

Literary Tea Spring 2023



Cover by Bob Stone



**STONY BROOK
UNIVERSITY**



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Auld Acquaintance

Patricia Ballan

Clunk! Smack!

The thunder and pelting rain masked some of the clunking, but after years of being alone at night, I knew the sounds of my house, and these were like nothing I knew.

Slipping out of bed and drawing my robe around me, I stealthily walked barefoot toward the noises.

My neighbor's night lights silhouetted a figure against the louvered window, and a boy was prying one of the louvers out with a crowbar.

I made my voice gruff and octaves lower. “GET OUT OF HERE!” I growled in a deep voice. The boy threw up his hands, dropped the crowbar with a clang, and fled. I hesitated, but finally called 911.

Later, the police found an already detached louver near the crowbar and complimented me on my presence of mind. One of the officers told me that the boy and his confederate were caught two blocks away, running through backyards to avoid detection on the streets. The police also mentioned the robbery of certain valuable Chinese vases, stolen from a neighbor up the street and taken right out of the lighted niches which had been specially hollowed out to display them. This collection had been featured in our local newspaper with photos of the objets d'art, setting them up for eventual robbery.

I cast my mind back to a few months before, remembering that my husband, Don, had taken a teen under his wing and even invited him to our home. The youngster, Justin, was a floor sweeper at Don's gym. Justin asked if he might invite his friend, Bob, to join him in the visit, and Don, expansive and hospitable, gave the two a tour of our home, innocently showing off our well-stocked bar, the giant TVs, and other evidence of our luxurious lifestyle. Don even allowed them to see into my studio, where my own Ming vase and Tang horse figurine, (both copies), were privately displayed. Bob, the older of the two young men, seemed to appreciate my paintings and lingered in the studio for a closer look.

As an amateur sleuth and mystery story buff, it didn't take me long to suspect that the boys from the gym had tried to rob our house, but I never followed up on my hunch, nor did I ask the police the culprits' names. To spare Don's feelings, I certainly didn't tell him my suspicions either. He would have been crushed, and he'd have felt his hospitality betrayed.

Fifteen or so years later, we were invited to a cocktail party at the home of new friends, Sue and Mark. Their son was visiting, and when they introduced him, here was that same Justin



from years before, now all grown up.

He greeted Don and me without self-consciousness. I searched his eyes for a sign of guilt, but found none, except that his eyes didn't blink when they met mine. I remembered that when my own young son had been caught in a lie, his eyes would grow wide and unblinking in a parody of innocence. I'd always known the truth though, and soon he'd confess rather than bear the weight of my calm knowledge.

I felt menaced when Justin circled behind me to take my coat, and the hairs on the back of my neck quivered. It was unreasonable and silly. Perhaps I was overreacting. I cast my eyes down so he couldn't see my suspicion.

Now Don boomed, “So, Justin, what have you been doing with yourself since the last time I saw you?”.

Sue and Mark rushed to answer, tumbling over themselves to reply. “Oh, Justin is in the importing business in Miami.” Sue added, “He and his friend, Bob, handle some pretty valuable Chinese vases and things”.

Mark chimed in, “Old, very old stuff. In fact, he's up here for a Sotheby auction , hoping to get a good bid on a figurine from , what was it..the Ming dynasty, I think he said”...



A Little Old Man

Jane Cash

Rain coming down in sheets,
No visibility
Blinding headlights
On the roadside, a big sedan,
Fogged windshield
Wipers useless
Headlamps light the shoulder
Little old man standing in a puddle
Splashed by cars rushing past
Weakly raises his arm and waves
I stop
“Can I help you?”
“Don’t know where I am
I’m trying to get home.”
Leaves his car
I drive him home
At the door, with key in hand
Says “I’ll trust you if you’ll trust me”
He lets me in
Plate, silverware, napkin on the table
A note “Pop, your dinner is in the microwave”
Little old man of 92
Drives daily to park at Stony Brook station
Takes the LIRR to his shop in Manhattan
Stays an hour and returns the same way
Offers me a compact from his factory
Goodbye, little old man.



From Manhattan to the Bronx

Joel G. Cohen

TO: ADAM

FORDHAM LAW SCHOOL GRADUATION MAY / ROSE HILL CAMPUS

A FEW THOUGHTS OF A FATHER

Today we return to the Bronx to a location walking distance from where Grandpa Fred grew up. To where Officer Reuben Kaplan likely cracked some heads. The walk is a bit longer to Scott Tower where I grew up with Bubie, Grandpa Herb obm and Aunt Barbara. It's not far from the Young Israel of Mosholou Parkway where I was Bar Mitzvahed and whose Rabbi married mom & me. Your sister was named there. It's not that far from where Bubie's parents George & Rose Unger obm ran their bottle business.

We have returned this morning to the location of our family's roots and not more predictably to the borough of Manhattan the home of Fordham University Law School.

We live our lives- time flies. Hopefully we accomplish some things of note; rarely a milestone such as yours. We do not reach these milestones alone. Our families have influenced us, guided us, shepherded us and thereby share our accomplishments. This sharing does not however diminish the overall accomplishment. It's not a zero-sum gain.

A decade or so ago there was a popular expression which mocked spoiled youth- “he was born on third base and thinks he hit a triple”. This dig does not apply to you Adam, nor for that matter to Michelle. You had nothing handed to you, but were simply blessed with a loving mother, father, grandparents and of course- big sister.

I could say more but I'd likely incriminate or embarrass myself. To you, Ali and your friends, continued success and only good things.

Love

Pops



Jeopardy

Michael Dolber

It’s early winter in 1990. My wife and I have just made the trip to Merv Griffin’s Hotel in Atlantic City so that I can humor myself by participating in a Jeopardy contestant search. I am ushered into a large room where I and what seems like hundreds of others will be given a written test. This is step one. I nervously wait for the test results, and I’m somewhat surprised to hear that I will be able to move on to step two- a simulated game, after which I am told that I have qualified to be on the show, if they can use me . That’s not a guarantee, and I’m convinced that they will have more than enough New York Kotter-type teachers with Afros and moustaches. We go home.

A week or so has passed. Finally, the call comes. “Would I like to fly out to LA (at my expense) to appear on the show?” I emit sounds that resemble “yes, of course. Thank you.” I arrive, along with my wife and kids, at the end of January. I have spent the intervening time studying. I’ve learned the sites of all 20th century Olympic Games, the names of most of our Vice Presidents, and all sorts of other esoteric and forgettable information.

It’s Monday, the 31st. I arrive at the studio to meet my game show destiny. In spite of myself, I’m thinking of how much money I might win if things go right. I try to put it out of my mind.

All five episodes for the week will be taped today. There are fifteen contestants. We are given instructions and a pep talk, as well as a pile of documents and releases to sign. With a leap of faith, I skim them and sign. We have been told to bring changes of clothing for multiple games, in the event that we win— an act of optimism that goes against my very nature. I am introduced to a gentleman named David Epstein (which he conspicuously pronounces Ep-Stine) who makes it clear to all of us that he is, in fact, the returning champion.

I am randomly chosen to be on Monday’s show, facing off against Mr. Epstein and a very nice woman from somewhere in the Midwest. Alex Trebek keeps his distance as we get ready for the game. I guess he doesn’t want to develop any preconceptions about us. Everyone not chosen for this game is seated in the audience, as are my wife and my kids—right up front where I can see them.

Finally, the game begins. I know most of the answers , and I hit my buzzer, but nothing happens. I can’t master the intricacies of hitting it after the light on the game board goes on as Alex finishes reading the answer. I’m frustrated. I keep getting locked out. The commercial break comes, and my point total is zero. I begin to sweat. A lot.

During the break, I am brought a glass of water, though I’d prefer vodka. I’m told that I’m buzzing in too soon, and I need to try to relax. Right. After the break, Alex interviews us, and



one of my answers actually gets a laugh. I calm down a little. As we resume the game, I finally answer a question, which I get wrong, and I plunge into the dreaded realm of negative dollars.

I begin to have a sinking feeling — a combination of frustration, embarrassment, and disappointment. This is not going well. What if I end up with negative numbers? What will my students say? My friends? My kids? What about the money I stupidly have been spending in my imagination? Somehow, though, I get on a roll, and as Double Jeopardy ends, I am amazed to be in the lead. Time for Final Jeopardy. My confidence emerges. I can win this, and maybe the next four games. I can replace David Epstein as returning champion. Years before “Hamilton”, I decide I will not throw away my shot. I’ll pay for Jess and Brian’s college, and maybe have money left over.

Alex announces the Final Jeopardy category— Museums. Ok. I know a little about this. I’ve been to the Met and MOMA. I took Art History. I figured out how much David would have to wager to beat me, and I bet a dollar more than that. I’m ready.

Here it is. Alex is reading it. “Upon his death in 1936, he donated his Sarasota estate, with its vast Reubens collection, as an art museum.” Wait.. Nothing about Van Gogh, Guernica, or the Mona Lisa? I stare blankly at the board. I see Elaine in the audience and I shake my head. I feel my face redden. My concern is obvious. I’ve never been much of a poker player. I have no clue. Time to guess. Let’s see— who was a rich guy who might have died in 1936? I scrawl my answer on the screen, thinking maybe my handwriting is so bad the answer might look correct. “Who was Getty?”

Wrong. But of course, David Epstein knows the question. “Who was Ringling?” So David wins, a smug smile on his face. I’ve come in second. I’m crushed. After the taping, Alex tells me what a great comeback I have made , and David tells me that he knew it was Ringling because he had recently read an article about it. Thanks David. I’ve always hated the damned circus anyway. I’ve won no money, but I do get garbage bags, Q-Vel for leg cramps, a Jeopardy game, Centrum Silver, and a great trip to a resort in Malaysia.

I’m invited to stay and watch the rest of the tapings. I decline, and we take the kids to Disneyland. A day or two later, we go home.

Of course it is 1991, the time of the Gulf War, and the State Department has issued a terrorism alert for Malaysia. This is where they’re sending me? And as if that’s not enough, the value of the trip is submitted to the IRS as income, and most school vacation times are blacked out. They refuse to change the trip. Not possible, they say. I forfeit the prize.

The show airs on March 11. When I get to work the next day, the door to my office is decorated with circus posters and ads for the Ringling museum. I love my friends.



Despite my disappointment, and the fact that I still have trouble watching the show, I remain very grateful for this experience, for my thirty minutes of fame, and for being able to meet Alex Trebek. Rest in peace, Alex. And thank you.

Perseverance

Len Farano

When I was about 10 years old I became addicted to reading books. When someone would ask what I wanted for my birthday or Christmas I would always answer: books. My Mom bought me a subscription to a Zane Grey book club which sent a new book every month. Zane Grey was probably the premier author of western books and I couldn't get enough of his writing. I read some of his books three times. He captured so much of the struggle in the early West and how determined people who moved westward were to establish a new life for their families. He treated conflicts with Native Americans in a much more humane way than did the western movies of the time.

However, if I had to pick one book that affected me most in my later adulthood it would be Alexandre Dumas' "The Three Musketeers". I can remember getting it as a gift from our next door neighbor Mary Hermann who was a middle-aged spinster whom I called "Aunt Mamie". She was one of two sisters who took me to Mass every Sunday since my parents weren't church-goers.

I can remember staying up all night to finish the book that I began one late afternoon. I was mesmerized by the book's hero d'Artagnan. I identified with this poor boy from Gascony who had the audacity to join the elite group of the Musketeer's of the Guard. Although this is a swashbuckler novel, Dumas portrays various injustices, abuses and absurdities of the regime giving the novel an additional political significance at the time of its publication, a time when the debate in France between republicans and monarchists was still fierce. I knew nothing of the historical context of the novel but I saw myself as a poor kid from the Bronx who wanted to overcome any obstacle to be recognized by the world at large.

The quality that I subsequently embraced, which was paramount in d'Artagnan's personality, was perseverance. If you believe in something deeply, never give it up. Keep fighting, keep advancing, keep your target in sight.

It served me well in pursuing an education, a career, a wonderful marriage and a beautiful family.

During my career I had the privilege of being a mentor to ten Management Associates, all young women. Their ethnic and racial backgrounds were quite diverse: Jewish, Chinese, Italian, Taiwanese, Croatian, African-American, Hungarian, English, Greek/Colombian and Irish. Each at some point asked me what attitude or quality would best serve their careers. My answer was always the same: perseverance. Each was quite successful in their subsequent endeavors. So thank you, Alexandre Dumas, son of a French nobleman and African slave, for providing me



with a role model early in my youth.



Donna Rolls Into Rockaway

Bob Hayes

Donna came to visit the Rockaways on a mid-September’s day in 1960.

She came down from the beach, rose over Beach Channel Drive (the main drag in town) and right down our street, Beach 51st, if I remember correctly that far back.

But, fortunately, for me and my family. We had heard she was blowing in, so we headed for higher ground.

I only recall some of that day as I was only about 3 ½ years old. We traveled out to Roosevelt, further east on the Island to stay safe. We stayed at my maternal grandparents house (the Heinemann’s)..

Outside the house that day it was raining cats and dogs, as they used to say. At times, the wind howled so hard that I was very scared. Even in the safety of my grandparents home.

I knew I wouldn’t get any playtime in the nicely treed backyard that day.

Meanwhile, back in Rockaway, Donna roared over the sand and boardwalk at Rockaway Beach.

She headed North at fierce speed. Donna was determined to reach our house that day.

She roared down the hill on Beach 51st Street. She never knocked or even rang the bell to our ground floor apartment.

Instead, she blew through the side of our house and came right inside our living room.

She rushed throughout the house, filling up all the rooms. Her immense strength pushed the front door wide open.

Back in Roosevelt I still remember how nasty it was that day.

But, it was nothing like what was happening back in Rockaway.

My parents told me Donna pushed my small bed over to the opposite wall. Keep this in mind for later.

My Mom had an electric Singer sewing machine. The type in a nice wooden cabinet.

Donna pushed it clear out the front door and down the street!



My Mom told me that a few days later my paternal grandfather, Michael Hayes, came and dragged it out of the street.

Supposedly, he brought it back to my grandparents house in Jamaica. He tended to it in his small work room. He totally disassembled it, removed any salt, and lubricated it.

He brought it back to my Mom and she used it for many more years.

After two or three days out in Roosevelt, we returned to our Home, somewhat wet Sweet Home.

But, in the end I felt there was a silver lining. When Donna had pushed my bed across the room it exposed my lost Silly Putty. Even the immense strength of Donna couldn't unlodge my Silly Putty.

And that's the way it was, or at least from my young mind's eyes.



Summer Beach Club Memory 1960

Aldustus Jordan

“When I discover who I am, I’ll be Free”

From Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison

Jim, my boss, fired me from my busboy job. I could not face my parents without a job—they needed the money. I crossed busy Ocean Avenue, and walked south to the end of the 8-mile boardwalk. Before me, in Emerald City splendor, were miles of intimidating yet beautiful beach clubs. These magnificent historic fortresses, with names like The Promenade, Breakwater, and Trade Winds, stood as both guardians and gateways to the moody restless Atlantic.

Within hours, I found a job as a pool porter at the prestigious Colony Surf Club built in the late 1920’s. I joined the expendable legion of summer workers in mindless, low-paying, demeaning jobs that challenge self-esteem and personhood. I became Don Quixote armed with a broom and long handled dust pan. My job description was simple: keep my area clean, mouth shut, respond promptly when summoned over the loud speaker, stay out of the pool or ocean even after closing, and the cabanas were off limits. I was unimportant and declared invisible

I was a guest in a strange house. The famous and wannabees paid thousands of dollars to roast in the sun, be catered to and, for some, specialize in being rude and obnoxious. The white-on-white cabana boys ran errands, pampered, and flirted with the older women for large tips. Their daily tips surpassed my weekly salary! The familiar sweet smell of suntan lotion hung like a cloud in a sickening alliance with the relentless humidity. Multi-colored beach umbrellas polka dotted the hot white washed concrete landscape as the sun’s only worthy opponent. But I could not use them. My relief from the sun was long risky unauthorized breaks in the men’s’ room or extended periods of needless sweeping in the shadow of an umbrella.

I knew many of the girls who accompanied their parents. They were my classmates. Our eyes locked in recognition, but not a word was ever spoken. It was a cat and mouse summer. Most of the girls ritualistically basted themselves in suntan lotion, settled into the cushioned pool lounges and tested the limits of melanin as they turned in a slow rotisserie rhythm. They never went near the water. Some read books, usually paperback romance novels, or caught up on required summer reading— To Kill A Mockingbird, Catcher in the Rye, and A Raisin in the Sun. Behind dark designer sun glasses was some serious boy watching. I smiled to think that in a few weeks these same girls hope to catch my eye and join my exclusive circle as the high school basketball star!

The all-black custodial staff of five was too small prompting us to work even harder. The other three pool porters were from up north in East Orange, a then thriving upwardly mobile black



middle-class community that capitalized on “white flight.” They were second generation college students, very rare back then, and rented rooms in a summer boarding house. Our worlds were very different, but our lot the same. I did not like them. They were too clannish, pretentious, and acted “white” in speech and manner. Their conversation focused on subjects such as fast cars, cotillions (a formal ball at which debutantes are presented to society), and hopes of a future in something called the Boule’ which I later learned is an elitist secret society of selected successful black men. They never accepted my offer to play basketball in my neighborhood. Yet, I was careful not to alienate them, they were my ride to and from work.

Mrs. Watt, a widow, was the “matron” for the bathrooms. She was the typical prayerful God-fearing church lady whom I would call “Auntie,” Years of domestic work left her without social security or a pension. Now in her late 70’s, she was too old and frail to be working especially in such a strenuous job, and too proud to accept help from her grown children. Yet each day she faithfully boarded the bus for the 24-minute trip from Asbury Park. On several occasions I found her in tears. How could a 15-year-old bring comfort to a person in their 70’s whose heart and spirit were almost broken? Sometimes I did her job and mine, but other times I instinctively held her hand and repeated words I heard my father say from the pulpit. In a preacher’s soothing cadence, I said,

“Mrs. Watt, be patient, your reward is yet to come,
God has a blessing for you.”

“I know. Thank you, sweetie,” she replied with blessed assurance.

My wide brimmed straw hat with the bright red band was more than a fashion statement or protection from the hot sun. It was my declaration of independence. I refused to be invisible. And one day somebody did notice me from across the pool and yelled,

“You know, in the South with that hat, folks would
say you’re down on the levee. But in my old Brooklyn
neighborhood, you would be down on the Levy.”

I froze in my tracks; My spine stiffened. Many around the pool laughed out loud, but not me. It was frightening. I needed my job. I should have known that it was Bernie, the loud, affable, fast-talking, owner of the food concession who seemed to chain smoke cigars.

“Al, I can see that I need to teach you some Catskill humor,
come on, loosen up!” he bellowed.

For whatever the reason, Bernie liked me. He even arranged for me to come in early on weekends and help him open. I was paid “off the books” cash and access to free meals, a privilege I never abused. He began to teach me the “tricks of the trade” and tell stories about his growing up. He told me that I reminded him of himself at 15, but I did not believe him at all. Admittedly, on some days I tried to avoid him. His friendship had a price. He asked me annoying questions about school, grades, homework, college, and future aspirations. I heard enough of that at home.



Bernie was a very wealthy man, who unlike others I encountered, was not arrogant or aloof. He promised me that I could always have a job in his business—reassuring words for a kid fired only weeks ago. Each conversation with Bernie made me feel a bit more comfortable. With extreme caution, I began to trust him, but only just a little. I was always awaiting the other shoe to drop. With Bernie, it never happened!

My job as a pool porter did not change--I did. It was still hot, annoying, low paying, and often demeaning. Yet, I began to realize that my job did not define me. More importantly, I gained comfort with myself. If it takes a village to raise a child, in the summer of 1960, I had one. My parents were always at the core, joined by Bernie, my co-workers, and even Jim, who had fired me. My first and last beach club summer began and ended. I was 15 years old.

Amor

Arnie Katz

Love is always bestowed as a gift— freely, willingly, and without expectation.

Leo Buscaglia

Joseph Campbell taught that the highest most perfect form of love was neither Eros nor agape; rather it was amor. The concept of amor (the reverse spelling of Roma) is derived from an amalgamation of the lust of Eros and the Buddhist ideal of loving all.

The troubadours of Provence in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries introduced the poetry of amor. Guiraut de Borneilh defined amor as being personal and specific— born of the eyes and the heart— all consuming, defying logic, and valued more than life itself.

On October 22, 2016 at 12:21 AM, a high school friend e-mailed me (and others) the following information: “I just learned that Linda Mahoney Moreno would like any member of our [high school] class [of 1959] to drop her a line with fond memories of Marblehead and ‘growing up’ there. Linda has end stage pulmonary fibrosis. It is difficult [for her] to talk on the phone. She would appreciate e-mails or snail-mails any of you [would care] to send.”

And so it began. I wrote to her that night, including a couple of my memoirs.

After receiving my e-mails, Linda responded: “Thanks, Arnie. I loved your stories. Even though it’s been many years since I’ve seen you, I somehow feel very close to you. My innermost feelings, at this point, are those of fear of the way I may go. The prospect of not being able to breathe scares me. Enough about me; tell me about you.”

And so I did. I wrote to Linda about my failures, my successes, my hopes, my plans, my fears, my faith, my admiration of and my concern for her. Then I started writing poems about her, about my philosophy of life, my disappointments, my struggles, my achievements, and about how much it meant to me to write to her every morning and every night.

When there was no response, I told her how worried I was, although I realized how weak and tired she must be. I asked her to just send an “I’m OK”, and that would be enough. Linda wrote much more than that— sharing her fleeting joys and her most



intimate thoughts.

I told her that she was with me when I went to class, when I walked by the East River, when I saw a play in the City, and whenever I sat down to write to her or about her. She responded that she loved the over twenty poems that I wrote, and that she treasured the time we spent together. I promised her that I would continue to write, and that she would always be a part of me as I remembered her.

Near the end Linda wrote:

“Well love, I think I’ve rambled on enough for tonight. I’m ready to meet you in dreamland. Hold me close. I love you.”

I responded:

“We are diving off the highest diving board, and don’t have any idea what is there to catch us below. We don’t even know if there is any water in the pool. I believe there is a soft, loving landing waiting for us. Even if I’m wrong, and it’s a smashing, painful landing, at least we will finally be one.”

Almost two years after that first e-mail, I received the following on September 18, 2018:

“Arnie... this is Linda... what day I don’t even know... what day it is... whatever day it is... it’s my last one... I’ll be seeing that beautiful i... I’m not afraid... I just wish it would happen soon... I’m in pain... and waiting... take me with you everywhere... I love your writing.”

There were no more e-mails; but I still talk to her almost every day.



A Rainy Day

Phyllis Korecki

There was a big gray coal fired stove in our kitchen. It was always a mystery to me as to how the fire stayed burning. I often had to go down to the cellar and bring up a bucket of coal for the fire. That's where the coal bin was located. Every month or so in the winter months I would hear my mother on the phone calling to have a ton of pea coal delivered. Coal came in various sizes according to the kind of stove or furnace that was in the house. It ranged from buckwheat, small pieces like peanuts, up to chestnut, much larger, egg size and probably other sizes that I didn't know.

We lived in northeast Pennsylvania where the anthracite or "hard" coal was mined. There were many coal mines in the area known as "Wyoming Valley" where the Susquehanna River ran through from upstate New York to empty into the Chesapeake Bay. These mines were the major source of employment for the residents of the "Valley".

Anthracite coal is only found in this area of the US, bituminous or "soft" coal is more common and is found throughout the United States and other parts of the world. It burns more quickly and is very smoky.

Often when it was quiet in the house and outside I could hear the machinery in the mines operating when I was in the cellar. There were many accidents in the mines as it was dangerous and hard work. The mines were flooded out in 1958 when an unscrupulous mine owner mined too far out under the river, the water broke through and flooded all the mines in the Valley.

One day I came home from school on a damp, cold rainy day. I went around to the back door because my shoes were wet. When I opened the kitchen door the most wonderful smell met me. My mother was baking bread. She sat me down in front of the big, gray stove opening the oven door to warm me and gave me a thick slice of warm bread with butter slathered generously on top. It was so delicious. Even today when I smell fresh bread I think of that day, the damp and cold walk home from school, the warmth of the kitchen and my mother.



Hello? Is Anybody There?

Martin H. Levinson

Thank you for calling the Department of Motor Vehicles. For English, press one; para español, marque número dos; pour la français, presse trois; für deutsch, drücken sie vier; orfay igpay atinlay, esspray ivefay; для русского, нажмите шесть. Please listen carefully as our menu options have recently changed. If you know your party’s extension you may dial it at anytime during this sentence. If you wish to speak to the operator dial “O” but please keep in mind that wishes are only granted in fairytales.

If you would like to participate in a brief survey after this call to help us improve our services press one, if you would rather not participate press two, if you think phone surveys are a total waste of time press three, if you simply feel a need to press something press four.

Is this call related to a matter you are truly worried about? If it is press one and say what is troubling you. If it is not press two, hang up, and have a nice day. You have pressed one but I can’t make out what you said. Please repeat what you said 500,000 times into the phone. Do not rush—speak slowly and carefully. When you have finished speaking press the star key.

I am still having trouble understanding you. Please find someone else to deliver your message or take speech lessons and call back later. I heard you say “no.” If that’s right press one, if that’s not right press two, if you need some more time to think about the question press three. You pressed one so let’s do this another way. Rather than mumbling so softly that only a dog would be able to hear you, please scream what you want to say as loudly as you can into the phone. Make sure you are really yelling and not just raising your voice a little.

I believe you said, “the sky is green, the moon is blue, the earth is yellow, the stars chartreuse.” If that is what you said press one, if it is not press two. You pressed two, which means you didn’t say what I thought you said. No problem, let’s try something else.

Please go to your computer and type in the following web address: www.dmvsupport.com. When the page comes up access the menu bar and click on “Alternative ways to get through to the DMV.” While waiting for something to appear on your screen you may want to watch the last season of Game of Thrones, read War and Peace or a book of



similar length, or take a week’s vacation in Bermuda.

If you have the patience of Job and the luck of the Irish, you should now be on a page with the heading “I’ve Got a Question.” Below that heading, type in your query and then complete the next 500 pages, which contain interrogatories on every aspect of your life from the date of your conception. Take time composing your answers, as they will be checked for accuracy by a government database that knows you better than you know yourself. When you finish doing this you should be old enough to collect social security. If you are already on social security, congratulations! Future generations may not be as lucky.

The current wait time to speak to a representative is two weeks, six days, seventeen hours, fifteen minutes, and twenty-three seconds. If you would prefer not to wait and instead have someone call you back press one. If you would rather stay in the queue press two. If you would like a referral to a mental health provider who can offer you coping strategies for dealing with big bureaucracies that could care less about the people they are supposed to serve press three. Thank you for contacting us and have a great day.



The Strange People in Long Beach

Michael McCarthy

strange
how things are

boardwalk happenings
a summer beach concert
swing time band
fills the twilight air
starting with Les Brown, lots of Benny, Dorsey
some ol blue eyes
and even Basie playing an Ellington tune

sitting on a lawn chair
next to my sister
who’s next to my dad
taking it all in

no Beatles or Stones
but the mood is pleasing
the tempo is right
suddenly, up goes those dancing ladies

whirling wildly in the night
right in front of us
The red head, tattoos on her aged white legs
and the woman with gray puffy hair, smiling

strange
how things are

looking straight ahead
beyond the music
beyond the late day beach folk
beyond the many large boats
to the ancient ocean
which is fading into the blue-black horizon



yet the summer sky still spreads a glow

I feel the melody of the present
inviting quiet
amidst the clatter
of the bustling Long Beach scene

the stillness of things
as I ponder my mom’s whereabouts
somehow hearing the echo of love
in the faint song of my sweet imagination

all alone with my kin
wondering silently
enjoying the beauty about
sensing the sacred

next to my sister
who’s next to my dad

strange
how things are.



Blank Page

Gary Opas

As I am mocked by this blank page.
Reminded that I’m not a sage.
Been at it since the last ice age.
No words will come to mind.

I think of people that I know.
The things I see. The places go.
For all this thought nothing to show.
No words will come to mind.

I think of those who’ve long been dead.
Imagine what they might have said.
I stroke my chin. I bang my head.
No words will come to mind.

I hug my kids. I kiss my spouse.
I walk my dog. I clean my house.
Procrastinating like a louse.
No words will come to mind.

Oh wait! I think I have a plan.
I’ll write of how it all began.
I throw my notebook in the can.
No words will come to mind.

You’d think this was a simple task.
To write a book. Not much to ask.
I’ll sell my soul, then wear a mask.
No words will come to mind.

The Devil said it was no deal.
I have no talent, he does feel.
Can’t write well ‘nuff to earn a meal.
And that is being kind.



He told me I’m a total hack.
Of writing skills, a total lack.
The Devil’s heart is oh so black.
I have an axe to grind.

I wrote about that Satan guy.
Ten million books did readers buy.
How’s that for spitting in his eye?
I’ll send him my book signed.



The Thanksgiving Gift

Rachelle Psaris

Sam needed a liver transplant and was on the transplant list. Every couple of weeks he came to our hospital for a Paracentesis-his big belly filled with ascites fluid. After the procedure in the Radiology department, which sometimes yielded 4 liters of fluid, he would need 50 gms of Salt Poor Albumin, to replace some of the nutrients lost during the Paracentesis. As a result he would be with us In Ambulatory Surgery most of the day to be monitored. His wife was one of the sweetest people I ever knew and Sam no less sweet. He loved all our different personalities and we became attached to him. One day he reported being called to go to Mt. Sinai Hospital in NYC-there was a strong possibility of a liver being available for him. He and his wife had waited all day with no updates, only to learn that the liver was not a match. He went home disheartened. Months later Sam received a liver the day before Thanksgiving. We knew this because he had called the Radiology department from a pizzeria and told them he had gotten a Thanksgiving present. The much loved radiologist, who had performed the Paracentesis procedures over the years, was so excited for him and his wife, he organized and paid for a dinner for Sam, his wife and family, and also included any staff member who had had any role in his care over the years-from secretary to Registered Nurse. What a celebration to life that evening was!



Satan and the Sauce

Fran Scott

With pasta on the battle plate

I carefully twirl angel hair noodles on my pitchfork
and hold steady to win the round,

But somewhere in the tournament

Satan loosens a drop of red tomato sauce
to splatter on my bosom--
and boasts a direct hit to my heart.

I scream defeat and grab a moistened towel

which bleeds it further across my blouse.

Satan and his accomplice, the sauce, normally win

though I do not shrink from their challenge

even when a glob of Bar-B-Q slides from a rack of ribs
to brand my ribs

or a ruby-sized serving squirts

from between layers of lasagna

or a single catsuped French fry, dangling near my lips,

drips red on my shirt as if a stiff wind had changed its course.

Defeated again, I cover my scarlet sin and finish my meal.

“Out, damn spot!” I later lament

to save my raiment and resolve.

Disguising as vegetables, tomatoes are really fruits, in particular, berries.

When Eve chose the apple for her bite of knowledge,

the tomato left Eden with its fake ID



to travel with the notorious evil doer
and leave its mark in games of “Got-cha”

So, when Satan calls forth only catsup
from the soup of condiments on my hamburger,
and it coats my cheeks in rouge before sliding downward
raising the cost of a cheap meal to include the price of my shirt,
I lose, but I do not surrender.

Lured by any great Marinara sauce, salsa, pizza or chili,
I return to outsmart the slippery speed and cunning
of this Devil and his staining sauce.

Don't we all?



Folding Chairs

Mary Ann Sommerstad

My cousin Maria comes by in the morning to walk me to school. I am new to kindergarten at four years old, soon to be five. Maria is seven and in second grade. It is 1954.

She holds my hand as we walk four blocks under the blue September sky, sun bright as a yellow crayon. We wear plaid dresses with Peter Pan collars and Buster Brown shoes. Our dark hair is cut short, pixie style, with bangs reaching down to our somber brown eyes. We look like sisters. We go through the girls playground and the girls entrance, then the hallway to the kindergarten classroom where she leaves me with the smiling teacher.

Maria is smart in school I hear the old grandparents say. They are proud of her. They never got to go to school at all. I hope I will be smart in school too.

The next year in September we move to a new neighborhood about ten blocks away from the school in the opposite direction. I am almost six and can walk to school by myself. I do not see Maria anymore.

Time passes. In sixth grade my teacher picks me to be class representative at a 7th grade orientation to be held at our new school. Every sixth grade class in the city will be represented. The new school is in the heart of the hotel district of Atlantic City, only one block from the boardwalk. It is a venerable gray stone building, imposing and impressive. It will house a thousand of us 7th graders in September.

We are seated in the front row of a large, darkened auditorium looking up at the stage set up with a line of metal folding chairs. A teacher welcomes us and then introduces the eighth graders who now walk out and sit down. They are going to tell us what our new school will be like. One of them is Maria. I recognize her. I may have seen her in recent years at a family function here and there, but I don't remember. She is still tiny, diminutive, well spoken with a good, strong voice.

What should we expect from this new place? It will be so much bigger than what we are used to. There are three floors and lots of staircases. We will have many teachers instead of just one. There will be so many kids -every 7th grader in the entire city will attend. The work will be harder and there will be more of it but the teachers will help us. Physical education will be held outside in front of the Claridge Hotel next to the boardwalk. The girls will need to buy ugly blue gym suits. We will be integrated. The black kids who had been previously hidden from us in their own neighborhoods will now be our classmates. We will step into a new phase of our lives. We will be mature and enriched. We will grow up into fine, well educated young people prepared



for the next level of education, high school.

The program ends and we 6th graders are encouraged to mingle with the eighth grade presenters. The refreshment table is set up with Hawaiian Punch and Lorna Doones. I talk to Maria a little. We are both still shy and serious.

A lifetime passes. I find myself thinking of Maria lately. I wonder why. I haven't seen her in over fifty years. I don't even know if she's alive. I think it's because I need an orientation. I want to sit in a darkened auditorium and look up at a row of metal folding chairs. I want Maria to come out with representatives from the generation ahead of us, the one that has disappeared. I want them to sit on the chairs in all their ectoplasmic glory and tell us what things will be like for us ahead. It will be so much bigger than we can comprehend. There will be so many people, some different from what we are used to. People will help us. We will be together with all of our loved ones. We will mature and grow as we prepare for the next level, whatever that will be. I want to socialize when the presentation is over. And I want there to be Hawaiian Punch and Lorna Doones. Or wine and cheese.

But I know there is not going to be an orientation. We of a certain age will have to find our own glimpses into what comes next. Sometimes we get signs, connections, but we have to make sure we are not inventing them just because we want them.

Some believe that a cardinal's song is a loved one speaking to you from beyond. Too easy. There are cardinals everywhere and they are singing because that's what they do. I hear my mother's skeptical voice whispering over my shoulder.

A couple years ago I was walking on a wooded path with a dear friend on the first anniversary of her husband's death. My foot bumped into something on the ground, a small stone painted with flowers and the word, "courage" in the middle. Tempting to believe there was a special message from the universe here, but I hear my mother's voice again. Likely a kind coincidence and nothing more.

About a month ago, I had a dream, very vivid and colorful. I was with my husband's ex-wife, Pat, who had died a year or so ago and rather quickly. We were riding around on the east end looking for apartments to rent for Pat. It was summer, lush and green with flowers everywhere, more like Hawaii than Long Island. Pat was lovely and radiant as she had been in real life. We were both very happy. It was a nice dream. I wondered why I had dreamt of Pat. I did not think of her often. We were together at family functions over the years, but we did not do things together. We might have been friends had there not been the awkwardness of a shared family between us.



Later that day I was reading Rabbi Gellman’s column in Newsday. I usually read it on Sunday, but I was a couple days late. I must say that I love Rabbi Gellman, ever since his days in the God Squad with Father Tom Hartman, now deceased. Rabbi Gellman had asked Father Tom to give him a sign, if he could, from the next world. Some time later, a friend of the rabbi’s recounted a dream he’d had about a man he didn’t know who gave him specific messages to give to Rabbi Gellman. It was the rabbi’s father, also deceased. The rabbi got his sign.

Today’s column was on dreams. Rabbi Gellman talked about being open to the messages of dreams, and how the deceased often use them to let you know that they’re all right. Then my glass of water spilled on the Rabbi’s column, as if to make sure I was paying attention. I think in my dream this morning, Pat wanted me to let the kids know she was all right. Why would she choose me as the messenger? Because most of the family is not inclined in this direction. I overrode my mother’s skeptical voice in my head. I told the kids about my dream and passed on Pat’s message.

I like signs that are hard to ignore. I attended a wedding shower some time ago where the bride-to-be was a nurse as were her mother and most of the guests. In my conversation with a nurse who worked with seriously ill and dying people, I asked her if she had ever witnessed anything to make her believe in the continuance of the spirit beyond death. “Not really,” she said. “But there was this one woman. She was delirious and she kept repeating. ‘I see red shoes on the roof. There are red shoes on the roof.’ After she died, I sent a young orderly up to the roof and there were the red shoes.”

I cannot ascribe that story to coincidence. My mother’s skeptical voice is silent. My new nurse friend and I walk to the refreshment table. There is no Hawaiian Punch or Lorna Doones, but I think of them. Wine and cheese will be OK.



The Pill Box

Bob Stone

On Sunday evening
I unlatch the boxes
of my plastic pill counter.

It has two rows
one side tinted blue
the other red.

I roll out seven morning pills
for the blue side,

I want to start my day with a blue sky
then seven for the red side,
red sky at night, sailors delight.

When I finish this task

I see the week filled before me.

Every morning one blue compartment empties.

Every evening one red compartment empties
and so, the days of my life count off.