall, leggy models at a fall fashion show. Now these same trees, standing silently amid scattered pines, their radiant leaves gone, seem unrecognizable and of little interest to passersby. It is as if two photographs were taken of them: the first in vibrant color, the second in black and white.

As I drove by, a sign with the words, "Welcome to the Walking Trails at Wolthill", caught my eye. Nearby hung a second sign from last summer announcing, "Free Outdoor Symphony Concert Today". I chuckled at the thought of an outdoor concert TODAY in the middle of January. Intrigued, however, I pulled over and got out of the car. Raising the collar on my coat, I decided to take a walk for the first time down the snow covered paths at Wolthill. As I set out through the silent forest, I tried to picture what it must have been like on the day of that concert last summer.

I watched in my mind's eye as the conductor tapped his baton on the podium and slowly scanned each section of the orchestra. Then with the deliberate movement of an Olympic diver, his arms floated upward. Releasing the musicians from eye contact, with the baton in his right hand, he plunged his arms sharply downward. The orchestra responded with an explosion of music! The concert had begun!

With that image, I continued walking. In the silence, I could hear the faint squeak beneath my feet of frozen snow being packed down with each step that I took. A rhythm started to develop, out of which I began to hear the shrill sound of a bow sliding slowly back and forth across taut strings, creating the high pitched melancholy cry of a violin. Then others joined in with flair and with poise, converting the silence around me to music. With each step that I took, the music grew clearer, louder, rising upward, putting me on notice to listen for other sounds as I continued on my sojourn through the forest.

In what was becoming a blustery winter afternoon, the north wind howled and whistled across branches high above me, sounding now like flutes, like clarinets and oboes, all blending together in an ethereal harmony of woodwinds. As I continued walking, the music of the strings and woodwinds filled the air with a smooth, eerily beautiful sound.

The path now dipped down, running adjacent to a frozen lake bounded by a screen of smaller trees and thick brush opening now and then to unobstructed views of the lake. Walking here is like a slow motion return from boyhood. I recall looking out the car window as my family drove down a country road toward home, with trees flitting by giving way to brief open views of meadows, ponds and streams along the way.

A loud rumbling sound all at once surges upward like the bellowing of a whale as it comes to the surface. Any skaters out there today would feel a chill up their spines as they raced for shore. I listen to the rumbling of the ice and hear in it the ominous low notes of trombones and French horns. From the lake I also hear the resonating rolling wave of kettle drums flowing upward, muffled at first, then becoming gradually louder, reaching a crescendo and echoing across the forest.

Ahead, on the edge of the path as it curves up and away from the lake, the thin form of a woman stands clad in a brown dress made of dried oak leaves that still cling tenaciously to her branches. She sways back and forth gently in the wind as if she is trying to keep warm. I feel moved with compassion to take off my coat and wrap it around her. There is another gust of wind moving her top branches as if she is shaking her head to assure me that she doesn't need any cover from the cold. With the wind blowing again, I move on, glancing back at her. Now I hear the brown, brittle leaves rustling like the clicking of castanets in the hands of a gracefully moving Flamingo Dancer.

Suddenly there is a loud cracking noise from above that pierces the air like a gunshot. I immediately shift my gaze upward. A breaking limb snaps loudly as it begins its fall slowly toward the ground. I hurry to get out of the way, watching the limb become lodged, hooked securely and harmlessly among other branches high above the ground. I pause and take a deep, relieved breath. As I stand among the trees with the limb cracking still in my ears, what I hear is not a limb breaking but the beginning of a fireworks show, the crowning touch as dusk begins to settle over the area.

The path is flat and straight over the last hundred yards or so as the parking lot comes into view. I pause for a moment then continue the short distance to my car, glad that I had decided to walk among the tall trees at Wolthill. For there is a beauty here in winter different from that of summer or fall. It is a quiet beauty set in stillness, a beauty that is heard and felt as much as it is seen.

So when you go to Wolfhill this winter, read the large sign welcoming you to its trails; then look for the second sign still hanging there from last summer. You will probably at first be a little surprised and even smile when you read it. But what it says is true even though it's winter. For as you begin to walk its trails, you will find yourself listening as I did today to the sounds of a free outdoor symphony concert in the woods.

~ **Tom Melesky**

Like Crooked Letters

Crooker letter, crooker letter, the title of the book I just read, “Mississippi - Crooked Letter”. The crooked letters in Mississippi have been there forever. As I looked down at my fingers, they are real font: crooked letters.

When did my crooked letters show up? They never asked my permission. I wrote on the chalk board one day, and a 2nd grader yelled out, “Mrs. C, why are your fingers so crooked? I shot a glance at him, not knowing what he could possibly be talking about. Then my eyes drifted ever so slowly to my hands. “Oh no! Oh no! He was right!”

I was embarrassed at first...don't know why. Was I deformed in their eyes, or was I struggling to accept the truth I was seeing in my eyes?

I avoid looking at my fingers. They hurt sometimes when I write, but they won't trap me and force me to look at them. I played the piano with long straight, straight, straight fingers. Haven't played in years...too afraid. Getting a manicure is a treat many women do every week...they want to show off their nails. I even sit on my hands sometimes. No manicure for me...no attention please.

I accept my poor vision better than my crooked letters, crooked letters.

Then remembering...Granny's fingers were crooked, but, they were beautiful and gentle when she stroked my cheek.

~ Lenore Strum

The Kiss

I don't think we're ever sure of how such things happen. Did my off-hand remark about her blue eyes find its way to her ears? Had she said something to her emissaries who then passed it on to my friends? I do not know. But I do know that one day' in the autumn of sixth grade, it was somehow decided that Jackie Klies and I had become an "item" in a sixth-grade kind of way.

I remember being overcome by two reactions-incredulity and elation. A born pessimist, I wondered how any member of the opposite sex, especially one with a blonde pixie cut and cornflower blue eyes, could be interested in me. Our house did, after all, have a couple of mirrors. and I knew what I had seen. It wasn't very pretty. But along with the disbelief came that lighter-than-air sensation that usually accompanies such moments. In about two seconds, I went from being part of the moiling crowd to being somebody. Like Charlie Brown, hopelessly smitten by the little red-haired girl, or Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, captivated by the fluttering eyelashes of the lovely Clarice, I immediately became airborne and floated through the rest of the school day.

As we paired up to leave school that day, I "naturally" stood beside Jackie. We chatted and giggled as we moved through the hallway and down two flights of stairs to the first level. As the pianist of the day pounded out the "Marine Hymn", we turned to our right for the final walk to the front doors of the school, which were always held open by monitors. Between those-two doors stood a steel beam about two inches wide. Caught up in the euphoria of the moment and trying to maintain what little composure I had left, I unintentionally recreated a blunder we have all seen countless times in romantic comedies. I walked right smack into the beam that separated the doors, and almost separated my head from my shoulders.

On the verge of blacking out, I faintly heard the gales of laughter and only dimly saw my classmates' pointing fingers since my right eye was already swollen shut. Jackie steadied me as I staggered. She wasn't laughing. Not only was she truly concerned, but I also think she was genuinely flattered by the fact that I had been paying complete attention to her and none whatsoever to where I was walking.

The next day I invited her to Saturday lunch at my house. She accepted. My mother was caught off guard, but was completely cooperative. Jackie's house was just behind the school so it was only a five-minute walk from my door.

Introductions made, I showed her my electric trains as my mother prepared soup and sandwiches. I explained that my dad was working. She noted that her father, a building contractor, often worked Saturdays as well. And my mother smiled that smile that I imagine all mothers do when they see their little boys first express interest in little girls. After lunch, we watched Ned Ryder while Mom stayed in the kitchen.

Jackie wore a neatly pressed pair of jeans and a plaid flannel shirt so I assumed she was the outdoor type. I suggested we take a walk, and we found our way to the small patch of woods at the end of my street. I showed her the foundation of the house that was never to be built. We talked of Mr. Delaney and social studies—specifically the Romans, as I recall.

In the middle of the path stood a very large half-buried boulder. We sat on top, side-by-side, searching for more conversation on what was a still, perfect autumn afternoon. Surrounded by sunlight filtering through the canopy of turning leaves, for whatever reasons there are that motivate such things, we leaned toward each other, pursed our lips, closed our eyes, and kissed. It lasted only a second or so, but it was my first and I suspect hers, too. Lost for words, we laughed, then regained our composure and headed for home.

After she thanked my mother for lunch, we walked back to her house, still nervously chatting about whatever came into our heads. We acted as if nothing special had happened, but I think we each knew it had.

After that day, we talked at school and skated with the crowd at the Gunlots that winter. There were no more kisses. I think we just wanted to see what it was like.

And then, just as unexpectedly as it all began, Jackie was gone. Her family moved and I never saw her again. But I will never forget that autumn afternoon kiss and the complete and perfect innocence of that moment.

~ **Jeremy Joyell**



No, Not Again!

“Clear skies and visibility more than ten miles. Slight chance of scattered clouds over north Florida. Looks like great VFR weather over your whole route.” These were welcome words from the weather briefer at Fort Myers, Florida.

I answered with, ”Thank you ,sir. Will call with a pilot report over central Florida.”

“That will be appreciated. Have a good flight.”

I, in my Piper Cherokee, and Richie and Ginny, in their Cessna taxied out to the runway at Naples airport. Richie received his clearance from the tower and lifted off at about 9:15 that bright and clear Thursday morning. I followed shortly. We both were heading toward Lakeland, Florida, where Richie would turn east to Flagler, while I would continue northeast to Jacksonville, and from there to Beaufort, South Carolina.

Fort Myers, which is a much bigger and busier airport than Naples, soon picked up our planes on radar. Since they were very busy that morning, Richie and I were vectored around the field and told to climb to 3500 feet and our intended course was changed. Using our Global Positioning Satellite receivers, we were able to stay outside of Ft. Myers’ airspace until we were north of the field when we were able to get back to our original course. Contrary to the weather report, we began to encounter some clouds at about 3000 feet.

I, to Richie on the pilot-to-pilot frequency, “What do you think, Rich? Should we stay high or go low under the clouds”

“I think we might as well stay high. The briefer said clear all the way. This must be a temporary thing.”

“Okay”

About twenty miles from Lakeland, the clouds had thickened and were beginning to get higher. So high that we had to maneuver between the taller cumulus. They were still broken and there were holes in them where we still could see the ground. VFR means Visual Flight Rules and assumes that one can see the ground at all times. Concerned about the rising clouds and the lessening holes, I called,” Rich, I think we should get under these clouds and land at Lakeland to check the weather.”

“I agree. I’m getting raindrops on my windshield. How about those forecasters? Where else can you get a job, be consistently wrong, and still get paid?”

“OK, there’s a hole off to my left and I’m nineteen out. Where are you?”

“I’m eighteen out and there’s one to my right. Call when you’re under and I’ll call Lakeland to let them know we are coming in.”

“Roger that. See you down below.”

The sun was still shining above as I headed for the rapidly diminishing hole. As I reached it, I put the plane into a tight turn and circled through the gray cloud towards the green ground below. Because of the narrowness of the hole, I temporarily lost sight of the ground as I passed through the cloud, but kept my eye on the instruments and soon was under the clouds and into a rain shower. No windshield wipers, but 100 knot speed keeps them clear. The ceiling kept getting lower but Richie called the tower and they cleared the planes to land.

Richie and Ginny and I ate lunch, got fuel and checked the weather. According to the forecaster, it was supposed to be clear above Craig Field at Jacksonville all the way to Beaufort.

Surprise! It wasn’t!

I reached Craig Field at about 3500 feet. The clouds remained broken so I continued at that altitude. I called Richie who had not yet landed at Flagler.

” Rich, it seems to be getting thicker but there are quite a few holes still. I’m going to call Gainesville weather to see what it is like up in Savannah. I’ll call you on the cell when I get there.”

“OK, Bob. Maybe you should stop at Craig and I’ll come up. Stay at our place for a day or so.”

“Thanks, but I’m all right. It’s only an hour from here. I can always land at St. Simons’ which is about twenty minutes from here. Catch you later.”

“You be careful. I’ll be on the ground in about five minutes so I’ve got to switch frequencies now. See you.”

I called Gainesville weather which told me that the ceiling at St. Simons was at 2300 and that Savannah, which was twenty-five miles south west of Beaufort, was clear. So, I continued. Getting closer to St. Simons, I tuned in the automatic weather station which

informed me that the ceiling was now 1900 and overcast. My adrenalin started spinning skyward. The pucker factor was beginning to increase. The GPS showed me St. Simons about ten miles ahead but no holes in that direction and the clouds thickening. To my left there seemed to be an opening. I turned toward it and spiraled quickly down intending to land at St. Simons but in front of me about eight miles ahead was Glynco Jetport. And I started toward it.

I found the frequency for the field and called, "Glynco Traffic, Cherokee landing because of weather."

The controller cleared me to land and informed me that there were no facilities for small aircraft at the field.

"Cherokee at Glynco," came a voice on the radio. "I just came down from Savannah and the weather is clear about fifteen miles up the coast."

I answered, "Thanks. -Glynco, I am going to go to the coast at 1200 feet and head for Beaufort. Thank you."

The controller told me to be careful and released me from the landing. I headed east to the beach with the clouds still thick above me. But now the beach was visible beneath me and if necessary, it could be used for emergency landing. Meanwhile, I still had a thirty-five knot headwind and was doing about seventy knots over the ground. Sure enough, about ten miles further north the clouds became broken and by the time I reached Tybee Island about thirty miles south of Beaufort, the sun was shining brightly, the ocean was blue again and the islands of the lowlands became welcome sights.

I contacted Beaufort Approach and started to relax. Just when I was over Parris Island with Beaufort airport in sight, the engine decided to quit and the plane became a glider. I had planned to change tanks over St. Simons but in all the excitement, I had forgotten to do so and the right fuel tank was out of fuel. I had been in this situation before and not wishing a sequel, I reached down and changed to the left tank, which started the engine again, and I landed without further mishap.

However, I mused, with those winds I should have landed at Craig and rented a car. It would have taken about as much time-with a great deal less stress!

~ Bob Grady

Spring into Summer

In the Spring, everything becomes new again. Almost everything. People continue to age and appliances continue their descent into a state of disrepair. I started thinking about these things recently.

The flower beds that border the front of my house were a mess. They were wild with leaves, old plant parts, and the debris of last Fall and Winter. While inspecting this disaster, I spotted two Hosta plants pushing up against all of that old stuff, displacing mounds of mulch in order to emerge from the ground again. They were renewing themselves. New is nice. It's hopeful. But appliances are another thing altogether.

With appliances, deterioration begins slowly, then accelerates, sometimes causing a total work stoppage. In the past eighteen months we've had to "deep-six" a stove, then a microwave oven, and the bell is beginning to toll for our refrigerator and dishwasher. We always try to repair our machines before pronouncing them dead. We often repair them multiple times. But then, it becomes clear that the cost of repair starts to exceed the value and the usefulness of the machines. Time to bring in the new kids. Then, there are the people.

I think that people are somewhat similar to both the plants and the machines. In the beginning, we are the new kids, all bright and beautiful and fighting to survive. Then stuff happens; life happens. A little arthritis here, a little memory loss or cancer there, and eventually there are more frequent trips to doctors and dentists to fix things, for repairs.

The major differences, of course, in our declines, as compared to those of plants and appliances, are: a) we don't go to seed and return brand-new in the Spring and (b) we don't throw ourselves out as we fail or farm our parts out to others (although much later, I guess that could happen). But, like the plants, we can renew and refresh ourselves, in a way.

We can become young again when we play with our grandchildren, learn new things, solve problems, take risks, explore the world, go back to school. Maybe at OLLI?

~ Ellen Keating Cleary

In Pursuit of Time

There can be moments when time seems like an endless sequence of humdrum schedules and thoughtless chores. An unwelcome side effect of this is a feeling that there is little wiggle room in which to enjoy ourselves. But it doesn't have to be that way. We can choose what we prefer. Choice then becomes the basic asset that enables us to do what we genuinely like to do.

One of the things I have always liked doing when given a choice is reading fictional mystery. All that intermingling of sleuthing and plot building, contrive to beguile us. British mystery writers are my favorite. Their works have made me a late-night reading junkie. Through pivotal twists and turns of events and enigmatic characters we get to peel through layers of intrigue hoping that everything will come together in the end.

Unlike the linear dimensions of a crossword or Sudoku puzzle, fictional mysteries let you look into the lives of others through the art of storytelling. Detective stories based on investigations are ideal for exploring the smallest details. Being a curious species, we also enjoy delving into the strange and unexpected. Detective stories offer that opportunity and more.

For starters, there's usually a murder to solve in a detective story. And readers love to catch the killer before he or she is revealed. Catching the killer demands that we focus on how each character fits into the story and why they behave the way they do. Everything about victims must also be analyzed to find out who would want to kill them and why. The reader is therefore challenged to puzzle out a chal-leng-ing string of events that lead to a logical conclusion.

In British mysteries there is murder, suspects with means, motive and opportunity for the crime and a detective, either amateur or professional. But it is the detective, more than the characters, that most lovers of British mysteries are drawn to, like Martha Grimes' Richard Jury, who with his hypochondriac sergeant, Alfred Wiggins, and his laconic friend, Melrose Plant, lighten the complexity of each mystery with quirky humor.

For those who enjoy more complex plots, psychological depth and razor-sharp detecting, there is Elizabeth George's Inspector Lynley. Inspector Lynley, a cultured aristocrat, lives on a sizeable estate, is attended to by a butler, and drives a Bentley. He is contrasted and assisted by the street smart and frumpy persona of his working class sergeant, Barbara Havers. But these and most other contemporary detectives pale next to the decade-after-decade appeal of Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot.

Sherlock Holmes was introduced by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in a series of short stories at the turn of the 19th century. From the very beginning, the public couldn't get enough of Holmes and his reliable sidekick, Dr. Watson. Holmes, recognizable by his iconic meerschaum pipe and deerstalker cap, uses his keen intelligence, talent for disguises, and forensic science skills to solve difficult cases. Dr. Watson, on the other hand, exerts a calming influence on his friend's cerebral restlessness and frenetic energy.

Holmes represents our moral sense of right and wrong by consistently pitting his wits against evil. He succeeds where society often fails. And we, on the sidelines, applaud his efforts and ascribe to him the extraordinary power of a super hero. The exploits of Holmes and Dr. Watson have been read and reread for over 100 years.

No detecting characters before Holmes and Dr. Watson have been so popularized. Stage, screen and TV adaptations are continually produced to satisfy our fascination with them. There is even a [British television](#) series that presents an up-to-date characterization of the two in modern 21st Century London.

Equally popular on stage, screen, and TV is Agatha Christie's most famous fictional detective, Hercule Poirot. Who but Agatha Christie could create an effete and wax-mustached Belgian detective who is obsessively challenged by the psychology of the criminal mind? He is Christie's longest-lived character with his "little gray cells" always on the alert to ferret out the truth. Poirot does not pursue clues or use disguises to find the guilty. He instead reflects upon the

order of events to solve a case. It is Poirot's peculiarity of intelligence and eccentric mannerisms that have endeared him to readers worldwide.

Agatha Christie wrote thirty-three novels and fifty-one short stories published between 1920 and 1975 featuring Poirot and is the most widely published author of all time, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare.

Through this man with the egg-shaped head and obsession for patent leather shoes, the reader is drawn through an era of two world wars, occasional drawing room settings, and travels to Europe and the Middle East.

Although profoundly fussy and vain, Poirot is keenly aware of his surroundings and what is said and not said at any given time. What endears me most to Poirot is his absurdity of style, love of people, and focused quest for truth.

Hercule Poirot, Sherlock Holmes and all my other favorite sleuths tempt me to do a lot more reading. Perhaps one day I'll stretch out time a little bit further and create my own fictional sleuth. Becoming a mystery writer would challenge me to delve into the compelling twists and turns of suspense. After all, isn't that what life is all about? In the pursuit of time, figuring out what will happen next?

~ **Mary Ellen Jancyk**

GEARING UP

A Children's Story

Carson slammed the door and threw his backpack against the wall.

“Carson?” His mother dashed into the hallway. “What’s wrong?”

“Explore- A -Truck will be the worst day EVER! I’m not going to school that day.”

“But, Carson, you love cars and trucks.”

“All the kids except me get to bring their dads to see the trucks. It’s not fair.” Carson plunked himself into a chair and tried to focus on his homework, but he kept staring at his dad’s picture.

“Would you like a snack?”

“No, I’m not hungry.”

“So tell me more about the trip, “ said Mom.

Carson perked up a bit. “My teacher said we’d see tons of trucks. And Mom, we can even touch them!”

She reached for the permission slip. “Carson, I’d be happy to visit the trucks with you.”

“No! I really need Dad.” He stared at the empty chair at the head of the table. “Dad’s the one who rides quads with me!”

”Oh, our little racing star,” she said, hugging him. “It sounds like a good time to me!”

The next day at school, Miss Ryder told them more facts about their trip. “You’ll have a chance to get behind the steering wheel of several trucks. There will be dozers, diggers, go-karts, jeeps, loaders, tractors and many more. The drivers will tell you what their trucks do everyday. And you can ask them any questions that you have about transportation.”

All the kids except Carson were in high gear. Throughout the week, the kids zoomed to the teacher’s desk with their signed slips.

Miss Ryder happily reported, “Some familiar faces will have their trucks on display. Bowman’s father drives an ambulance. He’ll show us how he uses the medical gear. You may have to say ‘Ahhh’ if he looks in your mouth,” she said laughing. Neve’s mother will let you write your name on the blade of her snowplow. She has very special markers! And Jonathan’s grandfather is a firefighter so you may get a helmet to wear.”

Carson wished everyone would just stop talking about it. His stomach hurt! He sat alone on the bus ride home, staring out the window. Carson’s feet shifted into slow motion as he got off.

“Is Daddy coming home soon?” he asked, as his mom opened the door. He

had tears in his eyes.

“I’m sorry,” she tried to comfort him, but Carson only sighed and went off to his room.

That night Carson’s Mom made a very important phone call. She shared his disappointment about not having his dad on the road trip.

In his room, Carson spotted his father’s Army photo. Since Dad can’t come with me, I know, I’ll just bring his picture. At school the next day, he went to Miss Ryder’s desk and explained his plan.

“That’s a great idea! Your dad would be proud of you for being so brave while he’s gone. Now let’s enlarge that photo and laminate it.”

Miss Ryder reminded her class to ‘be ready to roll’ early Monday morning. As he was gearing up, Carson clipped the photo onto his camouflage pants. The lively group boarded the bus for their adventure. Miss Ryder gave her final instructions. “Listen to the chaperones, use good manners, ask questions, and most importantly explore those trucks.” She handed each chaperone a list of trucks the children could discover. “We will all meet at noon by truck #26.”

Carson was happy to be in Miss Ryder’s group, until he saw Troy riding with his dad in the bucket of a cherry picker. It reminded Carson of his last birthday present. Before his dad deployed, they had driven bumper cars together at the amusement park. Having Dad’s picture just wasn’t the same as having him there. His shoulders slumped.

Carson was sure that Explore-A-Truck would end up being the worst day EVER!

Promptly, the class gathered near truck #26, an Army jeep. “Who knows why this truck is often painted shades of green?” asked Miss Ryder.

Carson’s hand flew up.

“Jeeps are painted in camouflage colors, just like the colors of the pants I’m wearing,” he said. “That way no one can see the soldiers and they stay safe. I know because my dad is in the Army.”

“Spoken like a true soldier,” yelled a familiar voice.

Carson squinted and then shouted, “That’s MY dad.” He sped through the crowd and jumped into dad’s arms.

Out of the corner of his eye, Carson saw his mother nearby taking pictures. “Daddy’s home!”

“Yes,” Carson, she said. “No empty chair tonight.”

His dad smiled, “I wouldn’t have missed it for the world, Son!”

Carson smiled back, “This is the BEST day ever!”

~ Sandy Qerim

Going Home

A Memoir

It is quiet. I am reading a book, there are pictures. I love books. I am looking at a drawing of a powerful giant whale, his huge tail splashing the restless sea, his spindly teeth exposed in a grotesque grin. His back is curved in a terrible motion, tilting a large sailing ship and sending it to be swallowed by the raging sea.

The year is 1949, I am 7 years old, my brother is 3. We live in Bucharest with my parents. My maternal grandmother and Aunt Natalia live in the apartment next to ours. I am very attached to Natalia, who is nine years older than I am. My world is happy and limited. I am too young to appreciate the fact that Europe is scarred by a terrible war, which my family was lucky to survive intact, and the regime in Romania is Communist. My father wants to go home. Only in the reborn State of Israel will we feel a sense of belonging.

We are at the train station. I am sobbing, we have to say goodbye to grandmother and Natalia. Am I going to see them again? I cling to Natalia who weeps with me. We are on the train, my chubby brother is running all over the wagon. I am sitting, observing the flying scenery through endless tears and a new dread comes over me. We are going to board a ship. What if a whale will tip it into the sea and we will all drown?

We are sailing. the Black Sea is calm. We sail the Dardanelles, pass Turkey and enter the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea. It is September. The sun is warm and the nights are bright. The thought of a giant whale recedes and the excitement of a new life in a new land engulfs me.

The Port of Haifa is shimmering in the distance. There is a quiet reverence around me. Everyone on the ship witnesses the promised land.

We settle in the desert, the Negev, the southern part of the land, where the days are hot, the evenings cool, and the nights are lit by an infinite number of stars.

At school I am studying the Bible. I am excited. I walk everyday in the footsteps of Abraham. I know the places that Jacob wrestled the Angel, and King David played his harp. I can hear the prophet Jeremiah. I can see the wild flowers in the spring and think of The Song of Solomon. The hills of Jerusalem, the shores of the Mediterranean, the sea of Galilee, the aroma of orange groves in bloom, are all speaking to me of roots and anchor, as no other place will ever again.

I am Home!

~ Lidia Bram



OLLI at UConn is a member-driven, community-responsive program offering non-credit learning experiences (courses, lectures, and special events) for older adults who want to engage socially and intellectually with their peers as teachers and learners. Situated on an intimate, state-of-the-art university campus with traditional-age students and research faculty, OLLI also provides fertile ground for an intergenerational interaction and exchange of ideas. The urban campus reaches out to a diverse region which provides opportunities for partnership with other cultural, educational, and arts organizations.

