



Voices and Visions

*The Annual UConn
OLLI Review 2011*

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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.



Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
at the University of Connecticut



Cover photograph by Tom Kmetzo

From the Editors

OLLI programs across the country publish an annual journal of their student work and Waterbury UCONN OLLI is joining them. As with many projects and initiatives, this journal had its seed in the many classrooms filled with enthusiastic learners and committed presenters. Over the years, some classes have created their own journals, but in the end, it was a response from those voices at the back of the room that prompted a fledgling committee to begin to look into publishing our own OLLI journal of student work.

We are still at work. The response to our initial call for submissions and to our invitation to the editorial board was heartening. It gave us the motivation to continue creating our own review, highlighting our own “voices”, and utilizing examples of OLLI journals from all over the country to create our formatting and content style. We also drew from our own backgrounds as presenters, teachers, writers, and students. We reviewed with admiration the prose and poetry, artwork and photographs that were submitted.

We are in the nascent stages, but we are also looking to the future. This first volume is a promise to our courageous students to provide a place to share their passion and discovery. As a place for their voices and visions, this publication demonstrates the aim of OLLI: learning for the joy of learning, encouraging creative expression, and keeping in touch with a larger world.

As the editorial board, it has been a wonderful undertaking to shape this first volume of ***Voices and Visions***, the Annual UConn OLLI Review. We hope you will enjoy reading this edition and that it will inspire and delight you.

The Editorial Board
August 2011

From the Director

Lifelong learning, in the context of OLLI at UConn, refers to older adults coming together to engage in intellectual stimulation, shared experiences of new learning, exploration of ideas, and creative expression for the sheer joy and fulfillment it brings to the participants. This often leads to personal enrichment and human transformation; it is valuable because it improves lives and potentially fosters the goal of improved brain health. Theorists and researchers have begun to explore the relationship between engagement in the arts, creative expression, and intellectual challenge and overall brain health. The Annual UConn OLLI Review is not just a publication that demonstrates what members of OLLI at UConn are doing, but rather a venue where organic, deeply meaningful creative energies come together to honor the creators of the works as well as to stimulate and inspire the minds of the readers. We should all be enormously proud of this endeavor, the work of the Editorial Board, and the exceptional work of the contributors.

Congratulations and keep the good energy flowing so we can all strive toward our human potential through the world of lifelong learning!

Brian G. Chapman, Ed.D.

Director of The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
at The University of Connecticut

From the President

On behalf of the OLLI Leadership Council and general membership I extend greetings and congratulations to all of the talented OLLI members who have had a hand in bringing this edition of the OLLI Review to fruition. This review is a labor of love, creativity and hard work coupled with a desire to share all of your creative endeavors with our growing OLLI community. I wish you continued success and congratulate all of the OLLI Review participants on reaching this goal. Happy reading!

Nancy Via,
President of OLLI/Waterbury

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Voices



Pulling Up the Shades

I didn't know I loved pulling up the shades and opening the curtains in the morning.

I didn't know I loved spring – light greens, soft rains – the daring and the tenderness of becoming.

I didn't know I loved staying put and being still.

I didn't know I loved sitting by the window, at the kitchen table, in the company of books, and yarn, and dreams.

I didn't know I loved looking around as I walked – head up, eyes wide-open – taking in the man-made and the God-made.

I didn't know I loved the poetry of Billy Collins – the gathering of words, the flash of insight, the glimpse of the extraordinary in each ordinary.

I didn't know I loved the unexpected, the serendipitous, the surprise of it all.

I didn't know there was so much to love.

~ Catherine Capuano

These Hands

These hands held a jump rope, put on roller skates, and learned to play the accordion.

These hands took toys away from my younger sister and held her hands when we crossed the street.

These hands turned pages, scribbled notes, and were raised before asking questions.

These hands joined my husband's in marriage and in the life that followed.

These hands drafted documents, sorted through files, and opened books.

These hands played Scrabble with a friend and wiped my tears when she died.

These hands helped my father from his chair and put drops in my mother's eyes.

These hands drive patients to treatment and wave farewell when we part.

These hands write letters of congratulations, encouragement, sympathy, and thanks.

These hands clap for the beauty and wonder of dance.

These hands fold in prayer and pull up the shades to welcome the day.

These hands.

These hands tell of my life.

~ Catherine Capuano

Faith and Reason

I remember the stories-

The Easter Bunny, Santa Claus, Superman,
The talking animals, Noah,
Jonah and the Whale-
And God.

I had faith back then
That all these things were true.

At first, I didn't question
And was happy not knowing-
Or thought I was.

But then the Easter Bunny died,
And Santa Claus,
And Superman...
Eventually all the rest,
Victims of knowledge.

God lasted longest.

But the questions kept coming
And the answers made no sense.
When does reason replace faith?
Is it better to know-or not know?
What makes Man Man?

Isn't it his ability to question,
To seek answers,
To find the truth?
I tried, and reason prevailed.
So, I guess I've lost it-

My faith-that is.

~ Bob Grady

April Promise

March's "just Spring" has finally gone.
The gusty winds subsided to breezes
That flow softly over the new buds.
Showers nourish the roots
Of flowers and trees
And the myriad colors of April
Burst forth from every corner.
Golden forsythia dot the landscape.
Pinkish-white dogwood perfumes the yard.
The stark black trees have softened
To pale greens and reds
Of emerging leaves and buds.
Yellow daffodils, red tulips
Jump from nowhere, it seems.
Purple flowers and green grass
Delight the eye and prove
That this is why New Englanders
Abide the nasty winter snows.

And now it is May-
All is right with the world.

~ Bob Grady

Where is the Who I Am?

I am here. I am also there. And there.

I am in my younger son, challenging his mind at his desk while his heart makes music.

And in my older son, advisor, coach, and comforter to children who adore him.

I am in my husband's world, where the play's the thing, whether it's theatre or baseball.

And in my daughters-in-law, each bravely mothering while finding her own way.

I am in the four bright stars that are my grandchildren, so different from each other but united in love.

I am in my house, this miracle house waiting for me at age 60 where I can love what I see when I wake up in the morning.

I am at one with the birds whirring around this house, stopping only to eat, build their nests and warm their babies. I love them, but I wish I could slow them down.

I am in the cold clear water of my pond, where I never tire of reflecting, as it reflects back the world to me.

I am in my friends, recipients of my laughter and my tears, as we talk and listen to each other, and share books and music and life.

I am in the collective memory of all these and more.

I have been here.

~ Kathe Reimold

Ventura

Short and stocky
Eyes and complexion dark.
A knot of Gray hair at the back of her neck.
Her deep wrinkled face reflected experience
Of life's happiness and sorrow.

Dark blue white dotted dress,
Small white collar
Dark stockings, heavy black shoes
Antique earrings and cameo brooch
She had a scent of Lavender
About her.

A widow
She lived in a room of her
son's house.

Ventura "read" coffee grounds.
Once, when she read them,
She saw her husband's approaching death.

As a child,
I spent part of my summers
With her.
I liked the complete order around her.
In my teenage years
She liked to talk to me about boyfriends.
She once gave me a cigarette.

When she visited us,
The house filled with the
Aroma of fresh baked baklava.

I never considered Ventura special.

Years after her death
I learned that as a young wife and
Mother of six
She took the tramway,
Every Friday,
To an old Folks home,
On the other side of the city,
And brought home a destitute woman
To spend the Sabbath with the family.

~ Lidia Bram



The Life In The Mason Jar

I miss you every day, and when the hurt is particularly excruciating
I reach for the mason jar and its buttons that bring you to me.

Red – from the jacket you wore on the boat bringing you from Italy
to Ellis Island.

You were scared, traveling so far, attired in your red coat with the
BIG buttons.

Green – on the hand-made, childhood jumper you played in every
day

Outside the three-story, three-family house that you shared.

Brass – so many of these, each one a reminder
Of long hours spent working at American Brass.

Gray - off the boots you wore
As you walked to English classes each night after work.

Pewter – so like the coveted ornaments you collected
That still come out every Christmas to decorate our tree.

Pearl - part of the dress your mother made
For you to wear when you married Grandpa, a man you barely knew.

Blue – dangling from the booties you knitted
While you waited for them to bring you your new baby boy.

Black - from your very best black dress
You wore it to the funerals for your mother and father.

Yellow - off of that frilly, girly-girl dress
That you sewed lovingly for your new baby girl.

Crimson - that buttoned up your choir robe
As you sang solos in perfect soprano.

Brown – securing you in the raincoat
That helped you weather “Black Friday” and the flood of ’55.

Teal – from the apron you’d wear on the afternoons you spent
Instructing me in the subtleties of cooking and making sauce.

Navy – part of the jacket that your son, my uncle,
Wore as he went off to fight for his country.

White - baby number two had many of these
On the dress she was in when she walked down the aisle.

Pink - taken from the sweater you would wear
For all of those chemo treatments.

Purple - from the suit that you asked to be buried in
Much too young and surely much too soon.

I visit you on Sundays to say “Hello” and to tell you my news.
I speak to you of great grand-children you never had a chance to
know.

You warned that life would be hard, and it is.
You knew that I’d get through things, and I do.

I’m not sure where you are now, Nonni, but I have you close.
Your buttons, not your ashes, make their home on my hearth.

~ Denise Whelan

Who Am I ? (I am 70 years young)

I am a living, walking, talking
SPONGE full of ancestral
viruses of the mind.

I am fully sopped, soaked, weighed
down and stinky. I've reached my
saturation point and need to be
squeezed out, disinfected of all
contaminating ideas.

I'm not ready to be discarded.
Perhaps I need to dry out and
get renewed by sitting in the sun
with fresh air filling up my
spongy lungs.

Perhaps I am a sea sponge,
plucked from the ocean floor to
a new life in the hands of a
bathing beauty or an artist
sponge-painting a wall.

What I soak up depends on whose
hands I'm in.

Don't discard me yet!

~ Lillian Poehailos

“It’s Only Draft ‘Til You Die”

Some fifty OLLI members and UConn students heard Kurt Brown, poet and professor, recite some of his poems last fall at the Waterbury UConn branch. He started out with some semi-autobiographical poems of his boyhood in Connecticut and finished with some later poems from his last book, Future Ship. Questions and answers followed and one line inspired your reporter to pen the following:

With Apologies to the Poet

Kurt Brown,
a poet of some renown,
regaled his audience
with some events
of the strife
of his early life
and late.

He spoke, too, of the fate
Of the earth
And the worth
Of each one
Until life’s done
With a line both sage and wry,

“It’s only draft ‘til you die.”

~Bob Grady

First Spring walk in Flanders

March morning, gray skies, patches of melting snow.
The rising sun warms the environment
After the winter snows and torrential rains.
It's time to take a walk in the woods.

I take a drink of water
Put on my boots and sweatshirt
Grab my walking stick and
Head for the trails.

A residual snow bank blocks the main entrance to Flanders' trails.
I take the white trail to circumvent the pond.
This path allows me to assess the melting snow
Forming streamlets cascading over moss covered rocks.

The first half of the uphill trail borders Lake Quassapaug
With its frozen center and melting shoreline.
The muddy trail exposes new stones
Leading to insecure footing for the unobservant hiker.

From time to time drainage from the granite-strewn hillside
Leads to streams that coalesce
Forming babbling brooks descending the hillside
Toward roaring rivers and overflowing bogs.

Pine needles cover drier sections of the trail.
Fallen branches and fallen trees block my path.
A white-throated sparrow sings its plaintive song
Amid the sounds of running water and swirling leaves.

At the top of the hill I am given a choice
Take the white trail following the circumference of the land trust
Or take the red trail southward
A more direct trail toward home.

I decide to bushwhack off the trail
Within minutes I'm lost and need to backtrack
The confusion of aging takes over
Encouraging me to stay on a marked trail.

I take the red trail in a southerly direction.
Reaching its origin, I realize my first intentions
Transposed the upper end of the red trail
With the lower end of the trail causing me to lose my way.

Encouraged by landmarks, I recognize my path.
I now set out for the blue trail
Taking me to a well known pond
Which appears to overflow with springtime precipitation.

A stream follows my homeward path
Forcing me to walk on its upper border.
I delight following the downhill course
Alongside the ever-growing stream.

The water is crystal clear
Moss covered rocks line the sandy stream bed.
There is no sign of wild life in the stream and in the hibernating
woods
Except for the sound of the sparrows.

The world is awakening to spring
My visit to the woods is at a transition time
I am given renewed life
As I experience my natural environment.

~ Ira Mickenberg

Discarded Diplomas

Snow blanketed my surroundings.
Freezing rain transformed the snow into inhospitable slush.
It was time to clean out my files under the eaves.
With no basement or attic all selected items making the first cut
are placed under the eaves.

Being retired I have the time if not the energy
to crawl with a flashlight under the eaves
and select from the selected.
I come upon a heavy box filled with diplomas
Twenty-four in all, some framed, some laminated.

My professional life's achievements.
Reflections of years of study, work, commitment and triumph.
These jewels had blessed my office walls.
They followed me as my office moved.
I remember the doubts about the wall arrangements
And the contrast of laminates and frames.

Patients entering my office
Would read the diplomas, an introduction and an assessment.
These diplomas led to first impression approvals
They were the standards that I strove to live up to.

And now with retirement
The diplomas hibernate under the eaves
Yet there will not be another day.
No one eyes them now and no one ever will again.

I savor one last look at each and every one of them.
I select a few, the high achievements.
The rest, a slice of my ego
Are taken to the dump
Not even recycled, just laid to rest
A premonition of things to come.

~ Ira Mickenberg

Love Poem

There is no telling
how these things happen.
In a moment
somehow
we understand.
Touch is electric,
a look, magic.

Words fall short.
Love
understated
is best.
The lexis of love
invites hyperbole:
burnishing attributes
that shed
little light.

The heart knows what
speech approximates.
Poets stretch and stumble
whipping up
honeyed moons, perfumed air,
and
starry nights.

These two
awash
in the glow
of each other's
love
is all we need
to see
and
all we need to know.

~ Phil Benevento

Lesson

In the land of magnolia
and moss
columns and porticos
traditions die hard,
the natives say.

Bayou, bog and marsh
hold secrets of despair:
spawned by
customs
that won't let go.

In the land of
weeping willows
blood is shed.
The order kept.
The innocent
put to death.

And yet,
the cell door,
however strong,
cannot confine
the soul
nor customs
choke
the heart.

Hallelujahs rise
each Sabbath
from the wooden
chapels
sending songs of hope
through splintered roofs.

In time
old ways
wither like uprooted weeds
left in the sun.
Change comes
bringing new customs
as sure as
magnolia blossoms
welcome the spring.

~ Phil Benevento

Poem à la Frost

A petal from a peony
loosed itself
flitting across my lap,
then taking flight
above the roses
and across the barn.

A bit of pink
and white
delight--
full of mischief;
brazen and free,
windswept
and innocent.

Its fate,
of course,
is death,
but
it would have died
at any rate.
only now
it cannot
reincarnate.

I watched it
dance
across the yard,
Beyond the wood
to meet
its fate.

The breeze
across my spine
and fading sun
Made me withdraw
to go inside
enchanted
and bemused.

~ Phil Benevento

Squatters

Squatters invaded the garden
eating our cucumbers,
stretching out
on walls, patio, chaise lounge.
I spied them through the kitchen window
earlier today:
a family of five.

In short time only three were alive.
The baby had died,
buried
under the decimated apple tree.
The man dug the hole.

I pulled the shades
and locked the doors against the day
that they would come for Ted and me.
“Don’t go out,” I whispered.
“Maybe they’ll go away.”

In the fall I snuck a look.
No one there.
Sunshine filtered
blood red maples and golden oaks.
Escaping, I pulled him after me.
Then we spied the grave; repulsed we turned away
and there they were:
sitting on the veranda
eating pachysandra,
bone pushing through skin.

Fixed in fear
with limbs falling about us;
like statues set in
a garden plot,
we watched them
shuffle
into the house
and close the door.

~ Phil Benevento

Daring Enough To Finish

We speak of endings
Past words on a page.
It is enough to begin.

Do I dare enough
To see and be seen?
Dare I touch and be touched
By the present?

To live on a page in the world
Courts my presence.
Felt wonder known,
Fair price for freedom.

Because I care enough
For all this and what follows,
I will dare enough to breathe
Until the words have ended
And there is no more.

~Betsy Nickerson

The Last Leaf

Though the trees out my window are bare,
Spider forms in the wind against light,
In far away places out there
Are leaves falling all through the night.

How we leave is never so new,
Ground littered with those gone before,
Yet the rhythm of life to be true
Bursts forth a new world from its core.

Through seasons the seeds that are born
Reach up and with purpose take form
A gift of renewal for all
There is never a last leaf to fall.

~Betsy Nickerson

Response to a Photo of Myself at 17 months old

Monkey shines they called you, imp.
How lucky to be considered cute, not naughty,
A tender age to own that precious knowing
That makes others laugh with delight.
Bright eyes that sparkle, hear meaning behind words.
“Nimbly fingers” they said you had, fingers that years later
Would bring clay to light and life.
When did it change, that innocent knowing?
Multi-layers of the world descending,
A gentle mist at first.
Civilized through civil eyes, slowly advancing
Expectations made known.

~Betsy Nickerson

Resolve

Night's chill pierces the winter wear,
 enters the chest, takes up residence there.
Wheezing, coughing compete with each breath.
 Phlegm clogs the throat and is mixed with regret.

Energy ebbs from a self-imposed wall
 further reducing a world grown too small.
Head pounds, muscles ache, an angry fist tenses
 at the damned medication reducing the senses.

Crisp images soften. Hues, once vibrant, retreat.
 Taste buds restrained are not pungent or sweet.
Sounds mash together, tones drown in the din.
 Touch fails to reach out, smells fail to come in.

For the strong there are plans and advanced preparations.
 For the weak, there's no need for such grand aspirations.
Too many poems unheard, too many books unread,
 too many plays unseen, too many words unsaid.

But blood still courses through these veins,
 and thoughts breed thoughts inside this brain.
So trembling fingers take to pen
 and shallow breath, seek air again.
Before the lights grow dark and black,
 before the sounds are gone and still.
Let rage the source of power be
 against these cursed infirmities.
In truth then it will not be said,
 when this one life is dead and done,
too late came wisdom and now is gone.

~ Chuck Miceli

Odyssey

He was in a torrent, dragged against his will toward the abyss. He struggled against the swift current but constantly lost ground, pulled along in the blackness.

Then, wedged in a narrow crevasse for a moment: a reprieve. He stopped dazed, confused, not knowing where he came from or when he started moving.

Suddenly a crushing pain to his head, as if trapped in a vice, then yanked out and over the falls. Bruised and bloodied, blinding light and frigid air. Was this the end?

But they were there to catch him. They cleaned the blood away, dried his aching body, and draped him in a robe.

She was there too, waiting for him, even after all these months. Lovingly, she took him to her breast, gently stroking his brow.

He wanted to tell her but the words wouldn't come. If they could, he would have said it aloud, "It's not easy being born."

~ **Chuck Miceli**

Sonnet to the Ferrum Equus Caballus

Captive, my ear lowers next the rail: the ground.
The rumbling reverberates in my head.
My faint heart braces for that racing sound,
and my head pounds with fear, my heart with dread.

Maine wood, Pittston coal, Pittsburg steel, Texas
oil, all pulled by that ponderous iron steed.
Will pine forest be the last scent to bless
my senses, or perchance fate intercede?

I see that Cyclops eye grow large and hear
that screech of steel on steel but then a turn,
a wind, a passing by, and very near
and I am saved, this episode adjourned.

Unchained I rise and looking back, a train,
trimmed tree and track, and I am five again.

~ **Chuck Miceli**



A Waiting World

Saline-soaked, an unheard scream
Ripples through placental walls
To tell the world outside,
I want to live.

Forceps-crushed, a fetal brain
Will no more wonder
What the outside world
Is like.

Tiny eyes, forever blind
Will never see, never see
The sun, the moon
The light of day.

Perfect ears never to hear
Bach, Brahms, Beethoven
Cursed to deafness
Silent.

Throbbing heart abruptly stopped,
Its beat forever stilled
By suction's massive force
Cut short.

Fingers flushed, organs flooded
Past vaginal walls
To a waiting world
And stainless steel.

~ Richard Kupstis

5 of 9

5 of 9 would have you believe
AT&T is just like you.
5 of 9 in robes of black say
Corporations and unions are, too.

5 of 9 say they may donate outright
No need for PACs.
5 of 9 say the highest bidder may sponsor
Seats in the Senate or House.

5 of 9 dictate conservatism will have its way
And the moneyed interests will have their say.
5 of 9 put private interests over public,
They agree with the proliferating Corporatocracy.

4 of 9 must have disagreed
And fought against the 5,
But their efforts are in vain
Their nation will go down the drain.

~ Richard Kupstis

Credo

I believe in the Edges of God.
Truly, that is my limit on the whole question of Creed.

I don't believe in God storming out of the clouds
and smiting me to smithereens if I am bad.

I don't believe in a God who would wake me up,
pin me to my bed and give me bleeding sores
on my palms and the top of my feet,
much less my side.

(Explain that to your general practitioner!)

I don't believe in a God who would instruct me
to slay infidels or displace peaceful people
so I can have a Motherland.

I don't believe in a God that has nothing better to do
besides visit bedrooms around the globe
uncovering (literally) illicit love.

I don't believe in a God who frets
about who wins the next election.

I don't believe in a God who believes in 'abomination'.

I believe in the edges of God--
the soft parts, the tender pieces--
the feathers and the fur of God.

I do believe in the ears of God,
which stick out--cartoon like--on the edges of God's Being.

I, myself, listen and listen
and then listen some more
for the Still, Small Voice.

I believe in God's nose--pronounced and distinctively
Jewish in my belief--

I smell trouble from time to time
and imagine God sniffs it out, too.

The toenails and finger nails of God--
there is something I can hold onto,
if only tentatively.

Hair, there's something to believe in as well.

God's hair--full, luxurious, without need of gel or conditioner,
filling up the Temple, heaven, the whole universe!

I can believe in God's hair.

God's edges shine and blink and reflect color.

God's edges are like the little brook,
flowing out of the woods beyond the tire swing,
in what used to be my grandmother's land.
God's edges are like the voices of old friends,
old lovers, people long gone but not forgotten.
God's edges are not sharp or angled.
The edges of God are well worn by practice
and prayer and forgotten possibilities
about to be remembered.
God's edges are the wrists of someone
you don't quite recall but can't ever remove from your heart.

God's edges are rimmed and circled
with bracelets of paradox and happenstance
and accidents with meaning.

God is edged with sunshine,
rainbows,
over-ripe, fallen apples, crushed beneath your feet
and the bees hovering around them.

God's edges hold storm clouds too--
the Storm of the Century coming fast,
tsunamis and tornadoes, spinning out of control.

Blood from God's hands--now there's an edge of God
to ponder, reach for, then snatch your hand away.
God bleeding is an astonishing thought.
God bleeding can help my unbelief.

And most, most of all,
the edges of God are God's tears.
Tears of frustration, longing, loss, deep pain,
profound joy, wonder and astonishment--
tears that heal and relieve and comfort...
and disturb the Cosmos.

That's what I believe in:
God's tears.

~ Jim Bradley

Our Dwarf Red Maple

For eight long years our favorite shrub had no name
It was part of the landscape just the same
This Japanese dwarf red maple graced the entrance to our home
And was always a welcome sight after a day on the roam.

It grew so slowly each year
That only its most peripheral branches would I pare
While it maintained its natural shape
Of a magnificent curvaceous red grape.

In the fall, other shrubs their leaves would shed
While our Japanese maple continued to appear well-fed
With her leaves on the hanging branches vibrant red
No complaints of this state of nature from us were said.

When finally the leaves would fall
They would first curl up in a little ball
And drop to the ground
Without making a sound.

Late in the fall the lawn was clean
Whereas under the maple it was no dream
To see many a fallen leaf
Awaiting my specific attention without a beef.

The winter snows covered our tree
Its branches and trunk as a wheel of brie
Threatened by naught, until I looked at the roof's snow
And my fears of collapse started to grow.

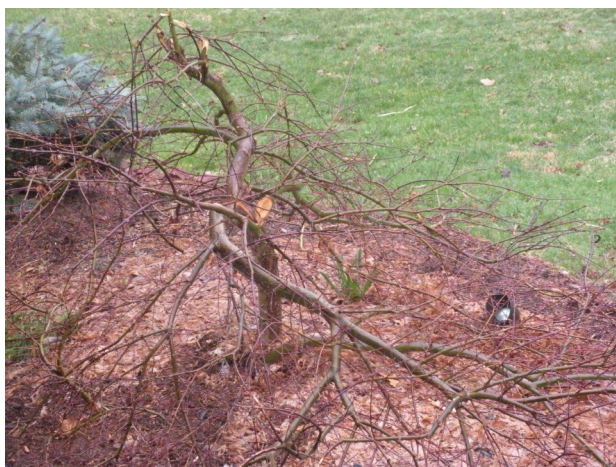
To shovel the roof, I hired some lads
This was after all, the neighborhood fad.
These boys hammered the snow and ice
Tossing down frozen wedges of shingle, slice by slice.

They covered the entrance to our home
With an eight foot mountain of frozen snow, not loam.
They proceeded to clear the entrance, impeded
In the process the maple's peripheral branches of leaves were
depleted.

Aggravated, we accepted the known
Until the warm sun exposed the tree's crown
To our consternation, the shower of frozen boulders
Had split the tree's delicate shoulders.

The poor little tree had expired
It needed to be prematurely retired
Our demeanor revealed a premonitory gloom
When we realized that it would never again bloom.

~ Ira Mickenberg



Visions



Monument Valley
Photograph by Jerry Joyell



Botticelli - The Birth of Venus - head sketch
by
Anna Ascione



Sailboat
By Francis Escott



Sister Vendors
by
Nancy Byrnes



Beach Dresses
by
Nancy Byrnes



The Writer
by
Nancy Byrnes



Golden Boy

**by
Tom
Kmetzo**

Rooftops - NYC

**by
Tom
Kmetzo**





Peonies

**by
Lois
Norcross**



Chairs
Photograph by Chuck Miceli



Unnoticed Driftwood
Photograph by Sandi Noel

more
Voices

Miss Conner Drops a Bomb

A childhood memory

Rarely did matters of the outside world, such as politics or social upheaval, come into our third grade classroom. Except once.

One day in late spring of 1951 a cold hard reality of growing concern to the adult world quite unexpectedly stuck its ugly nose in the door of Miss Connor's class. It was the only bump in a year that otherwise was to play out perfectly. I don't remember if it was a question from a student or if Miss Connor had initiated the subject. Considering what was happening on the international scene and America's involvement in it, I suppose almost anything could have triggered that moment when the tension, fear, and urgency of the Cold War first blew into my life.

So much came to bear on the American psyche so quickly that, in retrospect, it was no wonder Miss Connor had reacted as she did. After all, spies Ethel and Julius Rosenberg had just been sentenced to death, the Korean War had begun just a few months earlier, the Berlin Airlift was only two years past, the Russians had tested their A-Bomb in 1949, Mao had taken over China that same year, and two very dangerous men, one theirs, the other ours, had taken to saying and doing dangerous things. In February of 1950, Senator Joe McCarthy sharpened his tongue and started "finding" communists within our own government. The numbers he uncovered depended upon the mood he was in on any given day. The other guy was Joe Stalin. We didn't have a television yet, but those grainy A.P. photos in the newspaper, which my mother took time to point out, were enough to tell me that that snarling smile belonged to one scary SOB.

With all this pressing on America's collective consciousness, it was inevitable that a classroom moment would somehow come around to

THE BOMB. Miss Connor began to explain that it was incredibly powerful and that it required only a very little amount of “stuff” to make a terrible explosion. At the same time, some of us, especially the boys with their limited exposure to caps and small fireworks, knew that it takes a lot of “stuff” to make a big explosion; the more stuff the bigger the bang. Miss Connor went on to explain that the bomb was made with atomic material (she probably said uranium) and that atoms were very small. Some of us began to doubt the accuracy and credibility of her explanation. The smirks and smothered snickers were apparent to all of us and to her as well. As a last ditch effort to make clear this atom business, she said, “You don’t understand. An atom is smaller than...than...a pea.”

We burst into laughter. No, we didn’t think she was trying to be humorous. We were laughing at her and what we perceived as the ridiculousness of her statement. “No, no. You don’t understand. It’s true.” More laughter. Then, without warning, that pretty, perky face drooped and from behind those silver-rimmed glasses came tears, big tears, tears of fear, confusion, consternation, and most of all at that moment, tears of frustration. Why couldn’t we see that she was truthful, that she was warning us that our young lives could be in jeopardy? She heard our ignorance in our laughter; saw our innocence in our faces.

Did she really want us to know then what would soon enough become a reality in our lives? Probably not. It’s not fair to weigh down a youngster’s spirit with the madness of the adult world. I’m sure she knew that. She simply did a very human thing. She wanted us to know of the danger so we could protect ourselves; so she, as an adult, could protect us. It’s the way we would like life to be.

Miss Connor’s tears immediately brought a halt to the giggles, even caused a few of us to cry. She cleared her throat, said she was sorry, then began to smile. Nervous laughter broke out on both sides of

Miss Connor's desk. We moved on to other matters of the moment, our emotional balance and our protected, sheltered classroom restored.

Our family purchased our first television set in October of that same year, and soon I saw some of the A-Bomb tests from Yucca Flats, Nevada. Even a young mind could sense the horrific power. By the summer of 1952, on warm evenings as I lay beneath my open bedroom window, I sometimes heard the unmistakable drone of a four-engine plane going into Brainard Field up in Hartford. Sometimes I wondered if it was one of *their* planes, not one of ours. Lying there in the warm, quiet darkness, in my mind's eye I could see the bomb bay doors in the belly of the plane slowly opening. I would grit my teeth and hold my breath until the hum of the engines was swallowed by other sounds of a summer night. Only then, feeling safe, would I breathe a deep sigh of relief, knowing that this was not *the one*.

It was then that I began to understand what dear, sweet, tearful Miss Connor was talking about.

~ Jerry Joyell

Colors

One fall weekend, my lovely wife Joan graciously drove to Syracuse to attend a bridal shower for my oldest daughter Kate. This meant that I would have the whole weekend to myself. Which in this often noisy, chaotic world could be construed as a gift, a treat.

Sunday afternoon. As this fall day finally warmed from a cold and wet start, I just knew I had to go for a motorcycle ride. A short blast to clear the head. What I didn't know, was that the fall colors were bursting in their full and radiant best. The reds, the oranges, yellows and all the glorious in-betweens. Magenta reds, the yellows with their now fading summer green hues, and finally the spectacular deep pinks and fall browns. Tree after tree, and bush after bush, blew me away; a palette so beautiful that I wondered; who could ever be blind to this, who could ever not notice?

I really believe I could take painting courses, study color all my life, but one ride through the flowing, wondrous Connecticut Hills (even if I had a lick of talent), could teach me everything I needed to know. Dressed warm and comfortably, the bike seemed to glide past one beautiful farm after another, one beautiful color panorama after another. It was like ice skating on wheels. Quiet and respectful motorcycling is as close to flying as you'll ever get, without actually being a bird.

The fields were carved and the smell of freshly laid manure punctuated the air. A sweet and very refreshing smell if you like that fragrance; I absolutely do. As I motored through Watertown and Litchfield, Bethlehem and Woodbury, the views wrapped me in a golden Zen-like warmth. After forty-six years of riding everything from a Honda to a hot rod Harley (and most everything in between) these landscapes are still God's gift to motorcycle riders and to all of us in general. That's the gift: these sweet, lush, beautiful Connecticut Hills.

(Speaking of colors, as I write this piece, my German shorthaired pointer, Buddy, just keeps staring at me. That beautiful chocolate, fudge brown head with those dark, deadly serious eyes just seem to look through me. What could he be thinking? Or is his head made of solid fudge as I suspect?)

~Jeff Wilson

Always Working

There's something to be said for "tired" and although I'm as lazy as an old packhorse, once I get moving, I have some value. Among my peers as of late, we seem to be looking back, seem to be saying, "How did I get here?" The reality of people dying around us frequently jolts us into retrospect. We saw our parents, who came out of the Depression, and "simple beginnings" work in their chosen fields. Factory workers, policeman, doctors and doughnut makers alike, our parents showed us how to work and commit to the struggle of raising families. America, still the greatest in my eyes, has gotten a little soft, in this "life that is too easy" that has embedded itself in our culture in strange ways.

Generally 55% plus members of our American population don't work and are supported by the other 45%. Most people I meet who are on some type of government-funded disability, pension, welfare, or unemployment type supplement are less than honest about their ability to find work or work a little harder. Once the state or federal government checks kick in, the good solid work ethic kicks out. The comedy or tragedy of it all, is that people think that they're living some kind of better life by letting the government feather their nest, do their work for them. Somehow they don't realize that the greatest burden of all is to have no work. The greatest burden of all is to have no commitment to struggle, to toil and work at your chosen life and existence.

A life that is too easy is sometimes a life that is the greatest burden of all. I once had a friend who was given whatever he wanted. My friend, Tom, qualified for rich man's welfare, but welfare, nonetheless. He was pampered by the family servants, feared by the company employees and generally spoiled by friends and family.

Tom was smart enough to know that he was spoiled, but just dumb

enough to think he was bigger than all the vices of the 60s. One cold, 1968 February winter night, we left Lincoln Street in Waterbury, Connecticut in Tom's metal-flake green 1963 Corvette convertible and drove 40 hours to New Orleans, Louisiana. Just Tom, Chip Miller and I, stuffed in that little car with its 340 hp motor and screaming side pipes. We questioned life as we rambled to New Orleans and then El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico but we really got no answers. And Tom got lost in a life that was too easy, too young. Forty years down the road, it seems that we should have been working at college or in the Military, or at Timex, but working just the same. In the end Tom walked into a liquor store on the top of Cooke Street and blew his head off. The owner, who had been a good friend to Tom, displayed a gun behind the counter to ward off robbers. Tom died in a hospital a few days later. I still miss him after all these years.

People to me, young or old, rich or poor are better under struggle, are better under toil. There's something to be said for," tired"!

~Jeff Wilson

A Collection of Memories

So many memories. So many treasures. A cherished collection from another time in someone's life. Items kept to encourage a memory, a connection.

She was slipping further and further away from all she loved. Names of loved ones were long gone. Everything was unknown. The kitchen, once her hub, holds no specialness to her anymore. Could she even find her way from the bedroom where so much of her time is now spent? Once there, she would stand in the middle of the room and stare, but not see, forget why she had come and not know how to leave.

This collection may inspire a thought, an image, a memory. There had been so much love. Now there were only blank looks, sometimes tears, but never a flicker of our old connection.

There is no letting go. One must believe that something will work, will inspire. Hope is all that is left.

~ Barbara Krell



Season's End

Slow, slow, don't rush. Slow and steady. Concentrate. He was determined to break his record of last week. Was it his competitive nature that would somehow keep him going? Last week it took only 45 seconds to raise the coffee cup from the table to his mouth without spilling a single drop. "Don't look at the clock," he told himself, "Just concentrate. Damn it!" His hand started shaking slowly at first, but it didn't matter as he knew it wouldn't stop and drops of coffee splattered on his newspaper.

Parkinson had once again won. He took a shaky breath. He had flown planes, run a farm that he sold for over a million dollars, not to mention the money he had made and invested. What did it all amount to? Trying to break a record of how long it would take to get the cup to his mouth and sip coffee. It was a simple task, one that's automatic, like licking an ice cream cone. Now, even licking an ice cream cone had reduced him to having his wife wipe the ice cream that sometimes coated his ear lobe.

If he timed it to the minute and took the pill, he knew he could adjust his chores accordingly. Plant a few flowers at 10:00 a.m. after taking the pill at 9:30 and no shaking for, if he was fortunate, 30 minutes. "Think positive" everyone suggested, and anger soared and he wanted to scream back, "positive about what!" Reminiscing about the two hundred acres of corn he had planted only brought frustration and sorrow. He had reaped according to the seasons. To sit back and enjoy the harvest and afterwards travel would somehow sneak in and lure him off to far away places to energize the soul and body.

Parkinson had its never ending season. No reaping at harvest time. No new crop to research and plant. No travel to energize. A blank page with no words. Only a dark, downward spiral.

~ Lenore Sturm

CONCUSSION

Waiting for that kick-off

on a field awash with light,

knowing the ball was coming to me

that soggy Friday night.

Visions of my father

pulsed through my head...

This touchdown is for you, Dad,

who is now six years dead,

Body trembling in fear-

would I fumble,

or would I catch it,

would there be a thunderous cheer?

Receiving the ball, running up the middle,

helmets smashing all around!

Echoing the violence, as I hit the ground.

Being escorted off the field, then sitting on the bench, blurry-starry eyes asking, "What team are we playing?"

"Get back in the game, Richie!" the head coach angrily barked. I jumped to my feet, compliantly rushing to the opposing team's huddle.... Again I was escorted off the field, back to the bench, not knowing why....

Later being told of my embarrassing plight

of those non-remembered moments, that long-ago September night.

~ Rich Reimold

Alice's Angels

It was my lunch hour and I was walking down a ramp near my apartment in Waterbury to meet my girlfriend for lunch, which was our daily practice. After we ate I scurried back to work and I started thinking about my day and became confused about the amount of medicine I had taken that morning. Suddenly, I couldn't move! All I remember is a man – an angel? – reaching out and grasping me tight to keep me from falling. Behind me were two women with phones who must have dialed 911.

Next thing I know, I woke up in Waterbury Hospital. After I was checked and released from the hospital, I was transferred to Glendale Convalescent Home. I was in a wheelchair. With a lot of work, little by little I graduated to a walker.

During this time, I heard of an organization called “Money Follows the Person,” which helps find independent places to live for people like me who want to leave convalescent homes and live on their own. At this time, I could hardly believe that four years had passed – yes, four years! I had a yearning for my own place. But as luck would have it, this was also the point when I got pneumonia; and, yes, I was back to a wheelchair!

I wanted to have a place of my own so badly. In order to obtain this goal of mine, I was given several therapy helpers. Gina, John and Michael from Money Follows the Person found me a lovely apartment. Christine and Nancy, the girls from Glendale's Recreation Department, decorated it as only they could! Then came the RAs (Recovery Assistants) who helped me learn everyday things all over again. Christine helped me manage money. Sara and Rose took me to my doctor's appointments, and most importantly, shopping. Anyone who knows me, knows I “louuve” to go shopping! Rich cued me to learn to use the crockpot. “Cueing” is “RA talk” and I had to learn a new vocabulary. He also taught me how to make a good cup of coffee. Personally, I think he just wanted a good cup of coffee! Shelly, my first RA, prompted me on how to clean everywhere and everything; she also gave me good advice.

Well, this is the story of “my angels” who helped me transfer from living in a convalescent home to living in a place of my very own. It is how I define transitions and overcoming adversity and illness – with the help of “my angels”.

~ Alice Q Telesca

An Early Memory

Fido, a gray mutt about a foot and half high, with a white chest and floppy black ears, lived with us in a third floor apartment over the Hopeville Tavern. The house was located at the corner of Baldwin Street and Stiles Street in Waterbury, Connecticut. There were two three-story houses and no lawn-just cement-which allowed cars to get to the garages in the back. I was about five years old at the time and had started kindergarten at Hopeville Grammar School.

It was Friday, about noon, and I had come home from school at eleven. My brother, Jackie, my mother and I were going to take the bus, as we usually did, to my grandmother's apartment on Pearl Street, near Fulton Park.

Fido and I left to go downstairs first-probably to let him do his business. I don't remember. When we got to the yard, he suddenly darted away and crossed Baldwin Street to the Demuzio's who owned the grocery store across the street.

At this time--1937-- Baldwin Street was in the process of being re-paved from asphalt to concrete and becoming a major artery from downtown. Trucks, loaded with concrete, used the street constantly.

Since I was not allowed to cross the street alone, I called for Fido to come back. Unfortunately, he started back just as a big concrete truck was barreling from the north. I knew immediately that something bad was going to happen but I could do nothing about it.

Fido and the truck met. The puppy became a whirling kaleidoscope of gray, white and red spinning under the truck as I screamed. The driver never even slowed down-probably did not know what had happened.

Finally free of the truck, Fido dragged himself over to the sidewalk-all broken and bloody- and died right there in front of me.

I was introduced to death for the first time.

~ Bob Grady

Larry

Turning off the pot-holed street, I entered the project's litter-strewn parking lot. The drab grey townhouses all looked alike with their cheap aluminum sliders and peeling paint.

I parked nearest the one whose number matched the paper in my hand. My eyes surveyed the area as I knocked. It was getting dark and the small light next to the door offered scant security in this part of New Haven. Frayed draperies moved behind the slider and a small face peered up at me. Voices murmured something unrecognizable and the door slid open. The slight, attractive woman extended her hand and smiled, "I'm Yvonne." She was prettier than I imagined from our phone conversation but the image I had formed was clouded by the panic in her voice. I followed her through the worn, but neat living room. We picked up a second child along the way. Larry stood as we entered the kitchen.

"You're looking good," he said. "You too, Larry," I lied. It was less than six years since we had first met and he looked thirty years older. He asked, "You haven't eaten yet, have you? I ordered us some pizza. I knowed how you always loved pizza." Given the reason for my visit, that seemed presumptuous, but looking at the children's faces brighten and Yvonne, pacing back and forth while puffing on her cigarette, I thought maybe not.

"Sit down," Larry said. "Tell me what you've been up to." I sat on the cheap vinyl kitchen chair and ran down an abbreviated summary of my recent past. I intentionally left out much of what was going well in my life: the consulting jobs, the travel, the family vacations. All of that seemed out of place in this setting and I felt uncomfortable with the contrast. "So you're not at the prison any more?" he asked. "No," I answered, "It was time for me to move on." I left out the part about being fed-up with some people I worked for in a system that had run out of hope. Looking back, I wish I hadn't. It might have changed the conversation we had.

The pizza arrived and I paid for it. Larry and the kids dove in while Yvonne paced as she nibbled at her slice. As I watched Larry eat, I thought back to that first day he joined my electronics crew at the Cheshire Reformatory. Standing by the bars just inside the North Block, Larry was caged but filled with defiant energy. "I'll only be a minute," I told him. "Stay right here and don't move until I return. Understand?" But when I returned, Larry was in the hole. When a guard ordered him to move, it didn't matter that he was following his supervisor's instructions, that it was

his first workday, or that he hadn't received a more complete orientation. What mattered was that he didn't follow the last instruction given by a staff member and when he resisted, he was dragged to solitary confinement where he languished for five days.

I recalled one of our conversations about why he was in prison. He said the only white people he had known growing up were the ones that took: They took money from his mother for rent she couldn't afford; they took money from him and his neighbors by charging higher prices for poorer quality merchandise than they gave to the rich people in the suburbs. So one day he took and when the storeowner resisted, Larry pistol-whipped the man.

I also remembered what he shared with me shortly before getting out. "A white boy," he wrote, "could look at the president on television and say to himself; someday I'm going to be president. No black kid would ever think that. I used to watch Tarzan movies and yell, 'Tarzan, kill the savages.' Now I look at those movies and cheer for the tribesmen, 'Kill Tarzan!'" Finally, I recalled our chance meeting on the New Haven green after his release, when he showed me his apartment and we first ordered out for pizza. There was pride in his voice and a glint in his eyes as he talked about his job as an electrical apprentice and showed me his leather belt filled with tools. He boasted that he had turned down a pimp's offer to set him up with his own 'stable and territory' because he was pursuing his electrical career. I took some pride in having been a part of that. I can still visualize his 'reading room:' a tiny space in the unfinished attic with a single chair and a light bulb on a pull chain. A small stool had one book on it: Kennedy's Profiles in Courage. Then Larry showed me the house he would own one day: an abandoned shell in a run down neighborhood. Someday he was going to buy it, fix it up, and achieve the American dream.

Then I turned my attention to Yvonne's frantic phone call asking me for \$200 to pay the month's rent and prevent them from being evicted. She said Larry was too proud to call me himself. She was afraid he might use the gun he had if he were left with no other options.

"What happened Larry?" I asked. Larry welled up with anger, "That mother-f...r I was working for cheated us. The government was giving him \$20.00 an hour to pay those who were working for him, and he was pocketing \$5.00 an hour for himself from every one of us. It wasn't right and I told him so, and soes he goes and fires me." "Couldn't you work for someone else?" I asked naively. "There is no one else in these parts," he said. "I don't have enough hours to get my license and nobody else will hire me without it." "But Larry," I urged, "You have to pay the rent, buy

food and support your children. You need an income now, even if it means flipping hamburgers.”

At that moment, something changed in Larry. The glint in his eyes faded and then disappeared completely. I handed him the \$200 and asked him to give me the gun. He said he had thrown it away. Maybe he had, maybe he hadn't, and maybe there never was one. I said he could take as long as necessary to repay the loan. A friend suggested I ask for repayment but not expect to get it: he was right. Afterwards, I researched some local support services for Larry without success. I never even attempted to find him something in my own area. I had a wife and young children and I feared having his world collide with mine. I had paid the ransom and assuaged my guilt.

That was decades ago. I never heard from Larry again and my attempts to locate him were fruitless. I think of him often and wonder what direction his life might have taken if he were born in a different time, in a different place, with different mentors. The thoughts drift away and I turn on the television to catch the latest news about President Barak Obama.

~ Chuck Miceli

Finding Simplicity

Albert Einstein once said, “Out of clutter, find simplicity”. That’s become my mantra: *simplicity*. Keeping kitchen counters uncluttered is my symbol of simplicity; after all, aren’t cabinets made to store the “stuff”. When I weed through and discard trivia, I find the simple. When I find simplicity in life, I feel in control. When I clear things down to their elemental level, I understand the concepts. When I understand the concepts I feel mastery. Simplicity, mastery, control. That works for the inner me too. When I’m upset, angry, depressed, overwhelmed or just plain tired, I need to find the simple, to separate and allow my spirit to take over. When the season is right, I work out the clutter in my mind and emotions and find the simple in gardening. Touching the soil speaks to me. Gardens are cyclical and full of harmony, life and beauty. As I weed, the hymn, “I come to the garden alone...” echoes in my mind and negative feelings drain away, priorities become clearer, energy and peace return.

How did I get into this “simplicity thing? About a dozen years ago I read *Plain and Simple* by Sue Bender. Wanting to gain control of her hectic life and heeding her inner voice, she lived with the Amish, learning the lessons of simplicity inherent in the Amish lifestyle. The lessons Sue learned spoke to my heart, as I too was ready for change. My first step was de-cluttering my kitchen; finding a place for everything and getting rid of what was unused. Amazing how simple and manageable life becomes when only a coffee pot lives on the counter! As I went through my house and yard this way, I was also de-cluttering and simplifying me. I was working on unforgiveness and getting rid of burnt-out roles and responsibilities that no longer served a purpose. It was during this time that I read Einstein’s quote. What confirmation!

My journey of “out of clutter, find simplicity” brought me to a new balance and harmony in life. It is a conscious stewardship of my time, stuff, purpose and energy to allow my spirit to expand to new opportunities, new relationships and new joy and peace within.

~Sandi Noel

Anniversary

The sky in Avalon at 6:30 in the morning was an unbelievable shade of pink highlighted by swirly golden clouds. It was my third day at the Jersey shore in a home about 20 yards from the Atlantic Ocean. I sat up in bed, inspired, and thought to myself, “Maybe I’ll go out for a run.” And then I remembered -- I don’t run. I rolled over and went back to sleep.

At about 9:00, I got up and took the mystery I was reading upstairs to the deck overlooking the beach to sit and read for awhile with a cup of coffee. It was another great morning in what was anticipated to be a great week. I was in New Jersey to celebrate my parents’ 50th wedding anniversary. My brother, sister and I had accompanied our parents to a friend’s beach house in Avalon for a vacation/anniversary celebration week. We had spent about the previous eleven months trying to organize this event so that it would be special and memorable. This was no small feat for the organizationally impaired (read: my brother, sister and I). About a week before we were to leave, my sister told me that her friend had advised, “Just make sure you have tons of food and that everyone is there. It will be perfect!” If I’d only had that advice last October! But she was right. We had tons of food, special activities and memorabilia, and it was all contained within this lovely beach home which was a gift in itself. How lucky were we?

Well, extremely lucky. A 50th wedding anniversary is a milestone that not too many people will reach in their lives. (And the odds against it are greater and greater all the time.) I won’t celebrate a 50th wedding anniversary. And for people who might reach it, it is just as likely that one or the other spouse will pass away before it happens. I am not cynical about 50th wedding anniversaries. On the contrary, I am trying to point out how very special they are and reiterate just how lucky we all were to be able to have such an event to share with all concerned parties.

“Anniversary” is such a weighty occurrence. Our first day in Avalon, in fact, was September 11th. I couldn’t bring myself to watch any of the televised, political, maudlin, manipulative special events that day. I am not cynical about 9/11 either. I am of the school, or perhaps just the classroom, of thought that believes that September 11th should be a national day of remembrance. Weddings shouldn’t be planned that day just because the banquet hall is available, soccer games shouldn’t be scheduled and generally, we as a nation, should just sit back and keep remembering -- and honoring with reflection and mindfulness – that terrible day when everything we believed about safety, security and the American way was

changed. It was a paradigm shift as far as I am concerned; not a reason to go to war, not a reason to limit civil liberties, but an event which shook most of us to our very core and changed the way we looked at our lives and behaved towards our loved ones. I just think that. Maybe this is because another anniversary that occurs around this time of year is my own wedding anniversary. We were married in 2001--not coincidentally a little over a month after the paradigm shift. My husband and I had planned on being married at least three years earlier (apparently, he is also organizationally challenged). We were living together, the kids seemed okay with it all, so why fix it if it ain't broke? Then the world changed. And we got married.

Hurricane Katrina is another anniversary around that time of year that brings layers of necessary reflection and thought to us as a nation and to some, personally. I guess it just takes me longer to process some events. It was Katrina that moved me to finally write about Sue, my college roommate who was murdered in New Orleans. That happened over 30 years ago -- I still can't write that without taking a pause to comprehend the length of time that something can affect one. It was New Orleans in the news that brought back to my emotional surface feelings that quite possibly should have been resolved or at least buried and motivated me to write about "Miss New Orleans" and start my blog. I continue to write and post each month (mostly) about similar events.

The anniversary phenomenon in medicine and psychology is often studied for its impact on people. Patients who suffer specific physical or emotional symptoms at certain times of the year have been found to have experienced a traumatic event at that time years earlier. I experienced this myself after my appendectomy, which was an enormously traumatic event both emotionally and physically, because, who gets appendicitis at age 42? Me. A total textbook case--for a 12 year old. It happened on Mother's Day, too, which added to the total hilarity of the event. As the camp counselor of my family, no one was prepared to care for me when I came home from the hospital, so I hindered my recovery by keeping up my daily responsibilities to the best of my ability, which was inadequate. Suffice it to say that it was a pretty unpleasant experience and every May since, I get a little anxious the week leading up to Mother's Day. Even knowing why doesn't really prevent it, although over the years, it has gotten less significant--sort of.

Memories, thoughts, feelings, grief, sadness, frustration, anger, physical symptoms--all can be triggered by an anniversary. It tends to make the phrase, "Happy Anniversary" a little presumptuous. Hopefully, most are.

Birthdays, first dates, weddings, graduations are all happy occasions and should be celebrated monthly, yearly or daily. But anniversary remembers all events, happy or otherwise, and the weight of it, the depth of it should be honored for all its power.

~ Cindy Eastman



Flashlight of Insight

A being cannot ascribe meaning without reflection and reflection requires some insight. At least so it seems to me. Insight means shining a light around inside of oneself, kind of like a flashlight looking around inside our being to see what shows up. Let me see what my flashlight brings to view...

In one corner I find a box marked 'friendship,' in another a box marked 'family'; both are about the same size and both are quite weighty. They are marked 'Fragile' and 'Handle with Care', a reminder of how easily I can break or damage relationships that keep me filled with every possible emotion as I go through a lifetime. Both of these boxes are wrapped in plain wrappers although I remember that at times they had been wrapped in bright colors with fancy ribbons such as when I gave birth, found a new friend or fell in love. But, with time, the newness gets replaced with familiarity and sometimes even complacency and it is only when some force damages these boxes that I am reminded of their original color and beauty. These are the first boxes I notice.

In another place in my room of 'insight' I find a box marked 'accomplishments'. This box is irregular in shape. It looks as if it has been wrapped and re-wrapped a number of times in an attempt to get it right. Prominent in its bow is a small sprig of greenery. I realize it is a reminder of the growth that was such a part of all of what I have accomplished. On one side of the box there is a tear in the wrapping; I immediately know that this is about those times when I despaired of ever being able to accomplish what I had hoped to do at any given time.

My eye is drawn next to a package marked in a big V on each side. I know without being told that this box holds my values, those ideals that I try to live out consciously as I am confronted with challenges and questions of how to live my life. I see that this box is wrapped in rubber bands because having values requires flexibility with the changes that life brings without losing the essence of what is inside, my very foundation. This box is marked with a smaller label saying 'IMPORTANT- do not mishandle' and in smaller writing is the

following: ‘Use when under pressure, add integrity when under attack’.

I glance upward and see an elaborate birdcage suspended in the rafters. It contains a ribbon emblazoned with the word ‘beauty’. Emanating from the cage are smells of fresh cut grass, fall leaves, the top of a baby’s head, delicious foods such as fresh bread and frying peppers and garlic. The cage also contains scenes from places where I have marveled at the wonders of the world, both natural and manmade. It seems impossible that this small space can contain so much that makes my heart fill with warmth. Music, literature, artworks of so many varieties are all found in this open and inviting vessel; surely this is the site of appreciation in my world of insight.

Although I realize that there are other boxes and containers in my world of ‘meaning’, I decide to look at just one more, and it is in the form of a question mark. It looks like it is very worn and has nicks and scratches on its wrapping. I hold it up and it is cool to my touch, I have been avoiding this object recently. I can tell that ‘it’ has noticed this because ‘it’ keeps pushing itself into my consciousness. I know that the question mark is what I call ‘faith’ but I do not know if the label would be with a capital or lowercase ‘F’. I realize that I used to think this punctuation mark was a ‘period’ in my life and having it metamorphose into a question mark leaves me with an empty feeling in this part of the room. I would like to recycle this question mark into an exclamation point, but this is not something I can manage with the boxes I have around me. At least, not now.

~ Irene M. Murray



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.