Ripples 2024

Stories & Poems by or about Yellow Springs Elders • Volume 11, Summer 2024 $5

Yellow Springs Senior Center

"Favorite Meeting Place" photo by Ardis Macaulay

This is the eleventh issue of *Ripples* literary magazine published by the Yellow Springs Senior Center. *Ripples* features submissions from elders in Yellow Springs/Miami Township or authors and photographers whose material features residents of Yellow Springs/Miami Township who are age 55 and over. As in past years, we received many high-quality submissions, (this year even more than ever) making the selection process a difficult one. We hope you enjoy this edition as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

***Ripples* Working Committee:**
Deborah Downey, Pam Geisel (YSSC Staff), Gayle Gyure, Lee Huntington, Jo Ann Kiser, and Marianne Whelchel

Ripples is published by the Yellow Springs Senior Center

227 Xenia Ave., Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387
www.ysseniors.org • 937-767-5751
Submission info and past issues at: www.ysseniors.org/Ripples

Front cover photo "Ellis Pond, November 5th" by Jane Blakelock
Printed by Minuteman Press, Springfield, Ohio

Contents

Stories

Poems

Sacrifice

Margie Carroll Wehner

"You're out!" the ump shouted as the right fielder caught the ball my brother had hit.

I loved watching him play Little League baseball when we were growing up in the sixties. But sometimes the rules confused me.

Why did the coach congratulate John for hitting a "sacrifice fly?" I learned it was a way to help his team. A long fly ball had to be caught and thrown back to the infield. This allowed time for the kid on second base to tag that base (once the ball was caught) and run to third – closer to home plate and a chance to score a run.

My family cheered at every game as John hit, scored, and tagged out runners at home plate. I became enamored with the game – hearing the slap of the ball in the catcher's mitt, watching a homerun ball sailing over the fence, and cheering on the runners charging home. I wanted to play, too. More than anything.

John taught me how to catch and throw, but a girl didn't get much playing time in my neighborhood. I learned to bounce tennis balls off the back of the garage and catch them with my brother's hand-me-down fielder's glove. But it was a right-hander's glove and I was a lefty. The awkward catch, drop, and throw worked OK bouncing a ball off a brick wall or playing catch with a neighbor boy. I longed to be on a team and wear a uniform with a cool name like "Cassano's Pizza King." I needed a lefty's mitt.

The problem was even bigger. Dad, like many men of his generation, didn't think sports were appropriate for girls to play; he wouldn't allow me to own a baseball glove.

Girls weren't permitted to play on the boys' teams anyway, but things changed the year I turned twelve. A new girls' softball team was organized in my neighborhood. Miraculously, my parents agreed to let me sign up with my best friend. I was sure my dream was about to come true.

The softball team didn't have a sponsor to pay for uniform shirts or caps. A mother donated homemade brown patches shaped like baseballs, with a "W" sewn inside each one. We pinned them to our blouses and became teammates on the Wrens.

I tried out for catcher so I could be like my brother, but the team didn't have catchers' equipment like the boys' teams. I begged my parents to buy a left-hander's glove for me. I didn't dare ask for an expensive catcher's mitt – a fielder's glove would do. But Dad said no and his word was final. I couldn't be on the team, after all.

My mother had taken me to scores of baseball games and watched me cheer on my brothers while my sisters played jacks or jump rope to pass the time. She must have noticed how much I loved the game because she did something for me that summer that I'd never seen her do before. She defied my father.

Mom worked never-ending hours as a stay-at-home mother of six children. Compensation for her labor included crayon portraits, dandelion bouquets, and trading stamps.

In the sixties, customers could earn trading stamps for their purchases at gas stations and grocery stores. My mother carefully saved the stamps she collected from routine household shopping. In rare free moments, she used a damp sponge to paste them in their Top Value or Green stamp books until she collected enough to trade for a special treasure – like a footstool to ease her painful varicose veins.

While Dad was at work, Mom drove me to the Top Value stamp redemption store. There, I picked out my lefty's glove. Mom gave up several books of stamps and dreams of her own to pay for it. I don't know how much more that glove cost her in marriage currency.

I joyfully played catcher every game for that one summer season. It didn't matter that my glove was made to catch baseballs, not huge softballs, and lacked the extra padding of a catcher's mitt. It was mine and it fit. It gave me the courage to reach for every ball as bravely as my brother, even without catcher's armor.

A couple of years later Mom would go back to college to obtain her teaching certificate. Soon, she was earning her own paycheck. It was my mother's sacrifice that made my dream come true, but I hope she felt empowered by it, too.

Monk Time

Ed Davis

It feels like the perfect summer day at Ellis Pond as Bill Felker and I meander slowly across the new bridge and through the arboretum with its labeled trees, then around the pond with its lethargic geese to perch on a bench by the water. We talk about the things that matter, mostly family and death, along with monastic life and a bit about writing—we're both writers, me mostly a poet and novelist, he an almanacker and columnist.

When I came to Bill's house to get him, he was asleep, napping with his computer on his lap. Glimpsing only his head above the chair beside the door, I at first thought him dead. Though I rapped harder and harder, he didn't move. So, I tried the door and, since it was unlocked, entered.

Sitting in a chair across from him, I observed with relief that his chest rose and fell. After verifying he still lived, I realized I had not been unduly alarmed. He'd told me last Saturday, as we drove to Cincinnati to attend the monthly meeting of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani, that he was "indifferent to dying," which I knew did not mean he doesn't want to live. But if he's not able to enjoy each wildflower walk or pondside sit, he's okay with death.

Life at 80 is, for Bill, peaks and valleys. Protracted periods of depression, though frequent, do not consume for him every hour and minute of every day. What keeps him going is the possibility of peaks. And he still has some, even if they're lower than they once were, before his beloved wife Jeanie died 12 years ago. The peaks are now hillocks from which he can view the garden he and Jeanie tended so carefully while she was alive. It's now grown a bit wild, though he still tends it as best he can for one slower and stiffer.

Though Bill, like me, has some serious complaints about aging, he talks about the future more than the past. Always at work on his next column and next year's almanac, which he swears will be his last, he's most devoted to his Daybook: his lengthy, meticulous descriptions of each day for the past 44 years proving that, while the flora and fauna appear to us new every year, they actually remain much the same, year after year.

A former seminarian, Bill eventually chose nature over theology as the living manifestation of God. Choosing not to pursue the path to priestly fatherhood, he fathered, instead, not only two daughters, but our entire village by reporting the breaking news in nature, as opposed to "civilization." He's done his best since 1983, through both his annual almanac and weekly *Yellow Springs News* column, to teach us to see.

Here on the bench beside him, I see the pond's algaed water, mostly unmoving. The motley geese barely protested when we passed closely to sit nearby, to witness our lives and our deaths mirrored in this day that contains all the others just like it, mid-June, lazy, half-sunny. My friend has slowed me to his Cistercian pace, the speed of the monks at Gethsemani, the monastery in Kentucky he visits often. It's the speed of contemplation, the way that Thomas Merton and others said we should abide, experiencing rather than analyzing the God who dwells within. It is a life without burning bushes; a ripple on the pond is a major event right now.

Earlier, I didn't fret too much that my friend might be gone, maybe because I knew he wouldn't mind. Why should I begrudge the transition of my elder who'd gotten what he'd wanted while still living his age-diminished but far from extinguished life. Beside this pond, on God's perfect summer day, he'd told me he was considering volunteering for hospice; I had no trouble imagining him beside a dying, even terrified, person as the specter beckons. Calm, accepting, unsurprised by anything life or death presents, Bill's the man I want beside me if I were facing death and knew it. If he took my hand and looked into my eyes, it'd be with the gaze of God. I hope I'd recall this day's quiet, calm waters, the cooling willow breeze, the long necks of geese—the lovely space, yes, but the time and pace, too: contemplative time, monk time.

8-31-20

Amy Blount Achor

Sometimes the clock stops
And I don't know what day it is.

Sometimes the room spins,
and I find myself deep in a narrow
tunnel.

Sometimes the dawn breaks,
and I don't know how to fix it.

Sometimes the space-time continuum
collapses,
and I find myself in Dorothy's Oz.

Sometimes the numbers all run
together,
and everything stands still.

Because that is the way it is.
No more, no less.

Rectius vives

Horace, Carmina, 2.10, translated by Michael J. Kraus

You will a better life, Murena, live
By neither pressing close the unforgiv-
ing shore, afraid of storms, not daring steep
And ever thirsty swells upon the deep.

Whoever firm pursues the golden mean
Is safe; no crumbling house, unkempt, unseen
Impends about his ears, no splendid hall
Arouses envy, sober not at all.

More often winds disturb the lofty pine;
With harder falls do tow'rs of high design
Come crashing down; the thunderbolts of Jove
Descend upon the topmost mountain grove.

In troubled times the Stoic mind awaits
The coming turn of Fortune's wheel; and fates
More kind portend a fearful change no less.
The formless snows will Jove upon us press,

But then release. If things go badly now,
They will not ever so; Apollo's bow
Is not forever dealing fatal wrong,
When soft he wakes the Muse with lyric song.

If cornered, pressed or harried, show resolve
And brave appear, for now — all times revolve;
But when astern you feel the flowing gale,
Be likewise shrewd and shorten some your sail.

Historical note: No one seems to know who Licinius Murena was; he is not mentioned elsewhere in classical texts. Perhaps he was, like Brutus, an impassioned republican who preferred assassination and civil war to one-man rule. On the other hand, Horace supported the pax Augustana; wanting an end to political violence and chaos, the poet penned his classic paean to moderation — aurea mediocritas.

Seasoning

Janeal Ravndal

From the kitchen window,
between us and our fallen prayer flags,
three black vultures waddle,
so lacking their in-flight swooping grace.

Chris looks up from his cell phone.
"What defines a narcissist?
Karen says she's reading about
how to deal with them."

"We are all narcissists, some just
better at hiding it." I preach,
and leave mid-radio reports of
today's international narcissism.

Cane and I walk.
More vultures huddle by the pond.
Hip hurts less. Nice neighbor waves.
Distant Dove mourns.

At the corner,
looking up to treetops,
I note our local world waits
on its way to warm.

Near Rockford Chapel,
my determined cynic stumbles, at,
in winter's litter,
a first, yellow crocus.

Turning 70

Holly Knight

My body turned 70 on the winter solstice. In keeping with an old tradition, I took a walk in Glen Helen on my birthday. Glen Helen is the place where I came of age, the place that awakened within me a sense of vast belonging when I was a bewildered 20-year-old.

During the summer of 1969, I spent many afternoons in the Glen, sitting under a cavernous limestone formation overlooking the pool beneath The Cascades, reading and rereading Alan Watts, Thoreau, Basho, several volumes of the Fourteen Lessons in Yogi Philosophy and the like. There I began to discover another way of being—a way that sent me on a seeker's path for the rest of my life.

A year later, in Glen Helen, I felt a deep call to move to the mountains in Colorado to live a life of solitude and simplicity. I knew no one there, had never traveled west of Illinois, but the call consumed me. The year after that, I packed my small car and drove until I stopped on a red dirt road in Greene Mountain Falls—a tiny, sparsely populated town on a forested slope beneath the watch of Pike's Peak. Not long after, I moved into a cabin with a great stone fireplace on that same dirt road.

At night, from my bedroom window, I could hear the song of the mountain stream spilling over the stones and boulders across the dirt road. I walked to the falls everyday, smitten by the splendor. For ten years, backpacking and climbing mountains fed my soul. Within that decade I also followed a call to move to Kyoto, Japan for a year, often sitting in meditation in a small and simple temple tucked into a bamboo forest. And so it went. I followed the call of my heart to many a distant destination to fetch my dreams and quench my spirit's thirst.

In my fifth decade, I built a life on the shores of Lake Erie, where I thrived. But I drove down to Yellow Springs for this holiday season. The morning of my 70th year, I set out for the Glen to launch yet another decade. At the bottom of the long, stone-sculpted stairway down into the heart of the Glen, I crossed the bridge and took the north trail. The changes taking place caught me off guard.

The tributary off the Little Miami River that, for all these decades, had splashed playfully over a meandering, rocky creek bed, had dwindled to a trickle. A multitude of the once towering and mighty, old white oaks lay fallen, split and broken on the woodland floor. The stark image of those pillars of strength, disintegrating back into the earth, hit me with a jolt of distress and sorrow.

But it wasn't until further down the trail, I suddenly recognized the territory. I'd wandered smack dab into the face of impermanence. I stopped and slowly took heed of what I'd encountered. Here, atop the cliffs and prehistoric mounds, peering at the majestic panorama around and below us, the mid-afternoon sunbeams streamed through winter's ten thousand limbs and branches.

This time the Glen ushered me to a plane probably not very far beyond this turnstile. I pondered my own disintegration. Will I be able to look back at this stream of colorful human experience, this long pilgrimage as the grand adventure it's been? Will the compost of my life serve as leaven to help feed some other soul, hungry for another way of being?

I've broken a lot of boundaries in my life. I've had a good share of adventure. And, so far, all of my dreams came true. But based on my experience of mountain climbing, I know the descent can be much more rigorous and unstable than the climb up.

The path ahead may demand more courage than I've ever mustered—when meeting limitations becomes commonplace, the shredding of my ego routine, a continuing unmasking of identity until the ultimate emptiness.

I walk through this turnstile with more humility now, knowing I leave behind piles of time I took for granted. The more deeply I realize my mortality, the more deeply I cherish each everyday moment. Like how I get so easily fulfilled by the hours I spend time and play with my packmates, in the warmth and safety of our sweet home, in the shade under the river birch in our contemplative garden, watching the birds flock to the feeder under the pear tree, sipping coffee, reading the *New York Times.*

I hold a world of seemingly ordinary moments like a collection of delicate and fragile gifts, and with such magnified gratitude.

Transition

Frances Simon

Icicle hanging
The cold finger of winter
Dripping into spring.

A Meditation on The Martini

Elizabeth Wiley

There is nothing on this good earth like a well-made martini. Nothing quite as cold, quite as strong, quite as sensually stunning. If it's gin, it is so singularly astringent that, frankly, it takes commitment to acquire the taste. The almost too-strong flavor smacks your palate – rosemary, pine needles, a thick grove of juniper trees – this classic of all classic cocktails is not for everyone.

Gin or vodka, shaken or stirred, dry or dirty, served up or over ice, garnished with a twist of lemon or a briny olive, the specifics of how you prefer your martini is like a ritual you develop, becoming more detailed over time. Just watching one glide through the air in your direction, set down in front of you by the steady hand of a professional, gleaming crystalline in a stemmed cocktail glass – it quickens your pulse.

I think most martini lovers remember their first. One evening I offered to make my father a martini. His eyebrows went up; he said he hadn't had one in ages. After a whole-hearted yes to my offer, he told me this story.

It was 1952. Dad was in the Navy, training at Naval Station Great Lakes near Chicago. His wedding date to marry my mother back in Kansas was set. He promised her he would get a furlough for that specific week. This was harder than he let on. He identified the officer who would make the decision, and set about figuring out the best way to sway the guy in his favor.

One day he saw the officer put up a hand-written poster announcing auditions for a play, with the officer himself as the director. The man was a theater buff! Dad, who would rather walk through fire than be in a play, immediately signed up to audition. With the Navy not being known for its thespians, not many sailors showed up, and Dad got a bit part with a couple of lines. He took it seriously, rehearsals went well, and he got acquainted with the officer/director.

The play was performed on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings, and the officer convened a cast party after each performance. Every night to kick off the party, the man would elaborately mix martinis with his own personal bar ware. Sensing another opportunity to make an impression, Dad, who had never had a martini, was first in line. He genuinely liked the officer by this point, and had enjoyed the experience of being in the play. The officer gave him a knowing smile as he handed him the drink, one martini lover to another. Dad gave him a collegial nod, stepped away and took a sip. It just about blew his head off. Wow, this was one strong drink! But he loved it, and was first in line for another the next night. His friendship with the officer was cemented. When time came to put in for his wedding furlough, the officer signed off on it with a big congratulations. Mission accomplished!

The first time I tasted a martini was in 1988. I was in San Francisco visiting a friend from college. She was the assistant archivist at a local television station, and I was to meet her on the sidewalk in front of the building when she got off work. It was about 4 pm and it was raining.

I was there waiting with an umbrella when she came out with a look of shock on her face and a pink slip in her hand. She'd just been let go, with no warning. We stood there in the rain while she tried to put her thoughts together. Finally, she said, "Come on, let's go have a martini. I know the perfect place." We walked a few blocks to the mouth of a quiet alley, the sky getting darker as evening fell. The street surface went from cement to uneven brick as we picked our way along the narrow passage in the drizzle. About halfway down the alley, a small neon sign with art nouveau-style design glowed above an old doorway. All it said was "Bix."

We walked through the door, and into another world. Dark with glinting bits of amber light, the spacious barroom was accented with mahogany and chandeliers and looked magnificent, like a fancy establishment before prohibition. Early jazz music was floating through the air, smooth and melodious. My friend told me the bar was named after 1920s jazz great Bix Beiderbecke. On the long bar was a huge silver bowl at least two feet in diameter, piled with a mountain of shaved ice. Stuck stems-up all over the surface of the ice were classic V-shaped cocktail glasses. With me in awe and my friend still in job-loss shock, we were seated at an elegant small table near the center of the room. It was early yet, and there were hardly any customers. The waiter approached in a bowtie and long apron. My friend said, "two gin martinis please, up, with olives." She looked at me and I nodded. He smiled, said, "ahh, perfect!" and withdrew. I felt like I was in a Nick and Nora movie.

I watched the bartender shake our drinks with one hand as he pulled two cocktail glasses from the sparkling bowl of ice. He set the shaker and two glasses on a small

tray and signaled to the waiter. The waiter picked up the tray, and balancing it on the fingertips of one hand, started toward our table. Just as he approached, my chair started vibrating. The faceted glass chandeliers overhead began tinkling, and the floor seemed to lurch under our feet. I heard a crash and looked up to see the glasses falling from the big ice bowl, breaking on the bar. The waiter lost his footing, and the tray he was carrying wobbled and fell to the floor just a few feet in front of us. And as soon as I registered what was happening, it was over.

We held our breath, expecting it to continue, but it did not. After assuring us he was fine, the waiter went to replace our martinis, and my friend and I looked at each other with wide eyes and dropped jaws. My thoughts came back into focus. The bartender was cleaning up ice and broken glass. The music was still sublime. As earthquakes go, this was nothing San Francisco had not felt many times. We grinned and let out a big breath. In a minute or two, the waiter was back. He ceremoniously poured our martinis into their glasses right on the tray, then set them in front of us with a smile and a flourish. In a spontaneous display of relief, my friend and I stood up, applauded, and shook our waiter's hand. We had all lived to tell the tale! We sat back down, clinked glasses, and took our first sip. I doubt anything on this good earth at that moment could have tasted better.

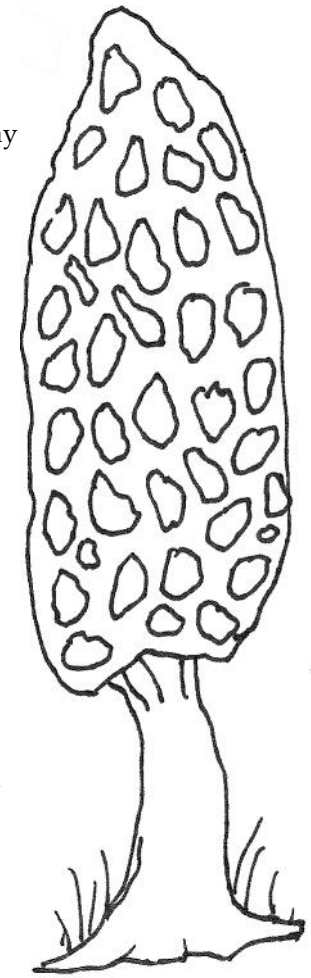
The New Normal

Diana Atkins

Answer the phone
Damn it
I need to hear
Your Voice Again.
I need to hear you say
I love you Mom.
Why can't I get used
To the new normal?

You would tell me
Get on with living
Go on an adventure
Try something new
Something exciting
Why can't I get used
To the new normal?

You had a short
Full life.
Enjoying family
Enjoying friends
Enjoying the tug
On your fishing line,
Enjoying the hunt
For wild morels
In the Spring.
Why can't I get used
To the new normal?



Moments of Enlightenment

Judy James

When the scent of a flower
brings tears
the whippoorwill's song
a sweet memory
When silence is the symphony
the wind its conductor
When the poet's words
wrap around my heart
breathing perennial wisdom
I lift illusion's veil
and walk in the temple
that is my soul

What is Really Important in Life?

Rubin Battino

It is not unusual for people to have a mid-life crisis where they question the importance and usefulness and satisfaction of what they have been doing up to that time. In a way, they are questioning the meaning of their life up to that point. (This can happen at any age, of course.)

We are generally not conscious of the fact that no one ever lives forever. We all will die at some time. When we are young that is somewhere in the distant future. As we age this knowledge sneaks in occasionally, especially when a relative or friend dies. For ourselves we prepare wills, living wills, durable powers of attorney for health, DNRs, etc.

People who have been diagnosed with a life-challenging disease have the awareness of death thrust upon them. Depending on the disease and the diagnosis and the doctor's educated guess (prognosis) this can be less than a year or a number of years. The book by S.H. Schneider (2005) entitled "The Patient from Hell" with a subtitle of "How I worked with my doctors to get the best of modern medicine and how you can too" was written by a scientist who was diagnosed with cancer, and who also understood statistics. He was well aware that life expectancy estimates given by doctors have error bars and standard deviations. Mortality studies are assembled by using life expectancy data for many patients. In statistics this yields a probability curve where there is a maximum at some number of years and lower numbers on both sides. Doctors pick the maximum number of years or most common number. For example, the life expectancy for someone diagnosed with pancreatic cancer (very hard to detect before it has spread) is generally around four months. A complete examination of the statistics shows that 5% of people diagnosed with pancreatic cancer live up to five years after diagnosis. Patients live more or less than the maximum on the probability curve, and doctors can be asked about the error bars and how they may be changed by various treatments. The "patient from hell" consistently did this!

For over thirty years I facilitated support groups for people who had life-challenging diseases. Their lives were foreshortened, and they were forced to think about what was really important in their lives. What was on their "bucket list"? What did they still want to do? Which of their dreams about life that they had as children, teen-agers, or adults were still attainable?

LeShan wrote in his book "Cancer as a Turning Point" that there are three reasons that a person typically gives for not wanting to die: (1) they fear the circumstances of death or dying, i.e., pain, the unknown, the helplessness; (2) they want to live for others, helping the others attain their goals; and (3) they want to live their own life, to be able to sing their own unique song. He indicated that only the third reason mobilized body and mind resources. It is only when a person searches for and fights for his/her own special music in ways of being, relating, working, and creating, that they tend to begin to respond much more positively to cancer treatments. This means that they have discovered what is really important in their lives. So, recalling the dreams (and daydreams) of our youth and later and working towards pursuing them is the magic key healing our minds and bodies and finding meaning in our lives.

I learned from the members of the support groups I facilitated that they all found the same two things that were really important in their lives. The primary one was people and relationships. *Life is with people*. This meant that they made time to spend meaningful time with family and friends. It also meant spending time in tracking down family and friends that they had not recently interacted with so that they could visit with them in some way. Making physical contact is important when possible.

The second thing that they all mentioned was being in touch with Nature, with the world around them. This was taking walks in the woods, hiking, going to the beach, being on or near a mountain, and being near flowing water. Clouds and blue skies, thunderstorms, the moon and stars at night, sunrises and sunsets, smelling a flower, and hearing bird song.

As an exercise for those reading this article: (1) write down what is really important in your life; (2) then write down what is really really important in your life; and finally (3) write down what is really really really important in your life. Share this with others or just ponder what you have discovered. And, remember the old adage of "You have to give the Guy With the Scythe a moving target."

Tikkun Olam

Marna Street

Sitting
semi meditative
in a clearing
forest deep around
At the edge
Our eyes meet
a doe
her fawns deeper
in the trees

When two worlds
collide
something in each one
trembles.
In those encounters
sparks
of a sort
leap
back and forth
shocking us

Recognizing
a larger universe
these worlds
mankind's and other
In that larger world
a woods at its center,
exchanging thoughts,
with a deer
is no more imaginary
than anything else

Conversations
tremblings
sparks recognition
that can heal
the world

Da šakom lupam

Luisa Lang Owen

Sama u sobi
nigde izlaz
prozor
vrata.
Kadgod ruku pružim
praznu šaku vratim.
Danima slušam po zidovima,
možda u tuđoj sobi
da neko tiho diše
da traži
da šakom lupam
da lakše umire.

To knock with my fist

Alone in the room
nowhere an exit
no window
no door.
Whenever I extend my hand
I return an empty fist.
For days I listen along the walls;
maybe in an adjacent room
someone is quietly breathing,
is seeking to hear me
knock with my fist
so he may die more easily.

Poem in Serbo-Croatian with English translation

At The Periphery

Linda Chernick

A month ago
It would still be light at 8:45.
I might be out walking,
Chatting with neighbors
As the sky flames,
Fades.
But not now.
One, then two fireflies blink their last.
The doe and twins viewed a while back
Are edging closer to the woods.
The fawns are bigger,
Their spots disappearing.
All three vanish,
Blending with the trees.
Tonight begins
The annual rain of shooting stars.
Clear sky essential to witness
The meteors' plunge through space.
But clouds are gathering.
There's a sense of
Something
Slipping away…
Of something
Just

Out of reach.

Dolfi

Luisa Lang Owen

The phone rings. "I am calling from Israel," the man says in a friendly and confident voice. "I had a hard time finding you, getting your phone number." He tells me his name. I think to myself, I know no one in Israel. "Yes, I am here," I say, wanting to be found. "I have been searching the internet, from time to time, for information about my great-grandparents, Adolf and Maria Beinhauer, who died in the Holocaust. When, recently, your memoir, 'Casualty of War; a Childhood Remembered' surfaced, in which the name Beinhauer appears." "Yes," I repeat, "I mentioned the Beinhauer's store."

Since I was born in the same village where his great-grandparents had lived, did I know them, the Beinhauers, he asks. "My grandmother Gizi, their daughter, their only child, told me her parents had died in the war; later I found their names on a list of victims killed in the Holocaust. My beloved grandmother, Gizi, lived in Bačka after she married, which was occupied by the Hungarian military during the war. There she managed to escape the persecution, and later the family settled in Israel. She died when I was twelve," he continues. I listen, saying nothing. "I am crying," I tell him after a while. "I am overwhelmed by the occasion of our meeting," I explain. That he is, at this moment, my closest of kin, I want to tell him, but I don't want my candor to scare him away. "Let's cry together," he says, "let's cry for joy, for having found one another, for meeting this way."

I was in kindergarten when the Jews of our village were taken away. The Beinhauers among them. Victims of the Holocaust. And I was nine and a half when the German minority of the former Yugoslavia were taken away; victims of ethnic cleansing. My family and I were among them.

Having similar experiences – living in a village in which a variety of ethnic groups lived together peacefully, sharing our customs, our culture, our cooking, our love for the land, and later being disowned, persecuted, driven out of house and home, put in concentration camps, starved to death, killed – is having a common history, as I see it, which makes us kin. I don't speak to Ofer about this. I mention my book instead. "Reading it you will get to know the village as it once was, when your grandmother Gizi was growing up," I tell him.

He has been in the village, and has seen the house where his grandmother lived before she married. He talked to an old man there who lived across the road and knew the Beinhauers; he did not mention that Adolf Beinhauer owned a store. He sold wood, the old man said. I mention the sawmill and lumberyard in our village, a place where wood was sold, a place the Beinhauers may have owned. But I am adamant about my memory of the store. I can see the name above the door. I had been there often with my mother when she bought the material for the dresses she sewed. I watched the fabric rolling off the bolts, it being measured out against the flat of the table – a surface even with the top of my head – while the lady proprietress and my mother were having a lively conversation in Hungarian. The little dress I am wearing in the photo on the cover of my book, was made of material bought at Beinhauers. As to who owned the store, my mother would have known.

I call a friend in Germany. Horst is three years older than I. Does he remember the dry-good store, I ask? I mention the Beinhauers. The only Jewish people he knew, lived in his neighborhood. The lady he remembers, an older woman, would call him in her yard occasionally to give him sweets. Her husband wore his arm in a sling, a black sling, Horst reminds me. And I remember. "But their name was Dolfi, not Beinhauer," Horst says.

I think about it later. Dolfi… Dolfi, something about it rings a bell. A nickname for Adolf? Why, yes, it is Adolf… Beinhauer. Of course! Dolfi for Adolf. There were people in the village not called by their proper name, but by names given to them by others in the village, perhaps long ago. Young people of the village may not ever have known the person's real name. Lang-Schneider, the tailor, for instance, a tall and skinny man, whose name was neither Lang nor Schneider and who was no relation of others in the village, the Langs nor the Schneiders, since that name was given to him in reference to his physical appearance. In Lang-Schneider's case, it was the length of him, his height, that is, and his profession (in German). It was meant to identify him as the long tailor.

I text Ofer: "Did your great-grandfather have an injury which required him to have his arm in a sling?" The answer is immediate. I respond to the good news: "We knew Maria and Adolf Beinhauer, your great-grandparents. You, Horst, and I restored their memory to the village, your grandmother Gizi's village, and ours; the village within us."

February

Jane P. Blakelock

Today a redbelly
wrangles the peanut wreath
prising out nuggets from
beige-fibered waffle-
stamped bulbs.
Yesterday he drummed
briefly, rat-tatted his drill
on a bedroom gable,
red belly to raw eave
underside.

Now a titmouse flits
within the coiled ring
a downy gets
a beakful of suet
strung caged from the pine
while pairs of cardinals'
orange beaks startle
rain and snowmelt mirrors
on the ground below.
Their baths are crowned
with terra cotta chimney pots,
red crests masked black, their mates
in gray and dun ombré
edged berry—

This February fills
with freeze and thaw.
Deer have traipsed
and sprawled
upon suburban lawns
all nervy and proprietary,
comfortable like Northern
Yorkshire deer, the native reds
I saw one year, residing herds
outside the stone brick
Choristers House
in Royal Studley Park.

Likewise at ease
Glen Helen's beavers
weave their dam's accretion.
The pond above is partly
frozen crisp atop the weir
of braided branches laced
in wattled gray.
Old music penetrates below:
a second tier where rivulets, full
bore,
spill down their strum
into the water's thrum and pour.

A sudden balm vaults
temperatures near summer's.
Pre-March light is slighted
by the sun outright,
beamed brash upon bare skin.
We are grateful and amazed
but wary, too, of purple yellow
bravery, that rampant gasp
of crocuses
brazen before a turning wind
sweeps on a dime to snatch us
back from premature
frivolity.

"Glen Helen Beaver Dam" photo by Jane Blakelock

Do You Remember?

Ardis Macaulay

A silence – silenced,
can't answer.
But what could it say?
Do you remember?

Drifting in reverie,
this SILENCE surfaces
as a heart's song,
hiding a question.

With focused, "mind's eye vision,"
enter into quietude,
to a place where
longings & shadows linger.

Sense feelings surfacing.
Focus.
Observe visions of
the day that never came to be.

This moment is no longer cloaked
in Invisible silence,
but patiently awaiting breakthrough
into your, "now time awareness."

Was there a question
or a longing to be birthed?
Do you remember, "In this present
tense moment?"
How will you answer?

Will you choose to release the desire
or reclaim it?
Either way, it's
silenced no more.

Naked in Finland

Barbara Brookshire

It is said that everyone has at least one story to tell about their life before they pass on to perhaps another life. If this is the case then this is my story, though a very bizarre one at that.

In the summer of 1964, my family, including my husband, Dr. Kenneth Brookshire, my two children, Christopher 8 and Rachel 6, attempted to travel to Finland, where we would live for a year, following a Fulbright Lecturing Award that Ken had been granted.

The day before departure from New York harbor on the Swedish ship Kungsholm, my family and I stayed overnight in a NY city hotel close to the ship's dock. The morning of departure we awakened in our hotel room and to our horror we had been robbed as we slept! My purse with all our passports and travelers' checks was gone; even Ken's trousers were missing, though we finally found them behind a hallway coke machine! Needless to say, we were in a state of shock and disbelief! Our new passport photos reflect our trauma.

We telephoned the Kungsholm ship Captain and relayed our terrible experience. We really thought our trip to Finland was on hold and that the ship would sail without us! But to our amazement the ship's management was able to take us to pick up new travelers checks and passports within thirty minutes of sailing departure time. Unbelievable!

However, that was our first hurdle. When we finally arrived in our state room, we found out that our trunk with a years worth of seasonal clothing and personal items did not make it to the ship! Alas, there was nothing we could do but wash and wear the clothes on our backs for weeks until we arrived in Turku, Finland, and even then, the trunk was still missing!

My Dress: I wore a lovely knit 2-piece dress that my mother handmade for me to travel "in style." It never occurred to me that I would be wearing that dress every day until we got our luggage back in Turku! I had to have the dress laundered every few days until we arrived and so by the time I could take it off, it had gone from a midi to a maxi (just above my ankles!). I was so glad to undress that I just tossed it away. Now after all these years I wish I had kept it with all its fragile stretchy memories of a time long ago.

When we did finally arrive in Turku after weeks of sailing on the North Atlantic by way of the Queen Mary, we were really tired but certainly anxious to disembark and become acquainted with our Finnish apartment on Sirkkalankatu Street. When we finally settled into our apartment where we would live for nine months, our trunk did not arrive for some time, and when it did, it was covered with many colorful travel stamps that told us it had been on its own adventure that took it to the country of Turkey, instead of our destination of Turku, Finland! But we were elated because finally, we had a change of clothes!

At first we were greeted by the cheerful Finnish American Society representatives who were so happy to inform us that they were taking us and a few other American representatives by bus on a tour of colleges where Ken would lecture on experimental psychology at the University of Turku, and Åbo Akademi Swiss University, and then on to a summer camp near a lake meeting new Finns and Americans who introduced us to the Finnish way of life.

We headed to the beautiful lake resort area of Tampara where we could relax, swim and most importantly have our first Finnish Sauna. We arrived in mid-afternoon and were escorted to our rooms. Next on the agenda was a sauna for relaxation and then dining on "sauna snacks" – linki (sausage), bread, cheese and beer. Since this was our first sauna we were surprised to find out just what it was and what we were expected to do in order to really enjoy it.

At this point the group was separated, males & females, professors and faculty wives. We eight faculty wives were ushered into a wooden hut with two tiers of wooden benches

and a very hot stove made of large stones and I am not sure what kind of fire, but it kept those stones sizzling. We were to remove our clothes and sit on the benches and sweat. The temperature was between 170 –250°. An experienced Finn would splash water on the stove and immediately a burst of steam would arise – wow!

We were encouraged to sit nude in the sauna; however, we could have a towel if we wanted – we all wanted! Now I must say in general I am a pretty adventurous person, but when it comes to sitting nude in a very hot room with a group of middle-aged faculty wives whom I hardly knew, I did pause. Three of the ladies declined this experience, but I wanted the whole Finnish "ball of wax" so I said OK!

After sitting in the sauna for at least 15–20 minutes, we really couldn't take it anymore, so we were led to the abutting lake and told to jump in and cool off. So, we dropped our towels and did just that in our glorious birthday suits. Here we were bobbing nude up and down in a lovely lake, when much to our surprise we noticed a boatload of fishermen not more than 20–30 feet away. We of course tried to cover ourselves with whatever was floating by, until we realized that the fishermen were more interested in fishing than looking at a bunch of middle-aged nudes! The Finns seemed to accept their nudity much more casually than Americans (at least back in the '60s).

For Spring vacation we had gone to Lapland (I really didn't want to go to even more cold) but this was what we did because it was planned by the Finnish American Society. Lapland was about 5 hours from Turku and so after arriving in our dorms – we had dinner and went to bed early. We were informed that we were to arise by 6 am, eat, and be on our cross-country skis by 8 am. I had never skied – remember I was a California girl! At any rate after putting on our skis we lined up and followed our Finnish ski master leader. Most of the terrain was flat and so I soon was able to maneuver the skis and poles, and though I was at the end of the line, I stayed with the group as did my family.

We skied across a large icy lake, Lake Pyhaselka (a film location for the movie Doctor Zhivago!) and eventually came to a small hut with a wood burning stove and were treated to a hot drink which we really needed. Just beyond the hut was another hut in which stood a Russian border guard. We were at the end of Finland and the beginning of Russia. The guard stared at us as if we were ready to invade Russia! We turned around but before we did, I did a very childish thing – I stuck out my tongue and crossed my eyes at him! This was the cold war era, but I got away with it! And so back we skied for more sausage and beer and finally sound sleep!

There is much more to tell about our marvelous Finnish sojourn, but that could be in another installment. Jaahyvaiset!

All Cats Know

Nancy Howell Koehler

all cats know everything
all cats know they are never wrong
all cats know water is not for washing
all cats know smelling is believing
all cats know the best time of day is night
all cats know high places are serene
all cats know drinking milk is for the very young or very old
all cats know that motherhood is a state of love
all cats know that the best food comes from the refrigerator
all cats know small dogs have bad breath
all cats know bird snacking is best done in private
all cats know toilet water is for emergencies
all cats know hopping insects are the most tasty
all cats know heat is a tranquilizer
all cats know reflections are mostly friendly
all cats know home is where everything stays the same
all cats know that "nine lives" is just an old cat's tale
all cats know never go willingly to the vet
all cats know marking one's territory is for those with the upper hand (paw)
all cats know temporarily acting obedient wins the most food
all cats know a happy home is worth fighting for
all cats know when the litter box is full a potted plant will do
all cats know that no other cats count except one's kittens
all cats know claws can't open cans but work well on boxes and bags
all cats know tree climbing is second nature; tree descending is an acquired skill
all cats know grooming is an obsession

An Afternoon at Underdog Café

Teressa Morse

I am sitting in a coffee shop. Creative thoughts are swirling about as I sit amongst other writers.

I can hear their words. Adjectives and adverbs flying around as descriptive measures begin to form and tell a story. The nouns and verbs are coming together and wondrous stories are about to be born.

I can smell the aromas of what they are writing. Describing a warm kitchen in a grandmother's home, the lavender fragrance coming off a field of wildflowers, the cologne worn by someone's first love. I pay no mind to the coffee brewing, it is the beautiful fragrance of their creativity that is captivating me.

Sitting here, I can taste the deliciousness of their minds as they quench their hunger for more and better ways to express themselves, setting a metaphorical table filled with stories that will satisfy a reader's appetite.

My sense of touch is alive here as I can nearly reach high enough and can grab those enchanting thoughts, words circling around in a folly waiting to settle down into the perfect sentence, the perfect expression, the anticipation of a new story coming to life to be enjoyed.

As I sit here and watch as they feverishly type away, I am in awe of their faces, deep in thought, a smile making its way across their lips as they privately relish in what they put to paper. It is exhilarating to think that I am witnessing with my own eyes so many lovely tales inching their way toward a reader.

My senses are alive today. My personal journey of expressing what my life has been thus far and the incredible path I am headed toward is now awakened by these senses. Life gives us these moments, a chance to engage with others and perhaps, if we are gifted enough, touch someone else with our words and set them off on an imaginary voyage.

All this from sitting in a coffee shop.

Eye Contact

Lee Huntington

The ophthalmologist, Dr. Olsen, scoots his stool closer to me. His legs straddle my right leg as my legs straddle his. He holds a round lens, and he sighs and groans as he tries to see something in my eye. My eyes had been dilated so it is hard to keep my eyes open in the bright light.

He leans forward, his forehead touching mine. Finally, he scoots his stool back and places the magnifying lens on his desk. He folds his arms and says, "I can't find anything. Sometimes people have hallucinations that seem very real."

"I'm not making this up," I say. "I actually see, I actually read documents that get between me and what's in front of me."

"And what do these documents say?" Dr. Olsen asks.

"I don't remember," I say. "Once they go away, I can't remember what I read."

"Try this," the doctor says. "Next time you see one of these documents, read it aloud and record your voice."

"You believe me!" I say.

"You need proof that nothing is there. Then you'll need to see a different kind of doctor."

"You mean a shrink."

"Let's just try this," he says.

A week later, August 9th, I return to play him a recording on my cell phone.

"This is what I saw," I say. "I recorded it this morning. I haven't listened to it yet."

"Give me the phone," Dr. Olsen says. "Ready?"

"Yes," I say.

He pushes the "start" button.

We hear my voice, "*Dayton Daily News,* August 10th. Oh no! Dr. Olsen!" I listen to myself read, "Dr. Vincent Olsen, an ophthalmologist who practiced in Dayton, was found dead in his office on August 9th, the apparent victim of an irate patient."

Dr. Olsen stops the recording. "Today is August 9th," he says.

"Do you believe me now?" I ask.

"No," he says. "After all, I'm still alive."

"You are making me very angry," I say.

On the Bedrock of My Soul

Jo Ann Kiser

It's come down to this:
On the bedrock of my soul
Two figures move in morning's light.

Once I dreamed
Accolade of thousands:
To bow from Marrakesh
Bound for Paris or Rome,
Brightness of pomp and circumstance
Lighting the certain way home.

I have come home now,
Not by way of Paris or Rome
But through the back door
Of my mother's love:
To these morning figures
Who never sought fame but
The steady light of everyday,
To make sense
Of God's senselessness.

My sister: gallant preserver of noon,
captain of love who led our mother
Through rough shoals to death;
My brother: cherisher of silver dreams
Bequeathed by a father who died in his arms
whispering fragile sorrow in his ears.

So might I emulate these two figures of light,
Be conservator against the coming night.

A Blow Away

Artie Isaac

Planted around our table
every weekday at 9:30
after the work-a-days
have gone their ways,

we six cradle cups of coffee
as if the diner were cold,
our blood a little thinner,
our trunks a little thicker.

Lou shares his business card
which says nothing more than
no phone number — no hurry
no obligations — no money.

Idealism dead, the power out,
we re-hash yesterday's debate
of black-and-white memories
and full-color news reports.

How about those Yankees?
Goddamn fools in Washington.
Determined to distinguish
our people from *those people.*

A skirt enters — our eyes all turn.
She crosses the floor, perhaps for us.
We stare, each thinking ourself
more than a dandelion gone to seed.

White hair stands on old scalps
lit gauzy in the sun,
ready for the slightest breeze
to blow it all away.

Illocution (Read With Attitude)

Artie Isaac

Tooth or tone, the text does turn:
Soothing balm? No! Stringent burn!
I spoke my kindness, with a smile.
You heard it wrong, with all defiled.

I do love you and told you so,
But you took my blessing as a blow.
Here's all I said, and meant it true:
It's been nice knowing you.

Plus four hopes that impossibly hurt:
I hope you're happy with yourself.
I hope you can sleep at night.
I hope you like what you see in the mirror.
I hope you're proud of what you've done.

Go in peace, friend:
Suit yourself.
Noted.
K
Whatever you say.

Obviously.

Alone By My Bookshelf

Berch Carpenter

Sometimes I feel them calling from the past.
Their voices – damaged, distorted, and tarnished –
Drift out to me over two millennia.

I hold their remnants in my hand.
These fragments of once living souls.
These Old Ones which creak with age
As I turn their limbs.

Their soft message sings out across time.
"There is a good way to live life.
Happiness for the human heart is possible."

This old theme told in different voices
Seeps into me and drifts toward the future.

Untitled

Robert Paschell

I am going to love you
without preregistering online.
Without a rehearsal, a background check,
an appointment, a feasibility study,
or an environmental impact assessment.
I am going to love you right now.
In real time, in one take, face to face,
without reservations.
Because in this world of electronic go-betweens,
recorded messages, automated systems,
and artificial intelligence, what else is there to do?

Curandera

Frederic Stuart (Skip) Leeds

My cat is the tide
  lapping up on me with her
moon-bent moods, tentative
  as she scouts my strand
imprints herself in these dunes and drifts
  then retreats, according to tables she clearly
does not grasp

My cat is lightning
  arriving before the thunder could warn
sparking the air alight, her eyes
    ozone blue
with electric indifference she treats me sideways
  to a static caress, and there again
    she's gone – her outline drifting, pulsing across my
     eyes
though they're closed

My cat is a tarantella
  But in silken slowest motion
  dancing black charm against my
  poisonous solitude – and like the
    curandera, she is not sure she loves but
      she is learning through moving and
        she spirals past the coda
  ending curled upon my lap

– For Ashes, Carona, and all their fellow feline healers

The Treachery of Memories

Sheila Flaherty Filler

Most of what happens to us goes unremembered. The events of our lives are like photographic negatives. The few that make it into the developing solution and become photographs are what we call memories.

– Janet Malcolm "Still Pictures"

It's the dawn of my life, and I'm waking up to the world around me. I'm learning that I'm part of a family. I'm also learning about the animals in my world. I'm drawn to them.

The chickens appeal to all of my senses. I crawl into the coop and collect the eggs, a task my parents have assigned me. I feel the eggs' smoothness. I register their interesting shape. If I'm lucky, the eggs are still warm. The hens, indignant, cry "Robbery!" and scold, but I'm only afraid of the rooster. Most evocative of all, I smell the chicken's stink, the earthy scent of bird manure. I like it. And like most young children, I'm not offended by shit.

Another animal I encounter in my new world is a cat, or maybe cats. I like putting the cat in our milk box, the box that is regularly filled by the milkman from the Lone Pine Dairy. A cat is a weighty animal for a three-year-old, so I never quite succeed in getting it into the box and closing the lid. My parents scold me, but I just cannot seem to help myself.

Several years ago, while visiting my sister and other family members, I related the "When I was Very Young I Tried to Put the Cat in the Milk Box" story. Annabelle interrupted me mid-story, and proclaimed, "We never had cats. Mom despised cats! How could you remember? You were only little!" But my memory is so visceral: the cat; heavy, with soft fur, trying to fit a rounded being into that rectangular box; my first geometry lesson! And my mother's voice chiding me. Annabelle's surprisingly angry, especially since I'm not directly challenging a memory that we both share. She is nine years older than me, and pronounces this with certainty. It doesn't occur to my older sister that she could be mistaken. We can file away a memory, but it doesn't lie dormant.

I understand the treachery of memories – that every time we revisit one, it changes a little and becomes a memory of a memory. So I wonder if we could both be "right" about the cats. Suppose Mom and Dad didn't keep mousers around but neighbors' cats came calling. I don't remember being scratched or bitten-although I deserved it! That suggests a pet, a gentle feline. But gentle felines can be killers, too. They can slay the rodents attracted by the chicken feed. Furthermore, when I'm older, I learn that my parents kept chickens as part of their Victory Garden during World War II.

Memories, inaccurate or not, are essential to our sense of self. In his memoir, *"A Childhood, the Biography of a Place,"* the writer, Harry Crews, wonders if the stories we tell ourselves are true, because we think they are true, which is quite a philosophical notion. Is therefore my memory of putting a cat in a box, true because I believe it is true? Or perhaps – related to that idea – that what we think we remember is more important than what actually occurred?

Since I love books, I like to think that our minds are home to our personal libraries. On the shelves are the books that store our memories. Some books we return to again and again. Maybe when we revise our memories it is akin to putting out new editions. Several years ago, Annabelle's memories began to die. No one was alarmed at first. It just seemed like the normal process of aging. But by 2017 my sister's grasp on her memories was definitely loosening. If prodded she could still retrieve a few. Her library was shrinking: books kept falling off the shelves.

Only two years later she and her husband were both at an assisted living facility in Massachusetts, in the "memory care" unit. When I saw her in person, that year, she knew who I was, and she introduced me to an aide as her "little sister." The following year her memory had eroded even further. During a phone call with Annabelle that year, she seemed to think that she was still teaching 5th grade in Springfield, Massachusetts, though she had retired more than twenty years earlier.

When Annabelle's husband of 50 years passed away in 2021 she didn't mourn him because she didn't remember him. When life breaks our hearts at least we are still alive.

But when our memories die – when we live only in the ever present, are we truly alive? Tragically my sister's library and most of its content has burned to the ground.

Dog Love

Pat Stempfly

Dogs are the waggers of the universe that give us unconditional love. Why do we make it so complex?

It Defies Probability!

Albert Schlueter

In the year 2000 I traveled to Nepal at the invitation of Mike Frame, 1962 Carleton College classmate. Mike served in the Peace Corps in Nepal after graduation and loved the country so much he stayed and lived his entire life there. Over 30 of our classmates also came for a week-long reunion.

After the reunion I remained ten days to take a trek into the Annapurna Mountains. When I returned to Katmandu I had a free day before flying home. I decided to use the day to visit the Buddhist monasteries surrounding a Stupa on the east side of Katmandu. It was a Saturday but I arrived after the services were over. I came to a temple in one of the monasteries and peered in. I saw a robed Buddhist monk inside. He saw me and said in perfect English, "Come on in." As I walked through the beautiful temple I approached the monk. He asked where I was from. I replied, "the USA." He asked where in the USA. I replied, "Ohio." He said, "I have been to Ohio." I was totally amazed by this but he, probably feeling it was karma, took it in stride. I then asked where he had been in Ohio. When he replied Yellow Springs I was totally blown away! I asked if he knew Robert Pryor and Dianeah Wanicek. He said he had stayed in their house for a month.

We chatted for some time and I learned that Robert had invited the lama of this temple to come and participate in the Antioch College Buddhism course he taught. Because the lama's English was not good, he had asked this monk to accompany him to serve as a translator.

The improbability of this chance encounter left me totally in awe. The monk never showed any sign of surprise. In fact, as I was leaving he said he wished I had come earlier. Why? Because earlier two women had been there and they were from Yellow Springs!

When I returned home I asked around and learned that one of the women was a Yellow Springs High School graduate, studying at Macalester College, doing a semester abroad study in Nepal.

In 2007 Jean Ballantine, the head of the WSU Sociology Department asked if I would host Zhu Zhiyong, a Chinese scholar who had contacted her about coming to work during the summer. I was living in a large house on Whitehall Drive and had hosted many WSU visiting researchers: a Canadian four times, a woman from Portugal twice, a family of four from Russia and a family of four from Denmark. Thus, I readily agreed. Zhu, his wife and his four-year-old son came in May. We not only shared the house but also my car. Their stay went smoothly and they frequently invited me to eat with them. The only snafu I remember was when Zhu put diesel fuel in my car because, at the time, it was cheaper than gasoline. A tow to Village Automotive resolved the problem and a lesson was learned. In September Zhu and his family returned to his university in Beijing.

In 2009 Sun Qi contacted me about renting a room in my house. She was a Fulbright Scholar teaching at Central State University. She had lived the first semester in Wilberforce but wanted to be in Yellow Springs for the second.

Toward the end of her stay with me she said she was going to Chicago to attend the national meeting of Chinese American Scholars. This meeting was attended by thousands who presented papers on their work. She sat in on numerous presentations. One she found particularly interesting. After the session she sought out the presenter. While talking with him he asked where she was staying. She said Ohio. He said he had been to Ohio. They discovered that they both had lived in Yellow Springs at the house of Al Schlueter! Sun Qi returned to Yellow Springs with a video of Zhu giving me an enthusiastic, warm greeting.

Yellow Springs is a small place with only 3,700 residents. This means that the global population consists of over 2,000,000 Yellow Springs sized communities! We are a mere drop in the bucket. To be more accurate, we are less than a fifth of a drop in a three gallon global bucket!

My life experiences suggest we have an out-sized presence on the global scale. Two chance encounters, each with a Yellow Springs thread of connection. It totally defies probability!

Two Chairs

Frances Simon

Our chairs
face each other
in front of the fireplace,
even when we've left the room.

What small intimacies
linger on the footstool
to warm our feet
when we return?

Honoring the Preacher Man

Joy Fishbain

I've been thinking about the Bible thumpin' preacher of my youth. He was mesmerizing, so impassioned and urgent in his message, trying to save us all, his congregation. I was so young, an adolescent at the time… but still I listened carefully.

He was sure. We were near the end. God was mad about things. Mankind wasn't following the right path, not obeying the master's rules. Man had better shape up or else. I was somewhat mystified by this preacher. Underneath it all I could see that he was a kind man. He was real and he seemed sure of the truth. At the end of his fire and brimstone sermon he would wipe his brow. Being a preacher was a tough job, but he knew what was up – and how! He warned of all the evils of the world, and of the devil's cunning ways. In all likelihood though, I felt that we congregants were pretty safe. We were immune; we believed. It was everyone else, the human race as a whole, that was in trouble. I was glad we were in the light, saved and in God's good graces. Our preacher encouraged us, prayed with us, cared about us. Life was black and white. Things were wrong and things were right. Life was simpler then.

As time moved on, and I grew up, I learned many new things – about life, about mankind, about evil, about hope and kindness, about illness, death and strife. Everything became more tenuous, more uncertain. A few years later I learned our minister had died of a heart attack.

There are mega-churches now; not so many Bible thumpin' preachers left; most have lost the knack. I also notice that the idea of fire and brimstone isn't quite what it used to be. The word out there is that many churches have dropped the part about eternal damnation; perhaps a little harsh, a little extreme. After all, eternity is a really, really long time. I think my old preacher would have vehemently disagreed with this premise however. One just can't make such willy-nilly amendments to the Bible he would have argued.

It all makes me smile, thinking back on a more innocent time. And I have concluded that if there's a heaven I think my old kind preacher man is there, probably in charge of the morals and ethics department, in the event that someone might yield to the temptation to stray, even up there in heaven. God forbid! He would be the right man to set things straight though. I would trust him on that.

Mr. Boomer

Lee Huntington

When the bread man, Mr. Boomer, came around twice a week, the boys listened for the doorbell and then shouted, "Mr. Boomer rang!" My husband Jim started it, and I could have shot him, because every time this happened, I laughed. What kind of fool laughs at the same joke, the same expected joke every time it's uttered? This was back in 1946 when all we had to worry about was finding enough things to spend our money on.

When I laughed at the joke, the boys and Jim laughed at me for laughing, and Mr. Boomer was always greeted by our four happy faces. We would buy his special of the day and a white puffy bread almost as light as cotton candy. You could have compacted that white loaf until it was the size of a tennis ball. As it was, we played with it in our fingers as we ate, and I never said anything because I did it too. We kneaded all kinds of dreams with it, and sometimes we even told each other what they were before we ate them.

In the wintertime we would roll the white bread into balls and stick them on the branches for the birds. The four of us would eat a hot breakfast at the booth in the kitchen and watch the birds eat our offering outside the kitchen window.

I always knitted Mr. Boomer a pair of gloves for Christmas, and in freezing weather he would be wearing them when he came to our house. I used to wonder how many pairs he had. Did he change them before each stop, or did he like ours the best?

The bread man doesn't come around anymore. Children take the bus to school. Husbands don't eat breakfast before they leave for work. White bread isn't good for you. Wives like me with empty nests sit at the table and mold their dreams out of empty air.

Country Music

Peter Whitson

The other day I was watching a show on PBS. It was a Ken Burns documentary on country music. It was really good. As it unfolded it would appear the Country Music part of the world was built on sex, drugs, alcohol, deception, and a whole lot of other creepy crawler things. Now that I come to think about it though, what else could a starving old short story writer ask for than to get a shot at being a published blockbuster author? So, all I have to do now is to figure out what is important and what is not. Ha, the story of my life according to Bob Seeger quote, "What to leave in. What to leave out. It seems like yesterday."

Well anyway, here goes. Something you might remember when we last spoke was that I had only recently come back from a trip to Nashville, TN. And I'm sure you know that Nashville is alleged to be the cradle of Country Music. Beer buses and all! I'll tell you what, Friend, there's no alleged to it, Nashville is the cradle and so much more. Nashville is the cradle of country music, Beer buses and all! But then so is Bristol, TN, and they have the Carter Family Fold nearby to prove it. No beer buses at all. The hand that rocks the cradle….

I could probably spend lots of time here telling you about the country music capital of the world. Nashville takes the prize, "Fer Sure," as my friend Louis would say. But Louis wasn't there. He turned the page not too long ago. He was a good guy. But this story is not about Louis. That would be a story for another day. It's first a story about a woman I grew up with. I think I remember her name was Joan. I'm not sure, but then I usually change the names of the people in my stories to protect the guilty. So, Joan it is, and Joan was real. Well, Joan had an interesting characteristic about her. While every kid from the New Jersey shore our age was heavy into Rock and Roll, Joan was heavy into Country and Western. She loved it and nobody was going to change her mind about it. So, there I was. Like so many other times, stuck between a rock and a hard place. No pun intended. A genuine gas station rocker. Worlds apart from country Joan.

Joan was smart. She was fast. She was very pretty. And on top of it all, she liked country music. Nowadays, a lot of people do. Joan was just ahead of her time, especially so for New Jersey in the mid-1950s, and she knew it. I'll be willing to bet at this moment you are likely saying to yourself, "So what does that have to do with the price of pork bellies?" Perhaps rightly so. I have no idea what the price of pork bellies are. But I do know many people living in my adopted Midwest do know and would be able to quote it to you on any given day and time. And that may be the point here. And... that is precisely my point! Remember that old rock and roll favorite, "I don't care what people say, rock and roll is here to stay."

I really don't want to strain my brain too hard but, where do we go from here? And for that matter, where and how do I find the story tension? But of course, was Joan a high school girlfriend of mine?

1. Gordon Lightfoot's Sundown.
2. If she was, I didn't know anything about it.
3. I sure wish she was.

Which answer would you pick? I sure do know what my choice would be. But alas, my loss. I do hear she still plays a beautiful country fiddle and still loves country music. Amazing being we both graduated high school class of 1958, a long time ago. And it was a long time ago that Joan started playing her fiddle with a couple of her country musicians at the annual class reunions.

Speaking of a long time ago and the beginning of country music, is it Carter Fold, outside of Bristol that is the birthplace of country music, or is it Nashville, the current Las Vegas of country music? I've been to both places. Each has its value, each its charm. See both if you can, you won't be disappointed with either one. If you want the actual answer, be sure to watch the Ken Burns documentary.

And now for a little lighter side, what do you get when you play your country music record backwards? You get your wife back, your husband back, your sweetheart back, your horse back, your old dog back, the money you spent on whiskey back. Need I say more?

There is one last thing I'd like you to know about Joan before we quit. You remember me saying she would play a country tune or so at our class reunions? Well, at the end of each performance she would look out to everyone there and say to them: "The only things you can take with you when you leave this earth are the things you gave away while you were here."

So, what a strange world we have here; a genre of music that is capable of bringing you to the lowest level of honky-tonk that has ever been. Yet this same music is equally skilled at raising the hearts of millions of us up to the gates of heaven. Not only that but we have what appears to be concrete evidence of the

significance of country music when we look at the success of the extremely popular songwriter, singer, and all around talented, extremely creative woman I speak here, of course, of Beyonce's album, *Cowboy Carter,* an album that took top honors in this year's Grammy Awards. And Beyonce is nobody's fool. She knows something good when she sees it. "I don't care what people say. Country music is here to stay."

So, there are at least seven good country, western, blue grass – whatever you want to call them – bands in and around Yellow Springs. Next time you go to listen, please drop a little something into the hat. I guarantee you'll hear somebody sincerely say to you, "'Preciate it."

The Office

Cheryl Wood Smith

Becoming a part of the world of "The Black Movement" involved transitioning from an ordinary everyday Black American life experience, and leaving the traditional working-class community of my youth and entering into the "belly of the beast;" the impoverished ghetto where the Black Panther Party created an island of revolutionary fervor.

Every place we occupied; the Free breakfast program, the Free clothing program, The People's Community Center, the Commune, all are indelibly imprinted on my memory, but the place that held the greatest meaning for me was "the office."

The office was the headquarters for the Dayton Branch of The Black Panther Party. It was located in a building called The Ghetto Palace. It was a large brick building that had been at one time, the finest movie theater on the West side of Dayton, Ohio.

In addition to the theater, there was a ballroom upstairs resplendent with a huge silver ball in the ceiling that gave off beautiful stars of light; with highly polished floors and brilliant chrome fixtures, it was magical. I remember going there as a child to hear my father's band.

But in 1970 the defunct theater along with the adjacent offices, served as home to multiple movement groups. In addition to the Party, The Black Guard, The Republic of New Africa, The Revolutionary Youth Movement, The Black Legion, all coexisted harmoniously and all were committed to change.

We ran our breakfast program out of the kitchen, which always smelled of bad plumbing and ammonia. The electricity was spotty, the water supplies unreliable, but the area where the children ate was thoroughly scrubbed and disinfected daily, as were all the utensils and appliances.

The office was located in the lobby of the theater. It was the most exciting and dynamic place I had ever known, filled with local leaders and occasionally, national figures.

We held strategic planning sessions, political education classes, sensitivity sessions, and explorations into the hidden passages of the building to identify escape routes in case we were ambushed by the police. We also had space for comrades from other areas who might need to go "underground" to avoid becoming political prisoners.

We received Panther Papers from New York and sold them throughout the community after breakfast. In the evenings we would read the paper from cover to cover, craving any and all information about the brothers and sisters who were working in other locations.

We welcomed everyone; radicals from the antiwar movement, women from the women's movement, pacifists from the peace and freedom movement, students from the surrounding colleges. Anybody who believed in our cause was welcome to be in coalition with us.

I thought this was the beginning of the New America, where equality and dignity was available to all. But it was a short-lived utopian idea created in the ruins of West Dayton's greater times.

Eventually, we all returned to who and what we were becoming before Huey and Bobby and a cadre of others convinced us that "revolution in our lifetime" was going to happen. It didn't. Today, we are still hoping.

The Time of Then and Now

Pat Stempfly

Time marches on with a flurry of wind, rain, and snow and hope for Spring when crocus say hello and violets show their purple face with beauty and grace. Fuzzy brown bulbs planted in the Fall wake up with daffodils galore and more.

I awaken to the seasons of life and nature with hope for the time of then and now.

As Is

Nancy Mellon

Snarky Parky & Me: A Journey Into Parkinson's with Nancy Mellon

"The Five Invitations" by Frank Ostaseski. "Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully."

Mr. Leo, my parents' friend and my dear friend, from my childhood, died last night. Leo never married or lived with a friend. The closest he came to living with anyone else, was when he and my parents bought a small cottage on Wonder Lake together. We shared many wonderful Lake adventures and Holidays together. Leo was a very happy bachelor and a lovely, unofficial Uncle.

After my dad died, (at the painfully young age of 43,) Leo remained a good friend to my mom and to me and my brother. After he retired, he traveled to exotic places, sometimes with friends, and sometimes he traveled alone and made friends along the way. He kept himself healthy and enjoyed spending time with his many friends.

During the time we lived in NYC, Steven and I got to know Leo as adults, when his work moved him to New Jersey. Wherever we roamed, he would visit us. When we moved to California, Steven and I and the boys visited him, in his favorite and last home in Phoenix. After we moved to Yellow Springs in Ohio, we started the habit of calling once a month to check in and to talk about anything and everything. He always seemed to be doing fine.

By 94, many of his friends had died. In the last 5 months, his life had changed.

We could tell that Leo was having trouble with his memory. We lived across the country and couldn't drop in to visit. We did not know any phone numbers of the few friends he still mentioned. We didn't know who his doctors were or if he had given anyone a power of attorney, and if so, who was it? Basically, we didn't know squat. We did know Leo did not want to leave his home. He was a very independent man and planned on staying that way. We knew that life was getting hard for him. We didn't know what to do to help.

Finally, JoAnne, a friend of his, found our number and called us. She was worried too. We were very thankful to hear that she had been given his power of attorney many years ago. She told us that Leo hadn't been going out, he was not eating well anymore and he was losing weight. He wasn't letting anyone in either.

He was living in his bedroom, dying by himself. He told us, on one of our last calls, that he might go to the hospital. JoAnne knew where he had an emergency outdoor key.

JoAnne and a neighbor were able to get him out of his bedroom and into a hospital. He went from the hospital into a place where he would get care. But he didn't want to be there. It felt like it only took a couple of weeks, it might have been a couple of months. His mind shut down. He didn't remember us or any of his friends or his life as it was.

My friend has died. I don't think it is a bad thing for him. On the night he died, he had 2 other friends that sat with him and told him it was OK to let go. Five minutes later, he died.

Years ago, when I thought my mom was dying, I called my brother Tim and Mr. Leo. My brother came for a week. He sat with her by himself, while I took care of my boys and made our dinners. But mom kept going and Tim had to go back to his job. He couldn't come again.

Leo asked if I would like him to come and sit with my mom. I said "Yes, please come!" I was frightened and wasn't sure how to comfort my mom or how I would react to her dying. I had never been with anyone when they died. But I didn't want her to die alone. Leo drove to California that day. He sat with me beside her bed.

It was a very quiet time. Mom was not talking anymore and her eyes were closed. I don't remember what Leo and I talked about. I'm sure I asked Leo about how he met my dad and mom. We most likely talked of Wonder Lake, and my dad electrifying the lawn by mistake, and shucking corn and eating ripe tomatoes and maybe about eating sweet-onion sandwiches. (Leo had a preference for a sweet, Vidalia-onion sandwich!)

In the Spring, they'd have to put in the dock, while mom and I would sweep out the dried up spiders and the icky, still-alive spiders (I'm sorry Zyn, it was icky to me) that had creeped into the bedrooms during the long winter months.

I would roll the almost-soft inner tubes, one at a time, over to the garage to get them blown up firm again. My mom liked to float, in a truck-size inner tube, while it was tethered to the dock. She would wave at the water skiers as they gracefully or not-so-gracefully, let go of the rope and water skied on to the shore.

I reminded my mom, as she lay still in her bed, of how every weekend that we drove to Wonder Lake, she always wanted to stop and get a soft-serve cone at the drive-in restaurant. (Which was one stop on the way, that my brother and I didn't mind at all!)

It made me think of another story: when mom was a girl; out for their

family's weekly site-seeing drive; her dad would buy my mom and each of her 3 brothers an ice cream cone. She was the only one who could make it last until they got home. How mad that made her brothers – as she slowly licked her delicious ice cream cone, the whole way home. It was an impish side of her, that I hadn't seen very often in my mom.

But Imp could have been my dad's middle name... I'm sure I told Leo how my dad met my mom. It was during WWll, most of the young men in their area of Pennsylvania, had already enlisted. My dad was too young. Mom, who I think had just graduated from college, was nervously teaching her first class. My very impish dad was a student in the class. He was 16 or 17, between 3–4 years younger than my mom. He liked her and to get her attention he put itching powder on her.

Leo and I talked softly on, as I watched my mom breathe and then not breathe and then breathe again. I held her hand. Leo and I probably talked of hot summer days, of pulling water skiers with our little speed boat. Leo skied, my dad skied, my brother skied. Our friends all skied. I did not. (Well, I did once and then told them they could now leave me alone to go back to reading my book, I'd tried it.)

There were beautiful Fall days, Leo helped me learn to drive on the way home from Wonder Lake. Then came icy Winter evenings, and the Holidays with the music, food, and laughter we all shared together.

I have never forgotten the blessing that it was to have Leo with me as my mother was dying. He sat with her, and me, as her hands grew cold. I noticed the coolness and focused completely on my mom. I whispered to her "It's OK mom, head toward the light. Daddy's waiting for you." Her mouth popped open in surprise, she took in one last breath and let herself go home to my dad.

Mom was loved and she loved us, Leo was loved, and he loved us.

So what has this all to do with the book "The Five Invitations"? I truly don't know. Maybe it is about how we all change. And about welcoming all the changes.

I will leave you with the gift Ara gave me when we were texting last night about Mr. Leo's death and the book. I asked her "What does it mean to welcome everything?" Ara sent me Rumi's poem as her answer:

"The Guest House"
by Rumi

This being human is a guest house
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness-
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the
malice
meet them at the door laughing
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

I think Rumi's poem tells us to welcome all of life and how to welcome it; be grateful for whatever comes; you never know what will be a blessing; dark thoughts may arrive but learn to laugh at them; talk to yourself gently; expect the unexpected; everything that comes, (including PD) goes: everything is a gift and a guide from life.

You might want to read the book "The Five Invitations" and find your own answers.

As for the title of this post "As Is." In the book "The Five Invitations" Frank talks about how he thinks we should all wear a tag that says "As Is." I love that idea. For me, I think it means that we can be loved no matter what, (including loving ourselves and laughing at ourselves).

I told Steven yesterday that I wanted a dog tag that I could wear on a ball chain necklace that has etched in it "As Is." He told me today that it is on its way.

Thank you Steven, for loving me As Is. Thank you everyone for reading this post and helping me to grieve. Thank you Leo, for everything,

Love, *Nancy and the Snark*

And Loving You

Beverly Logan

Every time I look at you
I think about the child I knew,
And can't believe you've changed
so much—
With rings and whispers, curls and
such—
Yet still that smile, those trusting
eyes, that gentle touch.

When I feel your velvet gaze
Some bird within me soars and sways.
I know we can't repeat those days—
Those sunlit days, those perfect
days—
Our arms embracing sweet bouquets.

Well, if you think of me at all
When sultry nights turn into Fall,
O sing for me some song we knew,
And know that I am hearing you
And loving you—yes, loving you:
I'm loving you till time is through.

The Art of Dying

Valeska Appleberry (1913–2006)

Marsha Bush

I visit her at the nursing home every week,
my ninety-three-year-old friend
I choose to see, because, although
her body and mind shrink on bad days,
her spirit is permanently pressed,
seeing joy beyond the wrinkles of time.

She wants to be one hundred,
for then, she says, she can celebrate
with her twin brother, the two of them
equaling two hundred, a party like no other,
their candles lighting up the whole town,
like dawn from their old rooftop in Manhattan.

She counts her children, grandchildren,
thirteen she says, but sometimes she gets their names,
places they live mixed up, laughing to herself,
saying, 'It doesn't matter. They're
all inquisitive, happy to be alive,
the essence of family love.'

She talks about her adored husband,
now gone, but not forgotten
for his pithy intellect and humor,
and the fact that he chided her about
taking the children to St. Louis one summer,
which meant the barn couldn't be repaired.

She remembers her Montessori Nature School,
where children planted gardens, seeds of learning,
while she learned about truth from them.
Like the time Adam said, 'Mrs. Appleberry, you're
getting fat,'
she replying, 'Why, yes I am.' She winks at me, saying,
'We learn through observation and acceptance.'

I take her to the dining room in her wheelchair,
a thunderstorm lighting up floor-to-ceiling windows.
She says to her table-mates, 'Look, look outside!
We're so lucky to have front row seats to nature's grand
show.'
She beams, then claps her hands, while they look down,
embarrassed at an old woman's child-like awe
of the wonders they no longer care to see.

I Used To Be Mistaken for a Tree…

Annie Blanchard

back then, in Spring as if newly budding leaves
sprouted from my branches; in Summer, happily
breezing and whispering about; then in Fall,
wearing unmuted colors to surprise the eyes.
These days, when after my nap I awaken,
fading hair frazzled and unruly, looking
more like a Buckeye in Winter,
hairless limbs unwilfully gone wild,
creaking against the ill winds,
more often I'm mistaken
for a wandering elder
needing to be led
back home.

Silent stillness

Bruce Cromer

The silent stillness of my writing room,
Enwraps, encloses me, my focused mind;
The cursive flows, a painting pen which soon
— Like photographs — develops cruel but kind

Descriptions of my world, my Times, of me,
(All springing from my view, you understand)
Of what they were and are, of what could be
At least, in Cromer's world, Bruce Byron Land.

Non-fiction always slips in fantasy
Amid the facts; it cannot be escaped.
Even recorded stuff, inev'tably
Misleads us by the method which it's taped.

Some fog upon the lens, a faulty mic
Allows us to interpret as we'd like.

Author Bios (partial list)

Pat Stempfly writes and likes to share stories to build community with others.

Teressa Morse is 65 years young and only recently started creative writing again, something has re-ignited in her, and this is turning out to be the happiest time of her life. Six years ago, she lost her sweet husband, Steve Morse, who proudly served on the MTFR department, was the tallest firefighter at the Street Fairs carrying a boot to collect donations. It was a beautiful tribute when the entire department, in their dress uniforms, arrived at his service and presented her with his helmet. During the past 6 years she also lost her mother, stepfather, stepmother, best friend from high school, best friend at work, golden retriever of 14 years, and in May of 2022 she lost her daughter. Life could not have been bleaker, but she continued to work and keep the promises she made her husband before he died. Just last July she decided it was time to take a step forward and maybe meet someone. Luck was on her side as she met a gentleman, a widower himself, and she is in love once more. They met at the Trail Tavern for their first date and have frequented many establishments in the Springs since. The village has become their go-to for most dates and each one is more memorable than the last. It was the gent who inspired her to start writing again and he found a gathering on Monday afternoons at the Underdog Café, *Shut Up & Write!* She doesn't know what it is about that hour, perhaps it is the location, but she hasn't stopped writing since. She began with poems, played around with some adult fables, but her lifelong dream is to author the novel she has had in her head for decades. Her daughter, Kim, had many disabilities but was the purest soul she has ever known. Kim inspires her to work hard, because she could not, and to never take a day for granted. The novel will be in honor of Kim and the incredible life she led.

Raised in Ohio, **Artie Isaac** is husband to Alisa and human to Margo (the dog). Artie teaches about ethical wills at the Senior Center and convenes *Shut Up & Write!* at the Emporium on Mondays at 4 p.m. Contact him at artieisaac@gmail.com.

Frederic Stuart (Skip) Leeds is a writer, musician, and an Associate Professor of Family Medicine at Wright State University, currently and perpetually living in Yellow Springs. His work is deeply influenced by the Beats, as well as more recent poets. He considers poetry the art of the unexpected obvious. And though a poem might well begin as an inside joke to oneself…it's a shame if it never makes good its escape to the outside world. His poems have previously appeared in the *Mock Turtle Zine*, *Blue Skies*, *Ripples,* the *Pages Literary Journal*…and somehow, one was even published in a peer-reviewed medical journal. Most recently, six of his poems were included in *Little Black Box (*Wipf and Stock, 2023*),* a print anthology of sci-fi, fantasy, and magic realism by Ohio poets.

Janeal Turnbull Ravndal enjoyed volunteering at the Senior Center front desk earlier in her 18 Yellow Springs Years. Now she is thankful for the Center's help with rides and that she can still walk the Friends Care path around the pond and through the woods.

Frances Simon has kept a journal since the mid-seventies, and her personal essays are often mined from them. Recently, she's begun admitting that she is also a beginning poet.

Margie Carroll Wehner enjoys writing fiction and non-fiction. She's a wife, mother, grandmother, dog mom, and almost retired speech-language pathologist. She has lived on the fringes of Yellow Springs since 1987.

"Yard Pond Lotus" photo by Jane Blakelock

Vignettes

Shirley Kristensen

Stark outline of rain-darkened branches against a leaden sky
A yellow crocus popping up thru sun-brightened snow
Budding, blossoming, greening surroundings
Purple violets, yellow dandelions
Smell of fresh mown grass
Lilac perfume by an old front porch
Sultry days with cicadas, crickets, katydids sounding
A woodpecker thrumming on a distant tree
Autumn in all its brilliant splendor
Smell of damp leaves and wood fires
Sharp, crisp smell heralding winter
Stark outline of rain-darkened trees against a leaden sky