




Kaleidoscope

*A Collection of Writings
from 2021 & 2022*



SAS-C Writers

Introduction

We are...a group of writers...Saline Area Senior Center (SASC) members who came together in March 2019 to write...to share...to bond...we named ourselves SAS-C (“sassy”) Writers...

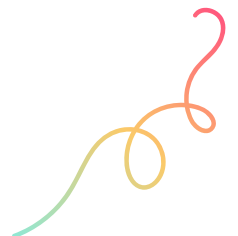
We are...grateful that we are partnered again with the Saline High School (SHS) Writing Center students following our first collaboration in 2019-2020 ... We met several times for a joint writing marathon at the high school and senior center...both groups were pleased and impressed by the openness, sharing, and caring for each other...

We are...excited to be publishing our second lit mag...our first was entitled “Space 2019-2020” and employed the same theme as that of the SHS Writing Center...this year’s publication, interrupted by the Covid 19 pandemic, is our own creation...our theme is “Kaleidoscope”...and our writings and photographs mimic the images seen in a kaleidoscope...bits of color reflecting endless changing shapes, combinations and patterns...visions of life...from a senior adult perspective...and we believe that writing is an art that can be achieved and shared by all...

We are...featuring samples of timed writings that we dubbed “prompt writing” ...each group member writes for a specified period of time being given a specific word or phrase on which to write...we also include two “progressive writings” in this journal...joint efforts in which an author in the group writes a paragraph or two, then passes it along to the next author...

We are...saddened by the untimely passing of two of our SAS-C Writers since the publication of our first lit mag...we share brief memorials and photos...so their lives, memories and writings will live on...

We are...joyful that the 2019 experiment of initiating an SASC writing group has not only thrived, but has grown in numbers, writing styles, voices, and camaraderie...we give this, our second journal, to you for respite, renewal, reflection, and a chuckle or two...



A Note from SASC

SAS-C Writers is already in its 5th year. We've lost and gained members throughout our existence, but the spirit always remains the same.

While not all Writers' current members have submitted pieces for this second edition of the Journal, all have contributed through listening, editing and offering feedback. Inside you will find stories, memoirs, poetry and photography which will make you chuckle, tear up, and ponder and appreciate.

We have a 50-year age range in memberships at Saline Area Senior Center: Our youngest is 46 and our oldest is 102. Different generations, different stories, different ideas. Whenever I hear any member's interesting story, I think to myself, "Wow, I wish they would write that down."

Fortunately, our Saline Area Senior Center "SAS-C Writers" have shared their stories, which you will find in this second edition. Maybe next time your story will be here.

Megan Kenyon
Program Coordinator
Saline Area Senior Center
salineseniors.org

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Beth Jacob, A Memory

Judy Slater

Beth Jacob was first known to us in Spring 2019 as SAS-C Writers launched its maiden voyage on a journey together practicing writing on-the-spot from prompts; reading our drafts to each other; and listening, critiquing, cheer-leading. Her self-introduction at this initial bi-monthly gathering revealed an adventurous, courageous, accomplished life. Her writing was witty, whimsical, thought-provoking, and memorable. She had a delightful shyness in reading her written pieces to us, perhaps not sure of her writing acumen. Her contributions to our 2019-2020 Lit Mag are anchor pieces to its theme, "Space," both in her poetry and prose.

An excerpt of her piece, "My Magic Space" from the 2019-2020 Lit Mag:

"I have a special place, a place I like to think of as my magic space. It is found within a sentence, for it is the space that sits between two words. Hardly noticed, yet without it, you would find reading extremely hard. Even by changing where that space lies can change the whole meaning of the words. So important yet taken for granted in everyday life."

Beth filled those spaces in each life she touched. She was a private person, yet had a warm caring soul and a zest for life. None of us had an inkling that when we re-emerged from Covid quarantine that we would learn Beth had passed away many months before. Beth is missed, but remains alive in our memories and in her writings.



Charles Jeffries, A Memory

In mid-year 2019 of our newly-launched SAS-C Writers Group meetings, Charles joined us and became a regular bi-monthly meeting participant. He preferred to listen to others' writings. We enjoyed his quiet presence that ameliorated some boisterous moments during our meetings.

We convinced him to share his Mt. Fuji story, written long ago, and encouraged him to submit it for our 2019-2020 Lit Mag, which he did. It is a delightful account of his fearless feat in climbing the mountain, and in nearly getting lost on his descent.

Charles' life included 38 years as a Microbiology professor at Wayne State University. He was a "regular" at the Senior Center, enjoying Woodcarvers, Strength and Conditioning, the Conversation Club, and facilitated TED Talk discussions. Charles was also an avid volunteer at SASC, serving on the Board and giving back to the Senior Center through programs like Panera Bread distribution. He was always willing to help with a project.

At home in his workshop, his woodcarving hobby was enhanced by strains of Beethoven and Bach as background. When you come to SASC, you will see Charles' wood handiwork in the handrails and the information boards. He was always more than happy to help others.

An excerpt from "Mt. Fuji's Ascent and Descent" from the 2019-2020 Lit Mag:

"I started my descent...it became obvious if I continued on the trail, I would not reach the railroad station in time to join my friend...he held my tickets...I set off straight down the side of the mountain, off the worn trail... rapidly down through the soft ash-covered sides, slipping and sliding... finally... to reach the train station before our train arrived..."

Looking back on the choice to leave the safety of the trail was reckless. Had I suffered an injury, I don't know when my location would have been discovered." July 1953



A Lovely Hike: A Progressive Story

Dave Talaga, Nancy Walfish, Evelyn Burns, Rita McMahon

The chilled wind rattled the French doors that separated the master bedroom from the cold flagstones of the unfinished patio. Moonlight peeked through the blinds, casting uniform and garish shadows onto the polished wood floor. The skies outside barely hinted at dawn. Yet the alarm clock on the nightstand rang out with an unwelcome punctuality. Everett pulled the feather quilt over his ears at first, as if that alone would bring him respite and quiet. Of course, it did not. So he reached out with one arm to whack the alarm into silence while his other hand still held the quilt in place over his head. “Another day, come what may,” he said to himself as he blinked the remaining vestiges of sleep from his weary eyes.

With a burst of cat-like agility that belied his age, Everett flung back his bed covers and pulled on his vintage maroon work pants and gray plaid flannel shirt that had fit him snugly once, but now hung loosely around the shoulders. He put on his cross trainers over his argyle socks, the same stockings he had worn to bed to keep his feet warm, then went out into the kitchen for a glass of unsweetened orange juice. He drank in uncharacteristically dainty sips, standing up as he checked the weather outside the window. “No frost,” he thought to himself as he contemplated wearing a jacket. But once he finished his juice, he only retrieved a hunter’s orange stocking cap, or “beanie” as he liked to call it. No jacket this time.

Then he went back into the bedroom. The pall of night began to lift and an early morning sparrow began calling from one of the arborvitae that grew along the backside of his two-story colonial home. Everett looked over at his wife’s photo on his nightstand, then blew her a kiss before grabbing a daypack that sat nearby. He sighed as he thought of the contents within which he had so specially and meticulously packed the day before. Then with the daypack slung onto his back, he opened the French doors and emerged into the backyard, inhaling deeply the fresh air that abounded here in the countryside.

As he looked back at the home he so lovingly built and lived in for so long, he never thought it would be such an adventure before he saw it again. The French doors seemed to be saying “be safe and enjoy your journey.” The daypack he packed was more than enough for the day he had planned with so much care.

As he walked along looking around him, he began to get the feeling something was different. The woods and the sky seemed to be speaking to him. “We have brought you this way for a very special reason. As you walk along, we want you to think about your life and what it has meant,” the wind seemed to whisper in his ear. At first, he was very startled and maybe even frightened. Nothing like this had ever happened to him. He continued on and realized there would be no turning back.

As he walked on, he began to look back at the life he had created and was grateful. The wife he was with for 30 years and had 3 children with was the love he had hoped for. His children were loving and kind people you would like to know. Things were changing and the life he knew was now over.

What is it that was expected of him and why was this normal day trip taking such a different twist? How long had he been walking? He no longer recognized the woods he had been so familiar with all his life. Up ahead there was this beautiful valley with a carpet of green grass. The sky was turquoise with white clouds flowing as if on a sea.

As he walked into the valley, Everett realized he wasn’t alone. Up ahead, he was greeted by a fellow traveler that was also unfamiliar with this part of the world. Everett greeted the stranger and they decided to travel this unfamiliar road together.

The two men exchanged pleasantries as they leisurely strolled. His fellow traveler turned out to be escaping his monochromatic subdivision for a brief time. Everett realized with new awareness the meadow leads to a much loved hiking trail he and his wife frequently used. At a fork in the trail, the two men genially parted.

Everett was quietly relieved as he needed time and solitude to clear his thoughts and ponder the day ahead. The trail now returned to the fairly challenging wooded terrain that overlooks the valley below. A sense of loss and weariness settled upon him as he climbed. It was a struggle to find meaning in his life just now.

He had not prepared for the loss of his wife as they had spent pleasant hours contemplating leisurely activities and interesting travel upon their retirement. It seemed so unfair that the stroke that took her life had not been foreseen even by health professionals. She seemed so healthy. He smiled wanly as he thought she would have shaken her head in bemused acceptance by his usual unmatched clothing.

The trail approached a particularly rewarding view over the valley. This was a view Emily had especially loved. He contemplated the carefully packaged contents of his day pack. Where better to release her ashes? She would surely approve. He settled on an outcropping of rock. Head bowed, he had never felt so alone.

Beyond feeling alone, Everett suddenly felt exhausted. He wondered how much longer he would be able to make this trek into the mountains. He watched the cheerful sun slip behind a cloud, and he began to wonder if the time he had chosen to scatter the ashes of his beloved Emily was right. Next week would be the first anniversary of her death, and it had been a very sad and lonely year of reliving old memories. He had asked his three children, Jack, Susan, and Mike to be present today, but each had declined because of pressing business.

As he laid back to rest for a moment, his eyes had barely closed when his phone rang. "Dad, where are you?" asked his oldest son, Jack, knowing full well that his dad was just ahead of him on the mountain, but not revealing his presence just out of sight in the woods.

"I'm up here on the mountain ready to scatter Emily's ashes as I told you a month or so ago," Everett replied. "Now I'm not so sure I'm ready to part with the last remaining tangible symbol of her life. Her cheerful description of becoming one with nature by having her remains become nourishment for the grass and flowers, as she pictured years ago, does not seem as romantic now as it had when she spoke of it then."

"Look behind you Dad. Mike, Susan and I decided that our 'important' responsibilities could wait for a few days to give you the support you deserve," said Jack. "We are here."

Coming out from the cover of the woods, Susan said, "We all feel ashamed that we took such a cavalier attitude about the painful task you faced scattering the ashes alone, and realized we owe you an apology. All of us need to find closure to Mom's death, to realize our family has changed, and that we all have to find ways to move forward with new expectations. We are not planning to forget her, but we know we all must open up our lives to other possibilities. You are still a young man. At 64 you have opportunities to explore new interests, develop new skills, travel with senior groups, visit us, and pass your experience and wisdom on to your grandchildren. Possibly you might relocate to a new place where the climate is warmer so you could play golf all year round. You might remarry and enjoy marital companionship again."

Mike added, "Moving on doesn't mean forgetting the people and experiences of an earlier stage of life, but as a part of life history we are all writing every day."

“It’s all right to look back now and then to remember and to savor times of joy and accomplishment, but we can’t get stuck there. If there’s one fact we’ve all learned in this past year, it is that life cannot be guaranteed to be predictable and neatly planned to follow our vision as we imagined it. Life is full of surprises, some are wonderful and some are bitter lessons. We have been learning one of those bitter lessons this past year.”

A rueful smile crossed Everett’s face as he looked at his and Emily’s three offspring. “Well said, kids, you have become wise students of the human condition. Your Mom would be proud of you. I’ll bet she’s smiling right now.”

Jack broke in with a suggestion, “Our planes are booked for Sunday afternoon since we all have to be at work on Monday morning. The weatherman promises perfect weather for Sunday morning, so we can come back here to release Mom’s ashes as she had requested.”

Mike said, “Good idea. Right now I’m starving! Let’s go down now and get some lunch. We will have time to talk and remember during this couple of days we have together before heading back to our work routines on Monday. Let’s be sure to remember how to get back to this place that Mom loved and chose for her final resting place. We may decide to meet here every year to remember her.”



carolyn r zaleon



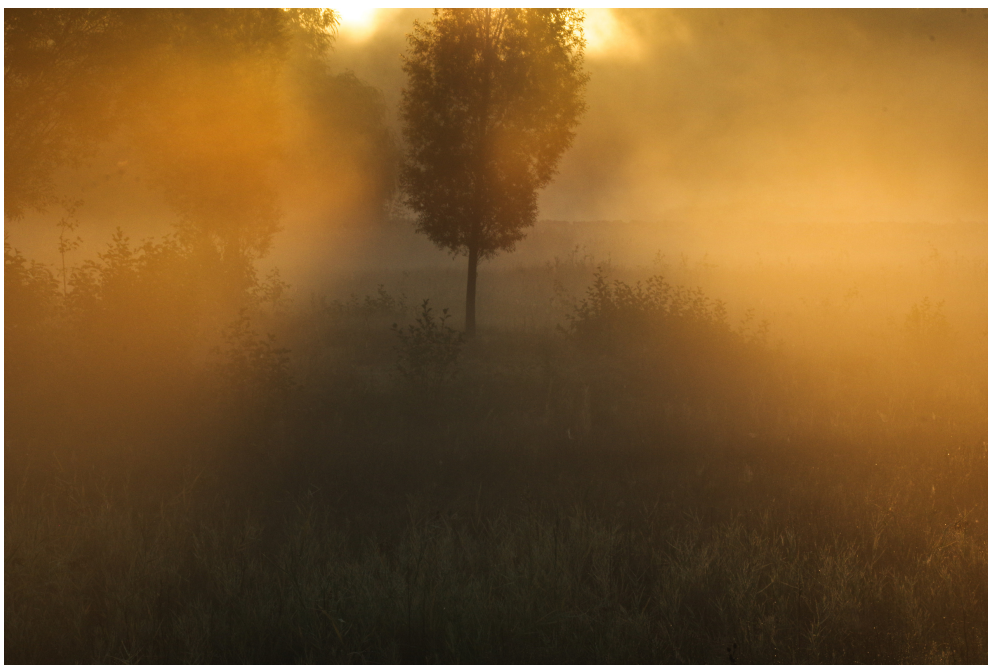
A Moment Suspended in Awe

Judy Slater

You there, blazoned with light
Yes, you, tree
Forest-deep, leaf-shadowed
Morning-dewed

What is your charm
That lured the sun
Through the thicket
To light your breast
Braving all that would deny

You are hope
Claiming dawn's bright promise



Blue, Blue, Blue
Rosemary R Berardi

Blue, Blue, Blue
My favorite color is blue

The sky is blue
Music has the blues
The great lakes and oceans are blue
And sadness can be blue

What other color has so many meanings

The shades of blue can be light or dark and can be so much a part of life

I LOVE YOU BLUE



carolyn r zaleon

core
carolyn r zaleon

i admit
i've been there

i've been to the place
where the letters are
just before the words come

and traveled the clouds
where notes hang just waiting
to be called
into song

i've seen photons
as they coalesce
to form a beam
of light

i've lived dust
before life

and dust
when life
is done

there is great comfort in this

viewing and being the core

the elements of the whole
before the whole is known



The Crooked Tree; Nickki

Bill Feight

No, I'm not wanted by the law or anything like that. It's just that I am, well crooked. I just popped up out of a discarded seed or something. I really can't remember back before I was sort of a seedling just new to this world. I do remember it was cold in the winter. I tried to hold onto my one leaf the first year like it was the end of the world. Actually, I really thought it was when the first snow came. I was covered in snow taller than I was at the time. I know I am over 40 feet high now, but I wasn't always that tall.

I just know that it was cold and dark. Well, dark anyway after the snow came. I should tell you that I am an old oak tree. One of the few in town. Well, I am in town now. Back then there was just the Courthouse and General Store, oh yea, and Larry's. I am not sure what Larry's is, but everybody seems to talk about it.

This story is not really about me, as much as it is the bird. Nickki was a nice little bird, very colorful and not much bigger than one of my acorns.

My part of the story is how big I am. Once I started to grow there seemed to be no stopping me. It was slow but I grew a little each year for about 5 years. Then a couple boys thought it would be funny if I were to grow along the ground instead of up away from it. I am right in the center of what might be called a safety zone between the sidewalk and highway. It is the biggest highway around. All the other roads are small by the highway standard. About half the width and some of them aren't even paved. Just a bunch of stones cover them.

Those boys came back every year and kept me tied horizontal to the ground for many years. Finally they moved or at least went away after many years. By that time I was longer than I was tall. The next year I grew bigger around than the rope that was holding me from growing up and I broke it. What a relief, I started to grow again and reached toward the stars every night.

That was a long time ago, and there are two more boys in the house beside me now. Our country has now been through two wars, if not more, and I am big enough to be a landmark. Kids and people look at me and say, "So that's the house by the crooked tree." They widened the highway a few years ago, and took out a lot of my friends that were a lot younger than I am, but I am still here almost in the center of town.

Those two boys that moved in after I was big would climb or even run up my flat trunk and make snow balls in my crotch to throw at the oncoming traffic. They seemed to think it was great fun, and really so did I. That is until someone would stop at the station next door. Then they would take off running as fast as I ever saw anyone move. The lady in the house would usually paddle the older boy saying, "You should set a better example for your brother." Those were some of the best times to be a crooked tree. Nobody seemed to know that I could really listen and tell all the other trees about them at night.

Then came the day that a funny looking green/yellow and white with some red on it something, came flying out of the house beside me and flew into the middle of my branches. It must have been a bird because it flew with wings, but it was smaller than a sparrow. That thing could talk the leaves right off your branches. I am not sure 'talk' was the right word, he sang everything.

He could sing a Polka, and something called a "Chickery Chick." He said things like "Wake up Bill, you're gonna be late," "Don't make me come up there," and "Billy, don't let him drink out of your glass." I got to know that little bird

quite well that afternoon. The lady that lived there came out and tried to catch the little bird by climbing me, but the little bird would just fly a little higher. That bird was really frightened of the noise of the highway though. Every time a big truck came by it would fly to the other side of me and hide. Nickki seemed to know all about me, and asked me why I got naked in the winter. “What do you mean naked?” I asked.

“Well, you sort of turn all sorts of colors and then all the color falls away and all you are is a bunch of sticks and a big trunk of wood standing there in the snow.”

“I go to sleep for the winter like all the other trees do. Except for those pine trees, I think they are a little stir crazy. They say those little needles they have on keeps them warm. I don’t see how though.” I was telling Nickki how the pine trees all seemed to stay awake all winter and went to sleep every night in the summertime.

Nickki asked me if I ever saw the little brown and white dog that lived with them in the house. “Yes,” I said, “I really don’t like him, or any dogs for that matter. They all want to mark me or something. It is really messy and doesn’t smell very good. I guess that is what dogs do though.”

Nickki was saying that he really did not like that little dog. It always tried to tease him and snap at him when the lady was gone. The dog wouldn’t go into the dining room though and that is where Nickki’s cage was. He said they never closed the door though and that is why he could sit in the front window and watch me. He said I was his favorite tree.

That made me feel super virtuous, I know I am the biggest thing around, but it sure felt stimulating that I was good also. We talked a lot that afternoon about trees and leaves, dogs and cats. Neither of us liked those either.

It had been one of my best days ever. The spring sun was warm and I found a new friend. Trees don’t have a lot of other friends you know.

The afternoon was mostly over when Nickki’s boy came home and I could hear the lady telling him how Nickki had escaped. The boy had a sad look on his face until he saw Nickki up in the tree near the top. He yelled and hollered as loud as he could. “Come on Nickki, here Nickki,” and stuck his finger up in the air like a place for the little bird to land. Just about then a big truck came by and like many trucks it blew its air horn right under me. It was so loud and windy my newly formed leaves shook like the very wind. I think it both scared Nickki and blew him off one of my limbs.

In the process of falling he spread his wings and landed safely, softly and quickly on the boy’s outstretched finger. With a huge smile on his face the boy walked back into the house with the bird on his finger.

That was the last I ever saw of Nickki, well not really, he used to watch me through the front window of the house for a few years. I heard that nasty dog finally got him one day, but the boys both moved away a few years later. I saw the younger boy for several years, but the older one just sort of disappeared. I saw him once many years later. He had changed a lot, but he did climb up in my safe little crotch and looked around. He really didn’t fit as good as he had before.

Cruising During the Pandemic

Dave Talaga

The comedian aboard our Holland-America cruise ship referred to the audience of passengers including me as a “biology experiment.” He said we were in the vanguard of the movement to see if cruises with vaccinations and mask requirements could be viable. His remarks drew some of the biggest laughs of the night.

When I'd booked this 11-day Caribbean cruise for my wife Wendy and me back in the fall of 2021, news of the Omicron variant had just begun to surface. By the time we boarded in January of 2022 however, the Centers for Disease Control advised against cruising. It was too late for us. We had paid our money and nobody told us we could get a refund.

I heard that being on a cruise was safer than being at a Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart doesn't require masks in its stores and doesn't mandate that you show a negative Covid test to shop, nor prove that you've been vaccinated at all. All passengers aboard our vessel needed such proof to sail. I thought we would be okay.

Not long after we set sail, I began to have my doubts. I observed passengers coughing or sneezing, sometimes taking their masks off when they did so. And what about the crew? The first day at sea we'd had a number of waiters come by every few seconds asking if we needed anything. After all, my wife and I were among 660 passengers on a vessel designed to hold over 2,000. But not long into the cruise, we ended up going to the bar ourselves to fill our drink order.

I wondered why the dueling pianists who entertained us one night became a soloist on succeeding nights. Or why the four members of a steel drum band pictured on an entertainment itinerary became just three when they actually performed. Then there was the safety drill announcement for all crew “except for those in hard quarantine.” That didn't sound good.

Crew and passengers alike wore their masks religiously but social distancing was not practiced. During one shore excursion aboard a submarine, we were packed more tightly together than teenagers in a Volkswagen Beetle. Masks were still required however.

Then towards the end of the cruise I fell ill. It wasn't anything serious, just a headache and sore throat, but enough to keep me in my room. There were no random screenings onboard, no temperature checks, and no Covid self-testing kits available for sale. Did I want to turn myself in to the ship's medical staff? I saw the Tik Tok viral video of a Covid positive passenger on another vessel being led into the bowels of the cruise ship by a crewman clad in a Hazmat suit. Not for me.

I was very happy to disembark, so glad that I was able to have that over with and now just the long drive from Fort Lauderdale back to Michigan ahead of me. When I checked into the hotel I'd reserved for the first night in Lake City, Florida, I handed over my identification and credit card as the desk clerk dutifully handed me the registration form. “Initial here and here, then sign here,” she said.

“What do I initial here for?” I asked.

“That you don't have Covid,” she responded matter-of-factly.

For those old enough to recall, when the late comedian Jackie Gleason was surprised speechless, he would start muttering, “Homina homina homina” to stall for time until he could think of something better to say. I now know how he felt because I almost did it myself.

I asked the clerk, what if I didn't know my Covid status? She said that I could substitute not having Covid symptoms instead. Now my minor symptoms could be just a cold; that's what it felt like. But I just got off a cruise ship too. I asked if there was any place locally where I could get tested and the desk clerk said there was a local testing site.

After checking in at the hotel, I went on-line and registered for an appointment for both my wife and me later that day. Then using the map feature on our cell phone we found the sprawling athletic complex where the testing site was located. We passed by several athletic fields and school buildings with cars parked and people nearby but couldn't locate any obvious testing facility. Then Wendy spotted a cardboard sign stuck into the ground which seemed to point the way to “Covid Test.”

It was just a small dirt track that dead-ended at what looked like an abandoned football field with a couple decrepit looking outbuildings. No cars, no people. “This looks like the place where some guy is going to pop out with a chainsaw,” Wendy observed.

We drove back down the road we'd just driven in on and then spotted a sign lying on the ground that pointed us in the right direction. It turned out that a windstorm earlier had played havoc with the signage, twisting some while flattening others completely. Bottom line: We got tested. Results in 72 hours.

Two days later at another hotel, we got a text message alert at just after 5 a.m. The results? Positive . . . for both of us, quite surprising to my wife who did not exhibit any symptoms. So I guess we know the results of that biology experiment the comedian talked about. Now we just need to report this to Dr. Fauci. By the way, I also tried emailing a report about this to my travel agent who booked our cruise. I got an automatic reply that she had retired at the beginning of January.



fib up down
carolyn r zaleon

it
cracks
like eggs
and shatters
like thinly blown glass
-- always vulnerable --
easy
for it to all crumble
before
your bewildered eyes
there you stand stark naked
blindsided
amidst the rubble of life
scattered around you
at the lowest point of low
the bleakest black of bleak
with a jumbled chaos
fomenting inside
there rises a swell of
faith and courage
innate resilience takes control
survival skills hidden so deep
they are unknown
emerge slowly and
deliberately
from within
dark turns light
and the soul shines through
nothing is the same
but all is
okay
o
k

In mathematics, the Fibonacci sequence is such that each number is the sum of the two preceding ones, starting from 0 and 1. In this poem, the syllables in each stanza reflect the numbers in a Fibonacci sequence: e.g. 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, ...

fragile

carolyn r zaleon

we shouldn't be

fragile

fragile ought to be a teacup
or finely blown glass

not life
or psyches

souls
or constitutions

but we are

each one of us

is

within
a breath

of bro
ken

a second

of split ting

a flash

of fad ing

a whisper

of wilt
ing

too easily we come apart
at the seams

from a memory
a scent
an event
an affliction

barely bound
by guts grace

and tears
that keep us whole

be friend fragile

we don't truly feel
without it

Frayed and Torn

Gay Kerry Halseth

Frayed and torn
Ripped and worn
Hanging by a thread
I should mend
but will pretend
things are fine instead
flayed and shattered
stripped and battered
begs that I attend
If I ignore
Days will implore
My soul I do Condemn.
Fits and curses
Wool that's worsted
Wound up in a ball
My brows I knit
With angst I spit
As knots my work, confound.
Spun and tossed
Stitches crossed
Pins that do a prickin'
If there is fear
I persevere
'Cause time it is a tickin'



Friends, Friends, Friends

Rosemary R Berardi

Some are family and some are not
Some care a little and some care a lot

Some are older and some are not
Some are bolder and call the shot

Some live near and some live far
Some you can visit by driving your car

Some sit and talk
Others go for a walk

Love my friends very much
Be kind and stay in touch

I love you friends!



Hello Again

Bill Feight

For those who are interested enough to read this story, I would like to place some food for thought on the table.

When I sat down and this story came out of my head I was working on an entirely different story from a different time and place. It took about two hours to get down on paper before I went back to the story I was working on. When I picked up the story and read it the next day I was stunned.

It was about November 18th or 19th, 2015. Which probably wouldn't mean very much to most people, but it was fifty years to the day from the end of the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley.

The story I was working on is about a soldier who returned from VietNam and was having some personal problems at work and home.

Hello Again

“Hey Rummy! How da hell ya been? Haven't seen you in years. More'n half my life anyhow.”

Who is that? Sounds familiar, like somebody I should know. I just heard that in my head, there was no sound and the ringing in my ears is gone. Last thing I remember is a slight pain across my chest.

I haven't been called Rummy in fifty years or more. How did I get that handle? Oh yeah! I drank Rum and Coke cause it was cheap. “My name is Randall, Charles Randall,” I retorted in the same angry voice I had used fifty some years ago.

Turning to look at my tormentor, I saw several hundred men sitting on a large dome-like hill more than a mile in diameter. Looking at the men on the hill I recognized them all. Some were in fatigues and some in civilian clothes. It was a lush green hill at the start of the Jungle. Somehow it looked familiar and yet was a lot different from the last time I was here. It had been burned black and brown in my memory.

There stood Brad Rice, a blonde short guy and second platoon radio man. He and I didn't like each other from the first time we met in basic training. Never could stand to be close to him. Fact is whenever we came within arm's length of each other there was usually a scuffle. The rest of the company kinda made sure we didn't get close. At least he had a smile on his face now, and somehow he didn't look as menacing as usual. In fact he almost looked friendly.

There stood Jerry Jackson, who had gone through Basic Training with us and had been a saxophone player. Usually a neat well kept guy from Kalamazoo. He was covered in sand and mud, standing at the base of the hill. Jerry and I had been standing next to my fox hole, talking at breakfast after ‘Puff the Magic Dragon’ finished the battle of the Ia Drang Valley. “Jerry, what happened, I haven't seen you since that mortar landed between us?”

“Nothin' happened to me Eagle, I been here ever since.”

Eagle was my call sign back then. With another look I saw Lt. Ragger and Captain Muller. Both were sharp and neat as any officer. There was Sergeant Rollin, too.

“Captain, what happened, last I heard you were in Flint?”

“I was on my way back from visiting Sgt. Keatland in Colorado when my car was hit by a cement truck, so here I am. He had a fight with cancer, you know.” It was still more thought than sound from the Captain.

“Yeah, I knew, I see him on Facebook almost every month. He’s real fond of his grandkids and posts a lot of their pictures.”

“Lt. Ragger, what happened to you, I thought you were goin’ to make a career of the Army?”

“Naw, I was goin’ back to West Virginia when I got out, that other bit was just ta get the enlisted guys ta re-up. I found a Claymore aimed the wrong way in a vil we attacked up near Bhn Khe, never got back to the real world.” The world or real world is what most of us called home.

“Hey Captain, where are the rest of us, I know Gary Leats is still just outside Toledo, and Fargo still lives in Northern Michigan in the summer, and travels southwest during the winter and Mallory Mount still lives in Lansing. I haven’t seen Andy Monte since that week in Grayling. How come they’re not here and just where the hell is this?”

“Look around Randall, we were all here fifty years ago. Those of us that are able try and make it back here this week. Sorta special to some of us.”

“What the hell is so special about this week, and the area around this hill reminds me of - - . Wait a minute was this area about five or six hundred feet higher before?” I remembered Air Force F 4’s making a mole hill out of what looked like a mountain.

“You’re startin to get the idea troop.” Sgt. Rollin caught my attention. He was black, over six foot tall, the sternest and fairest sergeant I’d ever met. That is unless you were black. He expected every man in his platoon to be excellent, but if you were black he expected perfection. “Gary told me you caught a fifty cal in the stomach up near Phu Bye.” I responded.

“Nearly right, it was closer to the DMZ, but I don’ remember much about gettin’ hit or anything 'cept the helicopter ride, that felt like a bed of knives. Kinda wish you had been with us that day. The radio man that replaced you never knew where he was on the map and couldn’t read it either. You might have had an even chance of takin’ that gun out with artillery. Maps was the one thing you were good at.”

Looking directly at Sergeant Rollin I ask, “You mean that everyone here is, well ah, I mean are we all ah?”

“If you mean dead or no longer among the living, you are correct.” It was the Captain looking at me. “With the exception of you, who seem a little fuzzy around the edges. You may not be totally with us yet.” He continued, “Remember, you were here with all of us fifty years ago today. A week from next Thursday is Thanksgiving.”

He finished and sat back down next to Lt Strong. A kind of energy seemed to encompass me and I was in a hospital bed with my wife holding my hand. She had tears in her eyes.

“You know I can’t stand a cryin’ woman.” I said.

Hoops and Shots

Dave Talaga

Hoops and shots. That doesn't refer to the current 2021 March Madness basketball tournament. It refers to the hoops you have to jump through to get your Covid-19 vaccination. As my wife and I live in Michigan, which is seeing a surge in coronavirus cases lately, it's been particularly frustrating.

Even with our advanced age we seem to be last in line. My son and daughter-in-law both got their shots many weeks ago, despite being in their 30s and working from home. But they worked for the University of Michigan which seemed to be inoculating all employees regardless.

My parents have had both their shots. My younger brother and sister each had one vaccination. I did get two invitations a couple weeks ago, one from the U of M (I guess they ran out of employees to vaccinate) and another from the Washtenaw County Health Department. But I wanted to wait until my wife, who turns 65 in June, got her invitation.

She never did, despite registering with the Washtenaw County Health Department, our local pharmacy and getting her medical services through the U of M, which is her PPO. When her risk group became eligible in Michigan, still nothing. And then vaccinations opened up to anyone over 50 or any adult with a health risk factor.

Imagine standing in a ticket line at a movie theater along with others waiting in line who should be entering at the same time. Then the usher says, "Never mind the line, everybody can get a ticket now." So whoever has a personal connection with a ticket-seller, has some inside information, is more adept at working the internet, or is just in the right place at the right time . . . well, that just made my wife out of luck.

Our other 30-something son found out that getting on a drugstore Covid-19 vaccination website at just past midnight worked for him. He got a vaccination appointment in a couple days. We heard of seniors who were finding appointments available in Ohio. Did we really want to go there? Rumor was that they would give you your first of the two-shot vaccinations, but would not schedule you back for the second shot.

To go back to that movie analogy, it would be like getting a ticket to a three-hour film show, then after an intermission the usher not allowing you in for the movie's second half. And the movie requires audiences to watch both halves.

I tried the vaccine finder site. I tried Rite-Aid, CVS, Kroger Pharmacy (my wife was already registered with Meijer pharmacy but we never heard back from them). All the sites made you enter your location, age, health conditions, which dose you needed, etc. Then finally we'd get the message that no vaccines were available even though the vaccine finder site claimed the store had them "in stock." Despite my son's tip, trying this on the internet in the middle of the night didn't work either.

Entering all this information time and again just to be told that no appointments were available was more than frustrating. Once again, using the movie analogy, it's like we drove to the theater after they said they have tickets, then after buying popcorn and soda, being told by the usher that no seats were available and to either try another theater far away or this one on another day. Argghhhh!

Neither Wendy nor I were able to get a vaccine appointment for her. I announced we were going to hold out for herd immunity instead. That bothered my older son who went on the internet and made an appointment himself for his mother through the Washtenaw County Health Department website. Kudos to him. It was three weeks out, but we'd take it. Funny how they never let Wendy know she was eligible.

But since the health department had already sent me an invitation, I found the original email and clicked on the link. If I were lucky, perhaps Wendy and I could receive our shots together as we had originally requested. Their link took me to a web page that had a three-step process: 1. Choose an appointment, 2. Your Information 3. Confirmation.

Cool. Almost there. I clicked on "Choose appointment" and the page simply just seemed to refresh. It didn't take me to another page where I could choose an appointment. There was a note highlighted in red that said, "All appointments are private, none are available for scheduling." Whatever that meant. But no matter where and how I clicked I always ended up on this dead-end page.

It took me a while to find out that my appointment invitation had, in fact, expired as had this web page. The Washtenaw county health department had changed the appointment-scheduling web page without emailing me or posting in the site linked in their email to me. One last time, using the movie analogy, it would be like going to the theater and finding it closed with a sign out front that says, "All movies are for private audiences only. No showings at this time."

By the time I did make it to Washtenaw County's site, the earliest appointment I could make was over four weeks out, so I did make my appointment through the U of M, which gave me the first of the two-shot Pfizer vaccine this past Friday. And since Wendy's shot, so far, is supposed to be Johnson and Johnson's one-and-done vaccination, we should be fully inoculated at the same time. I guess all's well that ends well. But with so many dead ends, twists and turns (sorry, one more movie allusion), did it have to feel like I was in The Wizard of Oz?



Hill Number 1136

Bill Feight

“Life shouldn’t be so cheap, Gary.”

Gary and I stood at the edge of the plateau looking down the hill at hundreds of charred bodies of the Vietnamese that had been attacking us a few minutes ago.

“You’ve seen it before, Nick.”

“Ya, but somehow I can never get used to it.” We had lived through the I Drang valley battle where the 1st Cavalry won its colors back from when they lost them in Korea, a few snipers, and seen the devastation that “Puff” could bring.

* * *

Somehow you managed to do your job when you had to in order to survive. You never had time to see the results of your actions until after you had survived. Your feelings and emotions would hinder getting the job at hand done and your survival. It was just easier to keep your memories and feelings in an imaginary box in the back of your mind and put an unbreakable lock on them. We had survived. We were alive.

It had all started earlier that morning. Maybe it was the day before when we got word that the North Vietnamese had overrun hill 1136. That was one of our Artillery outposts. The 105 cannons could cover a fifteen to twenty five mile area with friendly fire. That is as long as you knew precisely where you were on the map. This was the main reason you had to be absolutely sure of where you were at all times. It was one of the reasons the North Vietnamese worked so hard to take out artillery emplacements. If you were off in your map readings by one degree calling in artillery, you could call the devastation in on yourself instead of the enemy.

“Puff” was short for “Puff the Magic Dragon”. At that time it was a slow flying DC3, or as the Military called it a C47. It did not look very menacing, but it could spit what looked like liquid fire out one side. It got its name from the dragon-like fire that came from its large mini guns that spit out six thousand rounds a minute. It could devastate an area one hundred yards wide at over one hundred miles an hour. There would not be a building or living thing left. Not even a spider.

The artillery we had at the time was mostly 105 cannons. They could hit a fifty five gallon drum at over twenty five miles. Not much would escape a well placed artillery barrage.

We had an adventurous day the day before, and would have been late getting into an attack position. We had stayed about half a mile back into the heavy jungle and Captain Mallory had called “Saddle up” a long time before morning. We started walking toward hill 1136.

We walked for a couple hours in the dark and arrived at the east side of the hill just as dawn was breaking. Captain Mallory called a halt and all the platoon leaders and RTO’s to his location. He told them where he wanted each platoon at the bottom and how to set up when we arrived at the top. In a very short time each platoon was in position and quietly started up the hill.

We were no more than a quarter the way up when we heard someone on the top raise the alarm. Then we all cut loose at once. We had rifles firing, M 79’s thumping off and hand grenades going off. Before we knew it we were on top and Charlie (North Vietnamese) was gone down the other side.

A couple guys wanted to keep chasing Charlie, but they were called back.

All of the artillery cannons and ammunition were gone along with all the equipment that should have been there. The only thing left at the top of hill 1136 were a lot of 55 gallon drums that were for helicopter fuel.

“Each platoon to its designated area, now. Mortar Platoon set up on that knoll in the center. Lieutenant Strong, Steve come over here and set up the CP (Command Post).” Captain Mallory was in command.

It was Sergeant Rollin that said, “That was too easy.”

“That was a long hard run up that hill with a radio on,” I said.

“Do you remember anyone shooting back at us?” Sergeant Rolling was looking at Lieutenant Ragger with a puzzled look on his face.

“No, I don't Sergeant. Nick, get six on the horn.” He was looking at me with an urgency that I didn't feel yet.

“Six, this is three six India, my six would like a talk. Over.”

“Three six India, get your platoon set up, and I will call him to my location. Call back when you are set. Six out.”

“I heard, he knows. Sergeant, are all the squads in position yet? Have the men dig new fox holes as soon as possible and don't use the ones that are here. They probably have them all targeted for mortar fire already.” The lieutenant was hurrying down one side of the line and the sergeant was working the other.

The lieutenant had me digging a new fox hole about fifteen or twenty yards from a perfectly good one. The ground on the top was like clay, but after you broke through the first foot or so it was mostly sand. I used my knife to break the top and then I could use the entrenching tool as a shovel. We had been on the hill for less than three minutes. I still had not caught on to why the sergeant and lieutenant were so worried and in so much of a hurry.

The smell of Vietnam was worse or stronger when you were digging. It seemed to saturate the ground itself. It is hard to describe but something you can never forget. In the jungle it was like wet dried out old hard wood that was rotting from the inside out. The jungle itself is so damp it will not burn even when in contact with a flamethrower.

The hilltop was approximately two hundred and fifty yards wide by six hundred yards long, or about the size of thirty football fields, and what seemed like a thousand feet high. It was over three quarters of a mile up the sides. It was really too large for a company of two hundred men and officers to hold under any type of coordinated attack.

The lieutenant had been called back to the company CP and Sergeant Rollins was helping me dig when the first round hit. It landed directly in the fox hole we would have been using if the lieutenant had not made me dig a new one. Both of us would have been killed. I really hate digging fox holes, but I was glad I dug this one.

Sometimes there is a reason the people in command are there.

Lieutenant Ragger came running back. Reaching our fox hole, he grabbed the radio and jumped in with the sergeant and me. By then the whole company was under attack. All the platoon radios were talking at once. The captain was calling brigade for artillery support, and ammunition. Way off you could hear what sounded like artillery rounds going off, but they were a long way away and not close to us at all.

This is one of those times I should have been scared as hell, but I had too much to do to feel any emotion. I was talking to Company Headquarters, trying to call any gunships in the area, and setting up places where we would call for colored smoke.

By then it had dawned on me. It seemed we were being attacked on all sides of the hill. Charlie had simply vacated the hill to the other side, and let us take the top of the hill. Then the North Vietnamese simply surrounded the hill while we were on the top. We did have the high ground, but Charlie had taken this hill a couple days ago with the same plan, and was sure he could do it again with fewer men at the top. We had walked or rather run into a well planned ambush.

Our mortar platoon was popping out rounds as fast as they were given locations to hit. The thunk of a round leaving a mortar tube has its own almost metallic sound. Now some of the mortar tubes were getting warm from all the rounds going off. We had three tubes and they all had several missiles in the air at once. You could see the smoke coming out of a tube while the next shoot was being dropped in. Those guys had a lot of nerve to do their jobs while being shot at, and hoping we could keep the enemy away from them.

The M 60 machine guns were pumping out more than six round bursts, which meant that they would need new barrels before long. An M 60 barrel will glow red and can get so hot it will droop under its own weight. A six round burst will usually give the gun enough time to cool off between bursts. Not an easy thing to do under life and death conditions.

The fire was intense on all sides of the hill, and we only had what we had brought with us. That was not really enough to rebuff the full scale attack we were facing now. The captain had called for more ammunition when he called for artillery and we still hadn't got it.

Off in the distance two Chinook helicopters were coming in our direction. They came in about fifteen or twenty feet off the ground over the company CP and each pushed out two large crates. They never even slowed down. One of the boxes broke open, and there was ammunition spread all over the ground.

The captain called for one man from each fox hole to the company CP and get as much ammunition as they could carry back to their location.

Parts of the first and second platoons, who were facing east, still had the sun in their eyes, and you could tell they were firing as much at sounds as targets. We had attacked from that direction to get the sun in the enemy's eyes. Now it worked in reverse.

After the drop we had plenty of ammunition, and new barrels for the M60s. The machine guns coordinated the changing of the barrels so as not to have a large area that was not covered by machine gun fire. It takes a minute or less to change the barrel of an M 60, but in the situation we were in, that could be several lifetimes.

The M 79's were sending out rounds as fast as they could be reloaded. By now each fox hole had a couple boxes of hand grenades and were using them up rapidly. The sun was rising in the sky, but for some reason time was standing still.

Every once in a while when I got a chance to look up from the radio, I could see body parts flying and rolling back down the hill. Now and then I thought I could see an enemy soldier stick his head over the crest of the hill and then fall back. There must have been thousands of them.

I think Battalion or Brigade had called for help from the Air Force, but that would still be hours away. The haze and smoke of battle was in the air and the outcome did not look favorable for us. We were holding our own for now, but it would not be much longer and we would be running out of ammunition again. Several squads sent runners back to the CP for more ammunition of all kinds. Some of the M 79's were putting out smoke grenades to mark where they wanted gunships to fire.

The helicopters were coming and we wanted them to know where the enemy was. We really didn't have the gunship helicopters like those that came later. These were more like the transportation Huey helicopters with M 60 machine guns strapped in the open doors with bungee cords. It worked. This arrangement was very effective in landing troops in an open area and suppressing enemy fire, while dropping troops on the ground.

The gunners would usually target an area and not specific targets. It did manage to keep Charlie undercover for a while though.

I think it was Paddy from the second platoon who asked loudly, "What in hell is in those fifty five gallon drums?"

Someone shouted "They must be empty."

"Did anyone check?"

Captain Mallory sent Lieutenant Strong to check. He ran back reporting that they were all full of jet fuel for the choppers.

It seemed like it took about an hour, really only five or ten minutes to get a drum of jet fuel to each foxhole. Word was passed to use an entrenching tool to poke a large hole in an end of the drum at your fox hole and roll it down the hill. Soon there were bouncing drums spraying everything and everyone downhill with jet fuel. The word came to light the fuel with a hand grenade or an M 79 round.

Jet fuel is more like fuel oil than gasoline. It tends to soak into something while it is burning. In a very short time all sides of hill 1136 were deep in black smoke, yellow flames and more screams than I have ever heard before or since.

All gunfire ceased. The smell of burning flesh and rancid vegetation on fire filled the air. The captain called all the platoon leaders to the CP for a meeting. Sergeant Rollins was checking the platoon to see how many killed and wounded we had. Our platoon was unhurt. Maybe a few blisters from digging foxholes so fast. We got word from the captain that everyone that started up the hill was alive and well.

I climbed out of the not yet completed fox hole, lit a cigarette, and wandered over to where Gary was.

"Life shouldn't be so cheap, Gary."

I Was On The Way

Nancy Walfish

I was on the way to the hospital to get the results of my latest test. The ride seemed to take forever. What news would I receive? I looked up and realized how blue the sky was, the sun was shining and whatever the news, I was going to enjoy this moment!

As I approached the hospital I had spent so much time in the previous 6 months (major surgery and 6 months of chemotherapy) I thought of how naïve I was at the beginning of this journey; this was not going to impact me. I would get through this like all the other experiences in my life. But this was not like anything before. I was weaker and more dependent and in need of more help than ever before. I had always been the strong one! This time God had other plans for me.

Waiting in the room for the doctor, what could I expect going forward? The doctor arrived and began to explain to me what my chances were and how the diagnosis could affect my life. Stage four ovarian cancer was not the best news, but unfortunately it was the news I received. What did the diagnosis mean? I must have been in shock because I did not react as one would expect. My only question was, “What are my chances of being here in 5 years?” His answer was, “God knows, but the percentages are not good in your favor.”

As I digested the news that I had feared, I considered my options. I could be SAD or live with HOPE.

S=shame, suicidal, sorrowful, somber

A=anguished, aggrieved, apprehensive

D=depressed, damaged, doubt, discouraged, dispirited, disheartened

OR

H=happy, honest

O=overjoyed, open, optimistic, outstanding

P=pride, purpose, positive

E=enjoy, energetic, elated, excited

SAD – HOPE

Nobody knows how long they have. Enjoy each moment. I choose hope and continue to live with it each day!



In The Woods, A Very Crooked Tree

Judy Slater

Brave, clever tree...

What path your detour from nature's upright call?

What thoughts neighbor trees harbor

watching as you proclaim your independence?

What safe harbor your twisted nooks and crannies

provide to the hawk-escaping squirrels?

What notice hikers pay coming upon your gnarled presence?

Were you born to this shape,

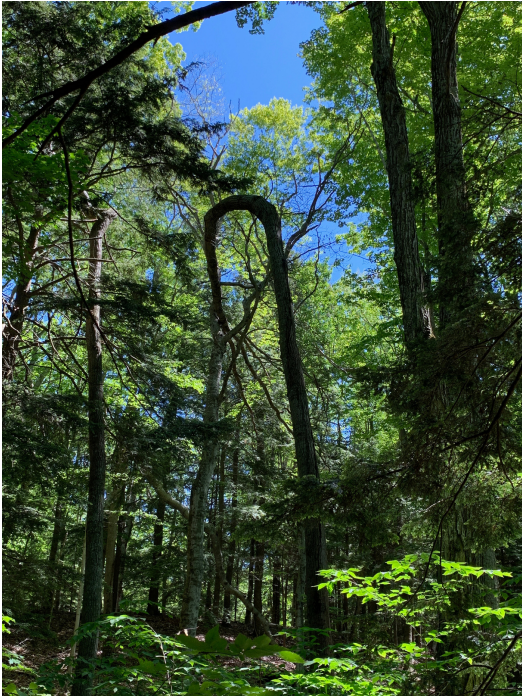
or did some surprise deter your destiny?

Yet you stand, crooked and leaning,

your leaf-buds tender as your neighbors'.

You are all alike, not in shape or form, but in purpose.

Brave, clever tree...



Isn't It Strange.....

Laurel Errer

just when you find the right cosmetic, it gets discontinued
that when your friend says "let's play ball," you don't ask what kind
how the first snowfall is so pretty but the second is just a nuisance
jeans the same size fit differently
when one home appliance breaks, there's bound to be two more
people are starving yet this nation throws away tons of food every year
someone says "what?" but you know they heard you
you follow her recipe but mom's always tastes better
salespeople are all smiles when you are buying, but try taking it back
whole races of people are hated by another, but we are all God's children
six of the exact same items in six different stores have six different prices
one day you can't remember an often-used name but the next day you can
how all chocolate chip cookies don't taste the same
that we can not agree on things like guns and climate control even when we all know they are dangerous
a lot of very smart people never go to school
that any crazy person can buy a gun by just checking the box marked "sane"
there are 8 or 9 different kinds of canned corn
televisions don't seem to give good reception during the program you want to see most
we blame our pillow for a bad night's sleep
a hamburger is a hamburger, but we all have a favorite hamburger joint
you can raise 7 children with one bathroom yet all new home buyers insist on a bathroom for each bedroom
how slow time moves for the young and how fast it flies by for the old
it takes us a whole week to recover from the time change
something seems like a good idea at the time
that some of us make our bed every day
how we love Fido and Trixie but not our neighbors

we cry at a sad tv program but not over the homeless guy on the corner

you can still mail a letter for less than 60 cents and still expect it to get to the other side of the country in a day or 2.....or not

different cuts of meat cost anywhere from \$2.89 a pound to \$35.00 a pound and it's all cow

we say someone looks like they should be a "David." What's that all about?

they stop playing one of our old, favorite songs because they claim the lyrics are racist, sexist or whatever

we send the youngest and least experienced off to fight our wars

we have 47 shades of red nail polish. It's all red.

a monkey can make art, but I can't draw a straight line

we can go to the moon, but still struggle with 26 kinds of the common cold

we can't wait for fall, or spring, or summer, or winter

a certain football game can unite over a million people

a certain song can unite over a million people

no one sees the same color red

when someone says orange.....it could be a fruit or a color

TV's are smarter than people

we ask grandchildren for help

many animal species eat their young

some animal species take turns raising their young

how Kevin has to go to the bathroom when we first start to do dishes

how my kitchen is the smallest room in the house but everyone wants to be in there at same time

we can send a message to the other side of the globe without wires but my phone only works 33 percent of the time

our tv control is larger than our phone

father did know best

we still haven't figured out when it's nature and when it's nurture

you get the idea.....isn't it strange???

Judy, Judy, Judy
Rosemary R Berardi

Judy, Judy, Judy
One of the nicest people I ever met
Not arrogant, not selfish, not mean
Just kind, sweet, and genuine

Judy, Judy, Judy
Writer, author, poet
Most of us did not know it

Judy, Judy, Judy
Where have you been?
We want to keep you in Michigan

Judy, Judy, Judy
Senior Center member and friend
We all love you



Last Leaves

Judy Slater

Towering maple, sentinel over bare trees,
Your surviving leaves catch the updraft.
And seen through the layers of otherwise empty branches,
You dance for these wintry woods.

Every tree moves in wind's concert.
You move more, your leaves, descending propellers.
Yet the wind shakes not all your dry leaves from their stems,
Fierce hold-outs from otherwise bleak bare branches.

What plan shaped your tenacity
To dress the now-naked forest in leafy grace?
Is it God's afterthought that hope lives in death wherein there is life?

One leaf tosses off, flutters down, unhooks, lets go.
Then all is quiet and you rest.



carolyn r zaleon

ENERG
FOR
RESILIENCY
TIT
TIT
TIT
U
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U
R
A
G
E
M
E
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T
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C
E

Michigan, Michigan, Michigan

Rosemary R Berardi

Upper peninsula - Lower Peninsula
How do I get from one to the other

Michigan - Superior - Huron - Erie
surrounds our borders and beaches

Washtenaw- Saginaw - Leelanau
county - city - peninsula
reminds us of our indigenous heritage

118 lighthouses
Mackinac Island
Cherries, apples, pears
Our colleges and universities

Traverse - Rapids - Haven
describes how Grand our state is

Michigan Michigan Michigan
I love you Michigan



carolyn r zaleon

Miscellaneous Brain

Carol Pullen

What should I write this morning? There are so many stories, memories, thoughts, questions racing around in the hastily-packed “Miscellaneous - Get To Soon” compartment of my brain that to go in there is to be quickly distracted, confused, overwhelmed and to usually leave without having selected one of them to take care of.

“What will I wear?,” mixed in with “Do I want to go on living? Should I get a cat? It’s time to pay the bills.”

That part of my brain is impinging on the rest.

An appropriate memory glimmers over there: me, one of the least athletic people I know, substitute teaching in a third grade classroom at gym time. What on earth to do? Kids like balls, right? Let them open the storage room and get the balls out and have free ball time. It sounded like it could use up the time and the kids would like it. Well, 10 basketballs bouncing along with tennis balls and volleyballs and even ping pong balls gets loud and chaotic very quickly. Even I couldn’t hear my voice trying to restore order!

This is how my head feels.

The solution? This is one of the questions, framed and reframed multiple times and placed in my “Miscellaneous - To Get To Soon” compartment.

Take something on? Pick something. Or maybe take a nap?

CAUTION: Do not let taking a nap become your default.
It is dangerous!



Missouri Farm Food 1930's-1950's

Evelyn Burns

"It's pretty hard to starve a farmer" was a saying that surfaced occasionally when finances seemed lean.

Most of what we ate, we grew. My mother took a lot of pride in her garden. Dad would hitch one or two horses to a single bottom plow and till the garden each spring. This was followed by harrowing to prepare the soil. Most of the planting was done by my mother and whoever was available to help. Once the soil was prepared I don't remember my father doing much in the garden.

First to go in was peas, lettuce, radishes, and green onions. These were the first to the table. Carrots, green beans, sweet corn and potatoes followed. When the danger of frost was past, tomatoes and green pepper plants were set. There was always a strawberry patch. They were best eaten fresh with sugar, but made really good preserves.

Spring was planting time. July and August was canning time. Sometimes a fall garden provided more fresh greens. Shelves of canned food from the garden and fruit trees lined one wall of the basement.

The garden also held a grape arbor. When grapes ripened in the fall, we often stood by it after school or at odd moments to eat the grapes right off the vine, popping them in the mouth and spitting out the skins.

At the height of summer wild blackberries and gooseberries would ripen along ditches and land not tilled nearby. Mother would don overalls over her dress and long sleeves to deal with briars, topped off by a bonnet as sun protection. Gallon buckets and pots with bales would be gathered. If berrying was on an adjoining farm's fairly undeveloped area, a team of horses and wagon were used for our transportation. This usually meant blackberry pies showed up on our table and some would be canned or made into jam.

An old apple orchard was located just west of the farm yard. Aged trees had rather low branching limbs that were perfect for young climbers. We were always warned that green apples would cause a tummy ache if we ate them which we usually tested. Gradually the trees aged and died. They were not replaced so the apple orchard eventually disappeared.

Mother planted a good size peach orchard near the chicken house. She canned numerous quarts of peaches which we ate all winter. For the county fair she entered and won blue ribbons for her canned peaches. My task, with smaller hands, was to arrange the peach halves face down to make a uniform and attractive jar of fruit.

For a time a couple of rows of sorghum cane would be planted along an edge of a corn field. This would be cut in the fall and hauled to a neighbor's sorghum mill where its juices would be extracted and boiled down to the desired consistency. Our family could put away a gallon or two of sorghum molasses a year. It was especially good on hot biscuits. Mixing molasses and home churned butter made a mixture called lick dob. It was always a little tricky to get the molasses and biscuits to come out even—no leftover molasses, no leftover biscuits. In my mother's family, the story goes that if you had leftover lick dob, it was placed in the cupboard for you to finish at the next meal. Waste was to be avoided.

When the garden was in full bloom platters of corn-on-the-cob, bowls of sliced tomatoes, and green beans hit the table. A favorite combination was sliced tomatoes topped with clabber cheese, our name for cottage cheese.

One canning failure that seemed to recur was my mother's canned corn. Whether for lack of a good seal or other causes, they seemed to spoil frequently. Its odor was rank enough to earn a quick exit from basement food shelves. Freezing corn was a most welcome solution.

All meat was homegrown. Each year when it had turned cold, a fat pig and a yearling calf were butchered. The calf was usually the milk cow's calf as it was not purebred and thus less valuable on the market.

For a while we feasted on liver and fresh meat. Brains in scrambled eggs were not my favorite meal especially if they were identified. Slabs of meat were placed on newspapers on the enclosed back porch until they could be processed. Cold weather was our refrigerant. Big iron kettles over a fire rendered the lard. The remainder was cracklings, not yet a popular snack. Hams were salt cured and sausage fried up in patties and packed in a 5 gallon crock covered with lard and stored in the unheated basement. Beef was cooked up and canned. Tender chunks of canned beef in its own gravy with cooked potatoes was a long way toward a quick meal on wash day. Later, frozen food lockers could be rented in town and the meat delivered to be cut up, wrapped, and labeled. This was before home freezers. In those days grilling steaks had not been introduced. They were dredged in flour and fried in a cast iron skillet.

There was a bit of us vs. them in reference to farm folk and town residents. One story that was considered hugely amusing was about rocky mountain oysters. Every year young pigs were castrated and their testes were referred to as rocky mountain oysters.

They were served, breaded, fried, and referred to as such to unsuspecting visitors. Their reaction was eagerly awaited when their true origin was revealed---always after they had been ingested.

Mother was a good farm cook who turned out multiple loaves of bread weekly. This included a pan or two of cinnamon rolls that never lasted long enough to make it to the table.

A special treat in the summer was ice cream from a hand cranked freezer. A block of ice was purchased, pounded into pieces, and packed around a container of homemade ice cream mixture. One part salt to 9 parts ice created colder temperatures. When the handle became difficult to turn, that meant the ice cream was beginning to freeze. If you wanted really firm ice cream, someone would be recruited to sit on top of the freezer to hold it steady while cranking. A school fundraiser for band uniforms was ice cream socials on Saturday nights on a lawn amidst downtown stores. Each band family would bring a freezer of homemade ice cream to be frozen or a cake to be served.

Before refrigeration was mechanized an ice box was used to keep milk and other foods cool. A 25 pound block of ice was purchased in town, wrapped in a burlap bag, brought home and placed in an insulated oak box until it melted. Another method for keeping milk cool and free from spoilage was placing it in a baled stainless steel 3-5 gallon bucket and hanging it by a rope into a well until it touched the water. Before each meal it would be retrieved from the well, then returned at the end. An old saying was "thunder hastened the milk turning sour." Whole milk from the cow was separated into cream and skim milk. The cream was churned into butter, often a task given to the child old enough to do so.

The farm had several productive hickory nut trees. Nuts were gathered in the fall, cracked on the shop vise and shelled for apple salad, fudge, and divinity. There was never enough. Usually a very successful cook, my mother's fudge often had to be spooned or was hard and grainy. In cooking fudge to measure its readiness to be poured into a cooling pan, a spoonful of fudge was dropped into a glass of cold water. If it formed a soft ball that held together, it was ready. If it dispersed in the water, it needed to be cooked a bit longer.

Besides the vegetable garden, mother liked to plant a row of gladiola flowers. These she arranged in a vase and took to church on Sundays. They made a showy bouquet. At the end of each season she dug up the bulbs to plant another year. To her dismay the second year plantings often reverted to a salmon color.

Cool drinking water was always available from a cistern outside the back door. A battered dipper hung on its side which everyone drank from, including visitors.

My First Day Of School In 1940

Evelyn Burns

My sister was the one who introduced me to my first day of school. I loved it.

During that day Miss Irene passed out pictures of a circle and instructed us to start in the center of the circle and gradually color it in.

I chose a red crayon and did exactly as she instructed.

Most of my classmates made straight up and down 6 year old scribbles.

Mine was the one filled in with increasingly large circles without going outside the lines.

I have spent a lifetime learning to occasionally color outside the lines.



One Of Many Gwen Stories

Carol Pullen

Gwen and I became friends when I was about 8 years old and she 10. It was one of those occasions when my mother “voluntold” me I was to befriend her. I had never met her, but our parents knew one another. I was dropped off at her house to have dinner and spend the night. All I knew about her was that she was blind, lived in Lansing during the school year to go to the School For The Blind, and was home for the summer. My mother always called her “Poor Gwen.”

I was a dutiful daughter, didn’t question my parents, and went off feeling like I was being fed to the lions. First of all, I didn’t know how or why she was blind and really thought I might “catch” it. Then, during the course of the night, she removed her glass eyes because they were causing irritation. I silently was freaked out and scared and afraid to look at her.

That was our beginning and the friendship lasted until she died at the age of 71. This is one of our stories, one that took years to finish.

Gwen was independent, confident, smart and determined. Over the years there had been many things she’d wanted to do or learn that were “beyond her.” She did not accept that and usually thought that I should be able to teach, show, let or help her do those things. We did quite a few of them below the radar of our parents, occasionally putting us at risk. For one thing, my dad would have killed me and banned Gwen.

When we were 16 and 18 Gwen decided she should drive. I could teach her. “You can sit right next to me and tell me when to stop and go and turn, when to speed up, what’s in the way...You can keep your hand near the steering wheel and your foot near the pedals if you’re nervous. Of course I can do this.”

I was sure this was not happening! We couldn’t do it. Gwen stayed angry for several days and occasionally brought it up for a year or two. She was sad and disappointed in me. Our friendship survived and went through college, marriages, families, careers, accomplishments and losses, sickness and health. She stopped asking so many questions, even laughing at me the night before her wedding when I cautiously asked her if she had any questions about sex or anything. She was now the “Older Sister.”

We were senior citizens on vacation together with our husbands and going out boating on a beautiful summer day. Talking, wind blowing our hair, laughing. And I remembered.

“Gwen, do you want to drive?”

She took over the seat, steering wheel, throttle, and boat. We flew over the lake, full throttle, executing turns, going forward and backward, laughing the whole time. She reluctantly gave up the steering wheel when we docked. She’d been roaring around for an hour.

Truthfully, it was a weekday and there were very few other boats out, it was relatively calm, and the lake was large. But she did it: felt the control, success, power, speed, response to her direction.

And she remembered too, “I told you I could do it! It took you this long to let me.”

Out My Window

Judy Slater

Out my window, a blue sky, fickle white clouds, and lazy breeze

A canvas back-wash for hundreds of winter-bare slim trees accompanying each other on a knoll, standing sentinel over a delicate, sky-reflective river below

The bare dark tree branches are softening and yielding to spring's urges, releasing mere specks of green, buds of promise, harbingers of lush delicate new leaves

The lazy breeze has dominion over the trees: tossing, bending, swaying branches in no particular direction or rhythm, gently encouraging release to the winter-frozen trees from their hibernation into the welcome of spring

Some trees in their petticoat stage of dress move more stiffly in this breeze, rudderless in their near nudity

Other trees, more fully dressed, move more gracefully, the newly visible leaves navigating the ocean of sky

How can there be discord among people when always in our view, the example of this interplay of tree and river and sky, relating to each other as dependent partners, shows us the effortless simplicity, harmony and beauty of cooperative existence?



Red Versus Blue

Rosemary R Berardi

Red versus Blue
Which one is for you?

Roses are red
Violets are blue
Which one is for you?

Cherries are red
Blueberries are blue
Which one is for you?

Sunset is red
Sky is blue
Which one is for you?

Buckeyes are red
Wolverines are blue
Which one is for you?

I LOVE YOU BLUE



Megan Kenyon



shin ש
the letter

shhhhhh
the sound

awe
the feeling

at its base
the foundation
for those who believe

three pillars rise up
giving strength
and structure

reaching unwaveringly
skyward

the י yod that
tops each pillar

the eternal presence
the spark of spirit

the shin of
shaddai שדי
the nurturing g-d living within

the shin of
shalom שלום
a greeting for those who enter
a shelter for those who roam
a blanketing peace for all

the shin of
shema שמע
hear o' israel
the prayer of faith

shin ש

always alive
ever present
sweetly comforting

shin שׁ is a letter in the Hebrew alphabet; it is a component of many Hebrew words with spiritual significance, the three in this poem (shaddai, shalom, shema) are a few examples. the significance of each are described within the stanza in which it appears.

yod י (the “o” pronounced as the “oo” in foot) is also a Hebrew letter which carries spiritual significance in the Bible and is described within the poem as well

the word g-d within the poem contains an intentional substitution of a hyphen instead of an “o” – traditionally in judaism, the word of g-d is not spelled in its entirety in non-sacred texts as non-sacred texts are often ultimately destroyed. in a symbolic gesture, g-d (the name hence the “spirit”) should not be destroyed with it.



Silence of the Yams

Gay Kerry Halseth

There was an old woman, Lucinda Merribelle, who lived on a farm in Michigan north of the 45th parallel. On the peninsula that reaches up around west of Grand Traverse Bay, 125 acres of sand, hills and clay. Lucinda was a master gardener extraordinaire, she raised all manner of fruits, flowers and vegetables there, peonies, pansies, poppies and sweet peas, sugar peas, cherries, cherry tomatoes and pears. The success in her produce was due to her great care, the sunshine, the rain and fantastic clean air, also her horse Pat, a rickety mare, as a source of manure no other horse could compare.

With Pattie hitched to a plow and Ms. Merribell in her huge garden bonnet, the rows they did furrow, a veritable gardening sonnet. Each spring saw her planning her beds with an eye to esthetics of foliage what colors would lie, turnips with tulips, cabbage with beets, daisies with carrots, all visual treats of texture and taste. A golden lace of hay they'd lay to keep the ground moist, keep weeds away.

Throughout summer the garden was lovingly tended, guarded, encouraged, fertilizer blended to yield the most succulent juiciest fruits, fragrant strawberries, broccoli, eggplant and gooseberries. Fairy wind chimes played gently as breezes swaddled the lush yield of Lucinda's labor. As temperatures dropped and summer heads into fall, sunflower, hollyhock and corn all grow tall, grapes hanging burgundy-green on the vine, each crop looking one step from wine.

Wendy, Lucinda's next-door neighbor, would lean over her fence on the swinging gate and watch Lucinda with great twisted anticipation of harvest. The lust in her mind was already ripe to stew the tomatoes along with her tripe.

Lucinda would gather all her darlings for display at Farmers Market in Suttons Bay, hoping her children would find loving families to nourish with fresh lettuce, beans, potatoes and kale for sale. Alongside Millie selling varieties of honey, the women exchanged their summers' labor for money. Wendy was there with a big basket brimming, trimming the dead heads from daisies and swatting butterflies furiously as she pinched, pulled and plucked at the produce in a nasty way that made Lucinda wince. More than once Wendy would intentionally bruise an antique Maiden Blush and muse "thin skin" to the chagrin of old Kilcherman, who felt compelled to hide the Northern Spy, rather than see it end up in Wendy's apple pie.

It was appalling to see her peel husk from corn, with a gleeful scorn, toot, "Any worms?"

For it was Wendy's way to look for the worst in the world be it other women, their work, the weather. And whether it be sunny or rain, either way for Wendy it caused pain when others displayed the ability to sustain and produce produce.

Some people dislike veggies and will not eat them; others selectively pick at a plate of peas or asparagus hiding their dislike under their ham or a bun. Wendy's hatred was very deep rooted, her disdain did not stop at merely not eating the offending fruit, she took pleasure beating, mashing and squashing with her boot any unpleasant crop that cropped up in her kitchen.

To home from the market grasping her basket loaded with plunder and prey, Wendy could ponder the prospects awaiting the stewing and brewing melee.

For the potatoes she had plans, she would peel their skins, boil them till tender and add olive oil, then mash them and mash them to a fine puree, those would be for dinner today.

For the carrots it would be slice dice and sauté in butter and with none other than utter contempt as she heated the stove and with much more than malice, she thought to herself, “These arrogant carrots deserve this dismembered destiny.”

As raw celery she mangled quite well with her jaws, the pumpkin made her wish she had claws to tear at the flesh with one swipe; she dreamed this as she wiped the knife blade clean and dug the innards out with a scoop, for pie.

Wryly she eyed the broccoli, not today, but maybe tomorrow, she planned to rip off their heads, the sweetest parts and along with sliced wild mushrooms and fresh eggs make quiche tarts.

Wendy thought, “The peas must be crushed!”

She rushed with a mallet and finely minced shallot to the soup tureen and inwardly beaming she imagined them screaming as she turned the boiling mush with a spoon.

The roses, how dare they bloom, their pastel petals fragrant, a flagrant slap at Wendy so to make potpourri, she’d hang them upside down to dry in tortured bouquets.

Lucinda Merribell knew very well what Wendy was up to. Quick she made tracks with her well sharpened ax, moments later she was rapping on the door to Wendy’s kitchen.

When Wendy opened the door wide, she stood horrified as Lucinda raised.....a fat fresh chicken and enticed, “Supper for two?”

Together they cackled and chuckled as they plucked and stuffed the bird into the oven. It was beastly gruesome the way this twosome devoured their dinner that night. It would be nice to say, they suffered some way other than indigestion, perhaps ironically and comically choking on the pits of some fruit or veggie. They both lived to be very old and the way it is told, they were healthy and spry to the end.

So go ahead and mash your yams, shred the lettuce and make salad and stew too. Eat them raw and steamed, dried and creamed, baked, flaked or fried but it can’t be denied, you must.....EAT YOUR FRUITS AND VEGGIES!!!!!!!

Snow

Nancy Walfish

Looking out my window today the ground and trees are covered with snow. The sun is shining and everything seems fresh and new. Light is bouncing off the snow with little specks of snow blowing in the wind. It is truly beautiful.

Life is often like that, all the shiny things we think are so important – cars, jewelry, computers and gold. These things tend to distract us. We believe what we see is reality.

But just like the snow, it is so quick to disappear



carolyn r zaleon

Space in the Time of Covid

The following were written from the prompt, “space in the time of Covid”

Sleep (Not) in the Time of Covid, by Judy Slater

I am awake
Empty

I turn to the open window
To a fresh silent breeze
To gentle soft rain
To the moon-graced black sky

A snow goose honks in contentment

I am still awake
Empty no more

Covid Void, by Judy Slater

The continuum cracks
Time and space undone
The ordinary vanishes
 Nothing follows nothing

Ah, moment, how amplified
Ah, movement, how stilled
 What was, no longer is

Inconsolable Isolation, by Judy Slater

Isolation?
Ok, we can do this
It's only three weeks

Extended isolation?
Ok, we can do it again
It's only three weeks more

More isolation?
NOT ok, we're not achieving it
It's only endless

Scientists say space is endless
But we are not

The Space Co-Void, by Judy Slater

They say Nature abhors vacuums
What will she do to fill this one?

Space-d Apart in the Time of Covid

I am alone
You are all somewhere else

How, then, is it you are with me
You come to mind
Your smile remembered
Your energy felt
Your love comforting

I am not alone

the space that covid made..., by carolyn r. zaleon

...or took away...

in the beginning, space slowly evaporated...in plain sight....and took time with it...my space, your space, the space for each other...leaving a void....full of wishes and memories...uncertainties and angst over the most mundane pieces of life

but then space reappeared...an unfamiliar space...from my fortunate vantage point, it is, in a way, now vast and freeing...and somehow eerily comfortable....like living in a turtle's shell...or bundled under a big heavy quilt on a chilly dark night...

though the process isn't equitable or gentle, maybe it's ok for a new way of seeing space...and a new time to go with it....

Life with Covid, October 2020, by David Talaga

I was in Bay City with family celebrating my mother's 88th birthday when suddenly the skies opened up. Buckets of rain deluged everything below. Though I was sitting on a couch socializing, a dreaded red flag rose in my mind. My mini-van's windows sometimes operate on their own, courtesy of a dysfunctional key fob. I ran to look out the window and, sure enough, the windows in front were fully down, rain pouring in.

Racing outside my parents home, I hurriedly started the car and put the windows up once again, but not before I was soaked to the skin. My dad loaned me a spare sweatshirt and trousers while he tossed my wet garb into the dryer. Very thankful. [editor's note: my father has since passed away]

These minivan windows occasionally have been operating on their own for years. It's probably my fault since I'm too cheap to spend \$200 on a new key fob. But my seven-year-old grandson Luke has a different explanation:

“Your car is haunted because you own so many scary movies.”

True, I do own a lot of scary movies. And this Halloween has given me a chance to watch them and a few new ones too. In fact, Halloween in the time of Covid hasn't been that bad. You can still go to the fruit farms for your apples, masked up and socially distanced. And with a new surge in cases locally, there's more time for the leisurely drive around the county to see the pretty fall colors and enjoy the ghoulish yard decorations. I even had time to create a particularly scary graveyard myself.

We don't spend a lot of time shopping in order to avoid the crowds. And dining out is becoming a rarity since we can't sit outdoors now with the cooling temperatures. But it does give my wife Wendy a chance to test her baking skills with pumpkins, when she can find canned pumpkin which is not that easy. So we've had pumpkin pancakes, pumpkin donuts and pumpkin tartlets. She did nix my suggestion of pumpkin ravioli . . . without comment.

Every year for the past seven years we've taken one or more of my grandsons to the preschool pumpkin hunt sponsored by the local recreation center. They made a few changes this year that I thought actually improved the experience. Instead of sitting on the floor of an overly warm gym listening to a local librarian read a spooky story, we did a story-walk into the woods, posted signs telling the tale of The Plumply Dumply Pumpkin.

The kids wore masks, as did the adults, but nobody seemed to mind. After finding our pumpkins in the woods, instead of sharing decorations and snacks as we had in years past, we were handed a packet of decorations and a bag of snacks, one for each kid. We decorated pumpkins outside with one family to a table.

No overcrowding, no hoarding snacks or supplies and not a Corona-virus in sight. Okay, we were lucky to have sunny and warm fall weather, but still it was a memorable time.

Though our grandson did his own pumpkin decorating, I was able to indulge my inner artist (I'm not, by the way) in another activity--coloring rocks to hide around town for a local painted rock hunt for families, something else to entertain folks who might be suffering the effects of Covid fatigue.

Then on another night, my two sons and I separately tested our Halloween trivia knowledge in an on-line trivia contest. Though I held first place most of the night, my younger son who lives in St Louis, nipped me right before the contest officially ended. He was very proud of that. Too proud, in fact.

Perhaps this pandemic has given us more time this fall to enjoy close family as well as the sights, smells and tastes of a Michigan fall. And when we're not outside, we can turn on the Halloween music channel on TV while catching up on our reading. For me, that means a magazine I bought called "The World's Most Mysterious Places." I've been to at least a half dozen.

Meanwhile, I can't help but see the irony in the song playing on my music channel:

"(Don't) Fear the Reaper."

Teachers

Nancy Walfish

The job of a teacher is so important and so undervalued in this world.

We would like to thank and acknowledge the people who shape the minds of the future.

Your time and dedication could not be measured monetarily, because the dollar amount would be immeasurable.

Your payment is in knowing that you made a difference in so many people's lives.



Three Sisters Crossing A Creek

Carol Pullen

We've each been following our own paths, sharing news about them occasionally when we contact one another. But today we've gotten together and are on the same path. Meeting in Sedona, Arizona and on a trail determined by red rock, time-sculpted mountains towering around us. Ancient mountains, and we are 79, 62 and 60 years old, so in very respectful awe.

We cross through the creek ten times today, each carrying the skills, limitations and burdens of our individual paths. I, at 79, have been sister/mother to my much younger sisters. I love these women.

My balance and endurance are very conscious concerns. Terri, 62, a psychoanalyst, 18 year valiant warrior in battle with Stage 4 Breast cancer and developer of great delight in living, is in pain and struggling to be here. Linda, 60, also a therapist, is very familiar with Sedona's trails, and confident in her enjoyment as an experienced hiker, but concerned about ours. We are all mothers and have been or are wives. We are all women of faith, with variations in their details. There is healing for each of us surrounded by such beauty.

The creek - maybe 40 feet wide, has a bottom of red soil, crossings of haphazard rocks, very cold water. Daunting to me and to Terri. Normally entirely enjoyable to Linda. Hesitation, fear, uncertainty, and a strong desire to go on are in Terri's and my approach. Care, coaching, help, strategizing are in Linda's. The play of planning a route over this "ominous" creek - "I'll start here, then go to that rock, next and next"- is fun but scary.

Linda goes first, showing us the route she's chosen and comes back to watch over us. I begin, slip and fall. Not hurt, not unexpected, a bit wet with a skinned knee, but relieved to see that it's not such a scary thing, and to reach for Linda's steady hands to get up and continue. Terri wants to come. Her balance is very uncertain, and she can't use her hands to steady herself by reaching for stable rocks or Linda's hands without great pain. Her hands are bandaged and covered with gloves. Leaning on Linda, she slowly crosses over.

There is jubilation at all three of us crossing the creek! You would think we had scaled Mt. Everest; it felt like such a victory and accomplishment. We did this with nine more crossings, each a relief and a milestone, gaining a bit more confidence as we went.

We finished our hike and were back in the car three hours later, cold and with wet feet (and for me wet pants as well), exhausted and happy together.

I don't know if there will ever be another actual creek crossing again given my age, Terri's condition, or anyone's length of life, really. I'm sure there will be the crossing of many "symbolic creeks" to come. If they could be as lovingly and satisfyingly accomplished it would be a grand blessing.



Tomato For My Sister

Carolina Ravina

It was the morning of September 1, 1942, my big sister Valya's first day at school. My mom was at work. My grandma was bedridden.

When I woke up, Grandma told me that she had sent Valya to school hungry as there was nothing to eat at home, not a crumb. Grandma gave me five rubles and asked me to go to the market, buy Valya a tomato and take it to her at school. She explained to me how to find my sister's classroom and told me not to enter it but wait until recess.

Since September 1941 we had lived in the deep rear, in the Central Asian Republic of Uzbekistan, the town of Jizzakh where we were evacuated together with the whole Tambov Pilot Training School both my parents worked for.

The Tambov Pilot Training School had originally been set up as a training institution training pilots and technicians for the civilian air carriers but was turned over to the military in 1940 in preparation for the war. It became a Prep School training fighter pilots and technicians for the Air Force.

There was a serious reason for that. The German fascists attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. In the June-July timeframe, Ukraine, Belorussia, and West European Russia as far to the East as the Volga were occupied by the invaders (Blitzkrieg Barbarossa, World War II). Very soon food was in short supply for the civilians. There was barely enough to feed the defenders of the nation as strict centralized rationing was introduced.

Returning to my story, I went to the market and bought a beautiful plump bright red tomato. The good-humored local men (they were exclusively men at the market) teased me, cracking jokes about a "big" customer, pulling at my jacket, entertained by having such a young customer (I was just over 4).

So I was on my way to school with the tomato for my sister in hand. I knew Grandma did not have any food, nor did she have more money to give me so that I could buy myself something to eat as well. I had never questioned my kind grandma as I was aware of the situation. I felt for her as she suffered more than any one of us.

The tomato looked and smelled so tempting and I was so hungry. With my little pinky nail I broke the shiny tomato skin ever so slightly and sucked the delicious juice twice. I immediately felt guilty. The tomato was not meant for me.

I reached the school and walked down the hall. The doors to the classrooms were all shut, it was quiet. I found the right door, and without waiting for the recess, opened it just a crack and peeked in. The teacher who was sitting at her desk in front of her class turned her head and asked in a gentle voice: "What do you need, little girl?"

"I would like to see my sister Valya," I answered.

Valya joined me outside the classroom, I gave her the tomato and headed home. Now pangs of conscience tortured me more than pangs of hunger. My sister never asked me about what had happened to the tomato.

I confessed my "crime" to her sixty years later, it somehow came up. I do not think she remembered the tomato episode and I cannot blame her for that. It happened so long ago!

I have always been overly sensitive.

The Voice

Nancy Walfish

Have you ever heard that little voice inside that tells you “listen to me, I can help,” but you ignore it as just wishful thinking? What if you listened? Believed you were not alone? You have someone that loves you and wants you to SUCCEED. So often we allow self-doubt to stop us.

We don't listen and often realize that if only we had listened, things would have turned out differently. Listening is so hard, and we usually make it so much harder by rushing ahead without thinking. So often by just stopping and giving life a chance to catch up, we realize the problem we thought was so big has already resolved itself.

Listening is so often the answer. That inner voice you drown out by the static of the life we live today, is the help you need.

Listen to that inner voice and you will probably get what you need. It may not be the answer you want, but often it will turn out to be the answer you need.

Make life easier. Try to stay calm. Quiet the noise and listen. Don't allow the doubt to interfere with what you know is true.



What Kids Did On Summer Vacation 1940's to 1950's

Rita McMahon

Often our first school writing assignment in the fall was to write two or three paragraphs on what we did during summer vacation. It let our friends and teacher know what fun we'd had all summer, and for the teacher, how much we had forgotten over the summer.

One thing we learned very early was to keep ourselves and our younger siblings entertained, and never complain about being bored. Our resourceful parents had all kinds of suggestions of chores that needed to be done, and occasionally we got nabbed before we could get out of the house in the morning. By midsummer our big garden was thriving, so there were always peas, beans, corn or tomatoes to be picked and prepared for canning. Pulling weeds or picking off bugs were additional chores that even children were capable of doing. If we had done a particularly good job on a work day, Dad would often take us to the local lake to swim or to get ice cream cones in town.

Our parents belonged to a generation that would have been considered "free range" parents by parents today. There were no cell phones to check on our whereabouts every few minutes, nor organized sports activities or camps to keep us closely supervised all summer while parents were at work. The older siblings were considered the "big kids" who were charged with taking care of the "little kids" wherever we went. We had many other kids our own ages in the neighborhood so we roamed from one house to the next using whatever play equipment each family provided. We might choose to play croquet, softball, tag, Red Rover, hopscotch, jump rope or other active games if the morning was cool. One favorite activity at our house was climbing the tall ladder to the hay loft and swinging down on the big hay rope. As the summer day warmed up, we often played card or board games indoors. The older girls often played "house" on one of our big front porches with throw rugs, rocking chairs, and small tables brought out from the house. We had plenty of younger siblings to play with.

As we got older we might take a bike ride uptown to buy penny candy from the grocer's big display case, or take long bike rides into the country. We were all involved in at least one 4-H project during the summer. Crafts, baking, canning, or sewing projects were favorite choices. Our projects were always shown in our Club's booth at the County Fair. Those ribbons and cash prizes were much coveted incentives.

All of the kids in the neighborhood saved most of their earnings from chores, looking forward to our town's annual carnival and the County Fair. I remember riding the mail train that stopped in every small town to exchange mail bags to the County Fair that was about fifteen miles down the tracks.

We also looked forward to the day each week the County Bookmobile came to exchange the books we had read for new ones. Reading was often a rainy day diversion from our more active pursuits. I loved to read, and often spent many hours under the shade trees in the front yard reading Zane Gray westerns by the time I was in 5th grade.

When Labor Day signaled the end of summer and the start of the school year, our focus changed from play to work, and seeing all the friends we had seen very little all summer. All the girls had to wear dresses to school in those days, so there was a flurry of excitement picking out what we needed from the Sears or Pennys catalogs. Aside from Sunday School, none of us had worn shoes for most of the summer. The boys all got new jeans and shirts that felt very stiff compared to the ones they had been wearing. Since chemical sunscreens had not been invented yet we were all suntanned, and our hair was several shades lighter, but in general we felt pretty subdued yet excited and ready for the school year ahead of us.

White Room Challenge

Nancy Walfish

I was watching a show on television that was called the “White Room Challenge.” The premise was that they gave you a completely white room and you are supposed to decorate it. As I was watching this show, it occurred to me it is so much like life.

When you are born your room is completely empty, white, and pure. As time passes you start to fill your room with color, people and experiences. Although all of these things might not be what you were expecting or wanted, you have to use them. You can either complain about what you were given, or you can incorporate them in a way that is useful and productive to you.

Sometimes your room gets too cluttered, and it is necessary to get rid of things that make your life unable to see what is important. Just like the show, you need to know when to edit. Try to keep the things that work in your life and get rid of the things that make you unhappy, and keep the things that help you live a fulfilled life.

Your life, just like the room, will no longer be white, but all the colors of your life. At the end of our life, hopefully we will have experienced all the colors of the rainbow.



why am i here
carolyn r zaleon

i have no clue
but i figure
if i follow my guts
and listen
to the small voice
within
i'll be where
i'm supposed to be



carolyn r zaleon

Why Do I Write?

Judy Slater

Writing by hand is a workout for fingers, so ease of pen put to paper is a writing gotta-have.

If a pen moves smoothly on paper, which this free promotional one does NOT, then pause, perhaps this one? NO, pause, another? No, pause. Free pens do NOT pass muster, not this one, either.

Still trying. Fourteen more free pens in my Mason jar.

This "Heartland" one is best so far, but still too much work. BIC Round Stic? NO. "Regency at Canton?" Easiest so far, smoothest, it's an unfamiliar "HUB" brand. "Marriott?" NO! Throw it away. "Hilton Hotel? NO! "BIC Soft Feel?" Yikes! Have to press hard. Another one: "Michigan Interfaith Power and Light." So-so.

A thought occurs: a broader tip may suit. Look for one among the last in the jar.

"EHM Senior Solutions" more like an ink pen: writes wet, pen shaft thick and easy to hold. Of course, no name brand. "Uniball 500" like an ink pen, but point too fine. "Zebra F202 Japan" throw away!

I remember a "Uniball" that, once found, was a staple on my Office Max shopping list a few years ago. How did I stop?

Now my hand is tired, I've been trying ballpoint pens, and I feel little in control of my handwriting. I can read it, but it is messy.

OK, so think, there's different kinds of writing that might be better suited to different kinds of writing instruments. Perhaps the junky free ball point pens would suffice for list-making or doodling (or losing!). Perhaps a pencil would succeed as my writing companion for "serious" writing.

I'll try a pencil, #2, sharp point. If this works better, I am getting a pencil sharpener. This #2 pencil has 6 bevels on the shaft. I'm discovering my fingers like its non-roll grip not featured in smooth pen shafts. And ease of writing, smooth.

Sometimes when writing, I concentrate on my handwriting style and evenness, but it never lasts, neither the concentration nor the style and evenness. I think my brain says each letter as I write it; how oppressive and frustrating to my hand to have to wait for brain's instruction. Hand does not have a mind of its own. For that, a great amount of magic occurs to get letters forming a word, words forming a thought, thought ahead of hand's writing speed. Irritation, frustration. Thinking is ahead of a word being written, hence the angst of never feeling caught up, in harmony between thought and formation of a single letter as it combines with likely and unlikely partners to form words. So, if I slow down to the sanctity of each letter in each word, perhaps my writing will be more even and legible. But my hand tires. And my brain drums ITS fingers, not willing to wait for writing fingers to catch up.

With all that, WHY DO I WRITE?

Notwithstanding the push-me pull-you between thought and transcription, I am driven to write. It's the best way I have found to dump my head chatter, because as I write, I slow down to reflect. I write to rest. The drive has met its match.

Oh, by the way, I need a pencil sharpener. Pencil wins.

Why I Like Herring

Carolina Ravina

It was early in the spring of 1943. The war on the territory of the Soviet Union had been going on since June 22, 1941, the day fascist Germany treacherously attacked the Soviet Union along an extended front line, crossing the borders of Ukraine, Belorussia and Russia.

My mother, my grandmother, my sister, and I lived in Uzbekistan, a Central Asian Republic of the Soviet Union, over two thousand miles away from the front line. In the fall of 1941 shortly after the War started we had moved there from the central European Russian city of Tambov together with the Fighter Pilot Training School. Both my parents worked for the School. My dad flew in a couple of weeks later.

He could not stay far away from the front line in Uzbekistan while his Motherland was in peril fighting for its very existence. He had sent a request to the Air Force Headquarters volunteering to be sent to the front. His request was promptly denied with a reference to his exemption as a highly qualified aeronautics engineer whose service in training specialists (fighter aviation pilots and technicians) was extremely important. He was appointed Chief engineer of the school soon after his graduation. Originally the school trained specialists for the civilian air carriers. By the time the war had started on the territory of the Soviet Union, it had been turned over to the military. He would not give up and would continue submitting requests to the Air Force Headquarters asking to be sent to the front. After his third or, maybe fourth request, it was satisfied.

Life has changed for us and everyone around us dramatically since the beginning of WW2 on the USSR territory.

We did not have enough food; some days just a piece of dark bread a day as food had been rationed. It was hard on everyone. Experiencing pangs of hunger was torture for a growing child. It was with you every single minute of your waking life. Once I heard the adults discussing the situation in my family mentioning that my mother's monthly salary (she was the only breadwinner at that time) was 600 rubles while a loaf of bread on the black market cost 500 rubles. She could not afford to buy anything but the ration.

Very soon there appeared some extremely emaciated people in town lying on the streets, unable to walk. They came from Ukraine, Belorussia and western parts of Russia, running from the war and starvation, to Uzbekistan. The people thought it was easier to survive in a warmer climate. Unfortunately, there were no jobs for most of them, and hence – no rations. I do not know if any social help was available. Of course, I realized all this much later when I started reading a lot.

Once I saw a very emaciated man on the lawn in front of our house. He was on his knees and one elbow looking around. I remembered that we sometimes (on a certain weekday) picked up from the officer's canteen some kind of brown liquid with dark brown dumplings floating in it. It was given to us as soup. Only my mom could eat it trying to save some bread for us children. Neither my sister, nor I could swallow the "soup." The same was true of my grandma who had a serious abdominal problem. So I quickly found an empty can and asked Mom for help. She heated the soup and poured it out into the can. I ran to the man and helped him drink the liquid and eat the dumplings. That was all I could do. The next day the man was gone. I do not know what happened to him.

I was not 5 yet, and looking back, I believe that in war time children mature much faster when exposed to extreme circumstances. I closely listened to the news on the radio following the daily situation at the front that children my age would not normally do in peacetime. When the War started, The Red Army (name used for the Soviet Army at that time) retreated every single day. It was very painful to listen to the news of the Red Army retreat. The Fascists were stopped in the early winter of 1942, when they approached Moscow (about 17 miles from the Soviet capital in the northwest direction) after very intense battles that lasted for about four months.

From that time on, the Fascists started retreating very slowly with heavy battles and enormous losses of human life on both sides. The Red Army would eventually liberate much of the area which the Germans had previously occupied. It was the summer of 1944. By about January 1945, the battles were waged outside the territory of the Soviet Union.

Meanwhile, the war was still being waged, and we started losing close relatives. We were dreaming of the time all this horror around us would end. All of us know how slow time flows for children. The awful war lasted for a long four years. I had already lost both my maternal grandparents who stayed in the occupied part of Russia. I had never seen them. I also lost two uncles - one on my mother's side (a career artillery officer), and the other one on my father's side drafted as a very young man of 18. He went missing in his first major battle – that of the Kursk - Oryol Bulge.

The Red Army defenses had held firm, but at a great cost of life. Although specific numbers are still debated among historians, it's estimated the Battle of Kursk caused around 800,000 Soviet casualties and 200,000 German casualties, as stated by Wikipedia

There were a bunch of us, the evacuee children. We went hungry and were obsessed with food trying to find any edible plants. We were scavenging for whatever we could lay our hands on, anything that was more or less edible or at least chewable. As an example, we found out that the yellow blossoms of the arid acacia bush had sweet nectar at the stem of the blossom. We would pull out the blossoms and suck out the sweet nectar. The same happened to be true of the red clover blossoms. It helped, somewhat, in quenching our hunger.

Yet another one of our great discoveries was that tar used for repairing roofs was chewable, creating an illusion of gooey food. We knew enough not to try and swallow it. Still, chewing it quenched hunger somewhat. We were happy about our discovery only to be deeply disappointed later when we found out that not all tars were the same. On one occasion we tried to chew the tar found on a construction site and wound up with our jaws stuck together so tightly that we could not open our mouths. We had a hard time scraping the tar out. I am recalling another food-related episode. One of my little friends (Tolik by name), a year or two older than me, shared with us pieces of sunflower oilcake he found on the railway tracks. It had come from a cargo train passing by, transporting oilcake for pigs. Tolik picked up a few pieces of the stuff that fell on the tracks. I was grateful as well as impressed with his generosity. He suffered from hunger as much as the rest of us, and yet he shared the food with us! The oil cake was delicious, and I hoped he would keep finding more of this delicious stuff.

Going back to the gist of my story, one December night in 1943 around midnight, Mom woke up my sister and me to let us know our dad was visiting on business for a couple of days. We had not seen him in a few months and were extremely happy. Mom suggested that we sit down and eat some food that Dad brought us. We had been tucked in without supper or anything to eat at all. Mom had not had any food to give us. What we found on our plates was a piece of salted fish for every one of us. She explained to us that it was a huge Caspian herring, Zalom, from Tehran, the capital of Iran where Dad had been on a government assignment. The herring was out of this world delicious. Since that time I have been dreaming about the food that became my absolute favorite. Mmm... so yummy, especially if you had boiled potatoes to go with it. We did not have any, but it was still very good.

During his visit en route from Tehran to Moscow my Dad later told us about his trip to Tehran. He was a member of the Technical Support Group that airlifted the Soviet Government Delegation to the Tehran Conference.

Later that year Dad was recalled from the front altogether and got a position with the Air Force Engineering Department Headquarters. Soon thereafter he moved us to Moscow.

*Tehran Conference

The Tehran Conference was a strategy meeting of Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill from 28 November to 1 December 1943, after the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran. It was held in the Soviet Union's embassy in Tehran, Iran.

Why You Need Pixie Dust At Disney World

Dave Talaga

I remember when I went to Disneyland in the 1960s that certain special rides required something called an “e ticket.” The paper e-ticket was necessary if you wanted to ride the Matterhorn bobsleds, the submarine voyage, or the Monorail.

The e-ticket is long gone, having last been used at the Disney parks in 1982. Today with our technologically-advanced society, Disney relies on phone apps and a wrist band they call a “magic band” for their ticketing, reservations and accommodations.

That leaves seniors like my wife Wendy and me in the lurch. The only phone app we use on our shared cell phone is the rewards app for our local Tim Horton's. Fortunately, I'm more literate with a computer and was able to make an on-line purchase of the modern day version of an e-ticket to get us into the Magic Kingdom during a family vacation in Florida recently.

So we joined our son, his wife and their two children on a bus ride from our resort hotel to the Magic Kingdom. The early morning lines to enter were fairly long and busy, but moved quickly past the turnstiles . . . until it was mine and Wendy's turn. Have you ever been in a long line when the person in the front suddenly has a problem that holds up the whole line, making you wait while everyone else has long gone and are free to do whatever? And you so hate that person for holding up the line? Well, we were that person. Actually, it was my wife Wendy.

I flashed my magic band at the turnstile, the light turned blue and I walked on in while the ticket guy was helping someone else. Then I saw Wendy waving for me to come back to the line she was in. Her band wasn't working. The ticket people tried several times but each time they said ‘no go.’ We were referred to guest relations which had a line of its own by now.

We motioned to my son's family to go into the park without us, and they seemed to have no problem cutting us loose. Good thing, as we were in line at guest relations for nearly a half hour, about the same length of time for people waiting to ride the Magic Kingdom's most popular Seven Dwarfs Mine Ride. But I figured when we got to Disney's version of customer service, they would find the error and fix it forthwith.

I figured wrong.

The agent said her records showed I didn't purchase a ticket. But I did! And it wasn't cheap at over \$300 for two tickets. My wife mentioned how I was able to enter the park with my own magic band. “Did the light turn green or blue?” the agent asked.

“Blue,” I replied. The agent explained that it was the wrong color and I shouldn't have been allowed in. What??? I could see maybe red or yellow, especially if accompanied by an audible alarm, the type you hear in stores sometimes when someone walks out past the store's anti-theft system. But blue has always meant good things, particularly to a University of Michigan fan like myself.

She said I needed the confirmation number off my reservation. I did have that. But it was back at our hotel. So would I have to ride the bus back to our room, retrieve it, and then return by bus again? How late was the Magic Kingdom open anyway?

Then the agent asked whether I purchased the tickets on-line. Yes. Did I have the credit card on me that I used to buy the tickets? Yes again. She ran the card and found out that, yes, my tickets were showing on my account. BUT . . . the magic bands we were wearing were purchased by my daughter-in-law on her account since she booked the room where we all were staying. So we found out there's a limit to the magic on the magic bands. They don't communicate across accounts.

Anyway, the agent did something in her system she said would allow us entry into the Magic Kingdom, and just in case our magic bands didn't work, she gave us a back-up plastic card which she said should do the same thing. We made it in . . . this time.

I returned that night for the Magic Kingdom light show. I figured I would not have any trouble getting admitted this time. I figured wrong. My magic band turned the light at the turnstile blue again. I gave the very nice turnstile agent that card I was given by guest relations. We tried that. Another blue light. I lamented that I might have to go through guest relations a second time.

“Let me call my supervisor over and see if she can sprinkle some pixie dust on this to make it work so you don't have to go to guest relations,” the very nice turnstile agent said.

Wow. Pixie dust? Why didn't they think of that this morning!

The supervisor came over, did something on her portable computer, took my picture and apparently while I wasn't paying attention did sprinkle some pixie dust because I got in.

So note to anyone else caught by a technology snafu while trying to enter a park in Disney World—just tell whoever is in charge to sprinkle some pixie dust on your magic band, and all will be cool. And you can even quote me if you like.



Wind, Wind, Wind

Rosemary R Berardi

Wind, Wind, Wind
Sometimes strong
Sometimes mild
Sometimes not

Sailboats depend on the wind
Flags blow in the wind
Windmills churn in the wind
Birds fly in the wind

Hurricanes, tornadoes, typhoons
Damaging homes, people and pets
East, west, north and south
Climate cannot be without

Cool breezes are welcome
Storms are not

Winter, Winter, Winter

Rosemary R Berardi

December 21 is the first full day of Winter

Cold, cold, cold
Snow, snow, snow
Shovel, shovel, shovel

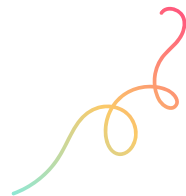
Get out your ear muffs
Put on your mittens
Bundle, bundle up

Great Lakes frozen
Evergreens sparkle
Reindeer are afoot

Look up!
Sky is blue
Birds flying south

Look around!
Leaves on the ground
Squirrels not around

I'm not a snow bird
I love winter
I love Michigan
I love my friends
I love blue!



Kaleidoscope: A Progressive Story

Judy Slater, Carol Pullen, Bill Feight, and carolyn r zaleon

Kaleidoscope. She imagined, *What would it be like to see it from inside?* Closing her eyes tight and making fists of her little hands, Betsy plunged her energy and mind into another of her day-dreams of fancy. Seeing her miniaturized self inside the long, narrow cardboard kaleidoscope tube, she felt the sharp shards of glass and mirror picking at her body as they twisted and turned around the tube, tossing both one way, then the other. She, too, was tossed as the tube twisted back and forth, occasionally being shaken from bottom to top, keeping her from any hope of balancing on her feet. She and the bits and pieces would pile upon each other in disarray as the tube came to rest, all awaiting the next assured tumble.

While reflecting on all that she saw and felt, three long, skinny mirrors, lining the tube's inside, also delighted her by reflecting ever-changing images of all the tube's tossed-about contents, including herself. She could not find a resting place; the tube-tossing was relentless. But the constantly-changing images reflected in the magic of mirrors and rainbow-colored glass bits so delighted her fancy that she only wanted more tossing for more images to appear.

For all the constant motion and wonderful images, keeping Betsy both striving for balance and awe-struck by the beauty around her, she did not notice the glass hole at one end of the tube. Nor did she see an eye looking in upon her from the hole. When at last she saw the eye, she thought, *I am going to leave from inside the tube and become that eye peering through the glass, then I will see the whole image instead of the bits and pieces I see from inside. And I will happily stop tumbling about.*

But before Betsy could imagine herself outside the kaleidoscope peering in, she heard her mother call her to dinner, interrupting her daydream. "Oh, well," Betsy mused, "tomorrow I will imagine myself inside a rainbow."

Yesterday's shifting, changing colors and shapes had made the little girl think of exploring a rainbow, and she was looking forward to it.

Today. A quiet time, perfect for daydreaming. She closed her eyes tightly, took a deep breath and said four times, "The rainbow. The rainbow. The rainbow. The rainbow." And there she was.

She was engulfed by slowly swirling color, tiny soft flakes of sunlit specks of light. She stretched out her arms and twirled around and around until she got so dizzy she fell through color after color.

It brushed against her skin, filled her nose and mouth. All the colors smelled fresh and were delicious. (The pepperminty pink was her favorite and made her laugh.) She decided to swim and dive and roll. Floating on her back she blew rainbow bubbles. She felt blissful and sighed contentedly.

But things were changing. The rainbow seemed to be fading and then disappearing. She tried to hold on to it, but it vanished in her hands. She was falling, faster and faster, and could see the land coming closer and closer. She hadn't thought about having wings or a parachute!

She tried to look closely to get her bearings. Was that her neighborhood, her house? It was! And there was her bedroom window - open! She fell right into the house, through the open window and onto her bed. Wasn't that the luckiest thing?

As she lay there going over everything she saw, touched and did, she decided she'd like to go back. But her head was full of other places and things to do, so it was probably going to be quite a while.

As her mother was calling, she thought of the colors and then of watercolors and a watercolor playground. Maybe she'd be the paintbrush.

The next day Betsy awoke with all the excitement of going to grandma's on Christmas. Her daydreams had the beginnings of learning on her own. Betsy usually would wait until just before lunch to launch into her imagination, but today she remembered wanting to be a paint brush.

A paint brush that could be any color it wanted. How was it that she got into that wonderful world of color and said, "The Rainbow, the Rainbow, the Rainbow, the Rainbow." As she spoke the last word she remembered not being able to keep her balance, and the rough glass in the kaleidoscope against her skin. When she finished remembering and repeating, nothing happened. Betsy was very disappointed. Why hadn't it worked like the day before? Maybe, her thoughts had betrayed her so she repeated "The Rainbow, the Rainbow, the Rainbow, the Rainbow," all while thinking about her favorite colors. Still nothing happened.

Wait a minute, she thought, *Yesterday was the rainbow and the day before was a Kaleidoscope. Today I am to be a paint brush!* And she said "Paintbrush, Paintbrush, Paintbrush, Paintbrush." Before she had said the last "paintbrush," she could feel the damp colors and see them spread on and over everything.

Then she started to wonder, *Can I paint stripes? How about a checkerboard?* Turning and looking back she could see her favorite Peppermint Pink with a green stripe running through it, and now it was changing to a Red and Green checkerboard color. Betsy seemed to be able to taste each color.

The peppermint was a cool ice cream with a mint leaf attached. The checkerboard had the taste of a candy cane. Then came a new smell and she thought, *can colors have a smell also?* Looking down and back she could see a dark red with white lines that made a pattern of half hearts, lines that ended in flowers or leaves. So *that's Paisley*, she thought, as the taste of raspberry ice cream filled her mouth.

"How many more colors and patterns can I smell and taste?" she asked. "I want to stay here forever." Then she saw her house and window and heard her mother call, "Betsy."

"Betsy....Betsy..."

She kept hearing her name in the distance as if the sound were traversing through fog. She slowly opened her eyes, stretched a big morning stretch while still snuggled under the covers, and lay there for a long moment watching the sun stream through the sheers on her bedroom window.

"What a happy, restful sleep," she mumbled to herself as she slowly sat up on the side of the bed, reaching for her terry robe and fuzzy slippers. *Maybe today is the day I tell my story*, she thought.

The enticing smell of bacon and biscuits lured her down the stairs to the kitchen. The table was set with her favorites: warm fresh biscuits, bacon and gravy, and steaming black coffee.

She took her usual seat at the table and before she started to eat, she began to tell her tales of the kaleidoscope, the rainbow and the scrumptious paint; three dreams in one night. But just as the last word left her lips, she heard the clang of forks hitting plates, in stereo, around the table.

“Mom, I can’t believe you had that experience!” blurted her daughter, Sarah, in utter disbelief. And before Sarah could say another word, the same words fell off the tongue of Betsy’s twelve-year old grand-daughter, Abbie. “Grandma, I had that same dream, more than once, but I was afraid to tell anyone.”

Sarah looked in amazement at her daughter and her mother.

“It’s been a recurring dream for me since I was Abbie’s age” Sarah said, “but I too was afraid to tell anyone.”

“Well,” said Betsy, “truth be told, I dream this same dream every so often too! Since I was Abbie’s age, I guess! I don’t know if my mother before me had the same experiences. Maybe she was hesitant to talk about it as well.”

The three generations of women sat in wonder as they ate their breakfast and pondered what and why.

“I guess we’ll never know,” Betsy sighed, “but whatever it is, I hope it continues for all of us. Perhaps Abbie, one day, you’ll pass this along to the next generation. What a beautiful way to begin each day.”



carolyn r zaleon



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Saline Area Senior Center

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Saline High School (SHS)

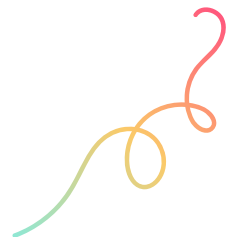
SHS Writing Center students for hosting SAS-C Writers for Writing Marathons, along with teachers Jen Denzin and Madelyn Clark for their continued support with our partnership.

Our Community Partners

Brewed Awakenings & McPherson Local for displaying our previous journal.

Lelaina MacDonald

A huge THANK YOU to SHS student and Writing Center consultant, Lelaina MacDonald for helping with the design and creation of this journal.



Biographies

Evelyn Burns

Missouri born, Michigan matured. 2 years home economics teacher, 1 year flight attendant when teacher salary didn't allow much travel, 12 years high school counselor, 16 years divorce mediator in Lenawee Co. court system. Married 10 years, (divorce best decision of life)..Things that keep her sane....sort of: Reading, walking, swimming, news junkie, organizing 28 annual events for a senior group, mild health nut. In moving to this area from rural Hillsdale Co. (second best life decision), she loves all the classes, concerts, cultural activities a college town offers. Evelyn hopes to learn from the writers group and needs the incentive to write.

Rosemary R. Berardi

I was born, raised, and went to school in Ohio. My father was a pharmacist and owned his own pharmacy. I received my BS in Pharmacy from Ohio State and a Doctor of Pharmacy from the University of Michigan. I taught Pharmacy for over 40 years in the College of Pharmacy at Michigan and was expected to publish articles and book chapters in order to get promoted. I have extensive experience writing scientifically, but very little experience in non professional writing. My greatest challenge is to develop confidence and skills in non professional writing.

Laurel Errer

Wife, mother, writer, painter, medical assistant, teacher, caregiver - jill-of-all-trades. Lived in Ann Arbor since coming down to the University of Michigan in 1962.

William "Bill" Feight

I was never much for writing when I was younger. I liked fixing things more. I did like telling stories though. At times I got into a little trouble with them. Most of them were not necessarily true. Something like "the Boy Who Cried Wolf." I found upon returning from Vietnam a lot of anger stored up. Then, finding myself recovering from a motorcycle accident, my brother encouraged me to write some things down. I found writing about Vietnam had a calming effect. I enjoyed it. Later other stories seemed to come to mind and so I really started to write more for enjoyment.

Gay Kerry Halseth

I am a minimalist at heart but plagued by collections of vintage jewelry, ephemera, craft supplies mostly fabric and beads. Nothing makes me feel more alive than being immersed in a creative project. I love working with hand dyed velvets, silk embroidery floss, industrial strength adhesive and words. Procrastination will be the death of me, unless I can put that off as well.

Rita McMahan

I was born, raised and educated in Ohio until I was 21, at which time I moved to Michigan as a young bride. I taught Home Economics for one year in Southfield, Mi. Then my tenure as a Stay-at-Home Mom of four young children began. By the time all of them were in school I resumed my teaching career part time, and enrolled in Grad School at EMU. I got my MS degree the same year my third child graduated from high school. I continued teaching until retiring, a few years before our 50th Wedding anniversary. My husband was already retired, so we were able to travel, work in our garden, and do other home improvement projects. Alas, my husband of 56 years passed away in 2014, but my life has been brightened considerably by watching the growth of our six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren, doing charity work through my church,

reading, traveling, and participating at the Saline Senior Center. In our writing class most of my work is concentrated on creating my Memoir of a lifetime of blessed memories.

Carol Pullen

I'm a 6 month resident of Saline, moving here after living in Ann Arbor for 60 years, coming to go to U of M and not leaving. I bought my home here following my husband's death and a search to find a smaller, more manageable home. Mission happily accomplished. I'm a mom of five, grandmother of eight and great grandmother of three, and am seventy-nine years old. Faith, family, friends, beauty in nature, art and music, reading, writing are my favorite things. I have worked as an elementary teacher and program administrator. I have never had anything published, really not much has even been read by anyone. But since I was very young it has been a dream I didn't invest in. At this point I have more time and choice in how to use it. And I have less time given my age. Hopefully both will spur me on to write now. I'm also hoping I'm a "late bloomer" when it comes to being a writer.

Carolina Ravina

Carolina was born and raised in Russia before the beginning of World War 2 on Russia's territory. She survived starvation like most Russians during the four long years and a couple of lean post-war years. That is the main gist of her stories. She is trying to take the war associated hardships out of her system. Carolina was mostly educated in Moscow from grade school to university. She graduated from The Moscow Linguistics University with three advanced degrees. Her jobs ranged from teaching university level languages to translating specialized scientific and technical books as well as working as a simultaneous interpreter in a variety of organizations including the United Nations Organizations in Geneva, Switzerland, Russia, Georgia, Latvia, Uzbekistan, etc. She was invited to the USA as a specialist in 1990 and worked for DOE Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

Judy Slater

Kansas born; California raised and educated. A reluctant recovering 1960's Berkeley hippie. Ocean and nature lover, especially redwood trees. Frequent day-dreamer. Grandma of six adorables. At age seven read poetry aloud to her dog, "Togo." Walt Whitman her go-to for stretching imagination. "archy and mehitabel" her non-conformist icons. Thelonus Monk and Saffire Uppity Blues Women her musical escapes. Documenting personal experiences her self-chosen therapy. Being taught by life that who she is is not what she does. For Judy, writing is a compulsion that must be satisfied, however infrequent, sometimes being awakened abruptly from slumber by crisp, clear, demanding word-torrents. No other writing is as effortless.

Dave Talaga

Dave has thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity that Judy Slater and the Saline Area Senior Center has given him to pursue his writing interests. Born in Bay City, Michigan, he attended Bay City Central where he was editor of the high school newspaper. He continued his journalism education at Central Michigan University, earning a degree there before joining the staff of the Alpena News. Although no longer in journalism, Dave has never lost his love for writing which has become more personal as he's written short stories and personal journals as well as maintaining his blog on Blogspot for over 15 years chronicling life with his wife Wendy, their two children and seven grandchildren as well as their pet dog Doogie when he was still with them. He feels the toughest challenge for a writer is to stay motivated and focused. Perhaps that's two challenges but they're equally important.

Nancy Walfish

I have recently moved from Miami, Florida to beautiful Ypsilanti, Michigan. My experiences are varied, I have lived in different parts of the world, and in every place I have learned new "Life lessons." I dislike the question that I have been asked many times: "Where did you like the best?" My answer was always the same, wherever I was at that

moment. My degree was in Psychology and I have used that education in all the different positions I have held in my career. I am a wife, mother, and grandmother, and that is the legacy I leave behind. Thank you to the writing club that has taught me how to express myself through writing.

carolyn r zaleon

carolyn is a retired clinical pharmacist by training; a poet and a photographer by choice. she began writing in the tenth grade with the guidance and encouragement of a wonderful student teacher, who also instilled in her a passion for ee cummings. cummings' influence gave carolyn the courage to abandon the use of capital letters and formal poetic form. her photography first manifested in 1972-73 (though she started many years prior) by being the student photographer and co-editor of her senior high school yearbook. both writing and photographing allow carolyn to think outside the box, focus on the unknown, and question usual perspectives. her greatest writing challenge is securing blocks of uninterrupted time dedicated to her writing.



Bill Feight, Dave Talaga, Judy Slater, Carolyn Zaleon, Carol Pullen.



One of our Writing Marathons with Saline High School students.



Bill Feight, Reggie Duerst , Rita McMahon, Judy Slater, and Marley Duerst at Brewed Awakenings for a mini Writing Marathon.



After a year off during the pandemic , the group met again outside in June, 2021.



We generally meet in the SASC Library on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays.



Our Writing Marathon with Saline High School students, September 2022.



SASC

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