

Reflections



A Celebration of Art & Literature
featuring Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at USM
Authors & Artists

2024



Reflections is an annual publication of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at the University of Southern Maine.

OLLI offers learners 50 and older a wide range of courses, workshops, events, trips, lecture, and special interest groups, all intended to capture the joy of learning and enhance creative pursuits.

To learn more about OLLI, to become a member, or to explore its courses and programs, please visit usm.maine.edu/olli or call 207-780-4406.

A NOTE FROM THE COMMITTEE

Welcome.

Welcome to *Reflections*, an annual publication from you and for you — the OLLI community here at USM.

The words and images within this magazine are created by OLLI members.

The magazine itself is produced with the support of OLLI's administration and selected through a blind (anonymous) process by fellow OLLI members.

Mirror images or musings, images or contemplations, *reflections*, are static fragments of what is truly dynamic — human experience. The authors, poets, and visual artists that made this “book” offer us an opportunity to enter their experience with curiosity.

Our thanks to those of you who submitted work this year. We hope that this issue inspires others to consider contributing next year. Not all work that is submitted is published — this year's magazine would have been nearly twice the size if we had printed it all — a joyful fact. And, this year, the magazine can welcome readers who use some adaptive visual equipment; many of this year's design changes emerged from the University's widening commitment to accessibility.

We hope you enjoy, share, and even critique this issue — dive in and share; that's the OLLI spirit!

The 2024 *Reflections* Team

Tim Baehr	Veronica Hartman	David Platt
William Doughty	Ann Landsberg	Kathleen Sutherland
Rick Gammon	Robert Petrillo	

PHOTOGRAPHY

Wood Island Light Station

Sharon Roberts

Spiral staircase to Wood Island Light. I love the geometry of the image...and the history of the old building.



In this issue

PHOTOGRAPHY

Wood Island Light Station

Sharon Roberts Front Cover, 4

Growing Back In

Richard Welsh 8

Snow Shadows

John Tiedje 11

Maine Spring

Lynn Lynch 12

Twilight

Libby DeMille 16

Shell Still Life

Ann Landsberg 25

Deep Winter

Sharon Roberts 27

The Quiet Man Bridge

Libby DeMille 30

Sisterly Encouragement After a Tough Loss in the Pie Eating Contest

Reenie McCormack 30

Snowless Winter Afternoon

Dawn Leland 35

FINE ART

Winter Church

Gail Worster 7

Lupines Galore

Kathleen Sutherland 8

My Blue-Eyed Boy

Susan E. Cunniff 16

Greeting the Day

Mary Barrett 17

Summer Heat

Susan Black 21

Harbor Fish

Mary Barthelman 21

Portal to the Sky

Mary Barthelman 28

The Definition of Happiness

Susan E. Cunniff 28

Last Light

Chris Essler Inside Back Cover

PROSE

Intervention

Susan Black 6

The Last Goodbye

Kathie Harper 9

A Pivotal Point

Gael May McKibben 13

Colorado

Toby Hollander 14

Spare Hands

Stephen H. Dorneman 18

The Brotherhood of the Rope

Lawrence Ricci 22

Neighbors

Daphne Gregory-Thomas 24

The Search for a Nest

Elsa van Bergen 29

Nici o problemă!

Don Bouwens 32

east

David Agan 34

POETRY

The Victorian Cemetery at Gray, Maine

Mary Snell 7

Aunt Josephine

Gail Worster 10

The Finish

Robert Petrillo 11

January Thaw

Irv Williams 12

When I was Young

William Doughty 15

A Cold Case

Eric Jensen 19

She: The Farmer in White

Jan King 20

Backyard Inspection

Mary Snell 23

Passing

Gail Worster 26

Volley & Thunder

Anne Cyr 26

Sign This Petition

Irv Williams 31

This and That

James Crary 36

Intervention

Susan Black

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have unknowingly entertained angels.

Hebrews 13:2

I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.

Blanche Dubois

I certainly couldn't be hospitable or entertain anyone. My utter dependence was surely known. And then you arrived on the scene.

All had been peaceful and normal, until it was not. The car that I had been driving on the interstate, with my two-year-old son properly strapped into his child seat in the back, was all of a sudden flipping, twisting, flying, floating — and crashing.

As this was happening, I felt nothing but numbness. I saw nothing. I heard nothing. But I apprehended everything. I knew that something catastrophic had happened, that we both would die. No, worse: that he would die, and I would live. In the fraction of the second that we were suspended in air, time stopped. A vast and unending and desolate future sprawled out before me. I knew.

And then ... time resumed, and the numbness receded. I felt the *thunk* as the car landed upside down, on its roof. I saw in front of me the glass of the windshield, shattered but holding in place. I heard my son crying behind me. The image of the future changed instantaneously.

My son was alive, but we were in real trouble. We seemed to be on the grassy median, but heavy traffic was rushing by in both directions. Something had hit us, but what? How soon before we might be hit again? I was trapped, hanging upside down in my seatbelt. It had done its job of keeping me in place and uninjured, but its unyielding strength was now keeping me from getting out — getting to my son. I couldn't even twist around to check on him.

That must have been your cue.

In the fraction of the second that we were suspended in air, time stopped. A vast and unending and desolate future sprawled out before me. I knew.

While I was trying to somehow manipulate my weight away from the constraints of the seatbelt's straps so I could unlock the buckle, you arrived — I was told later — at the back of the car. The rear windshield had crumbled away into pebbles of glass so that — again, as I was told later — you could reach inside for my son. He was screaming as he too hung suspended upside down; his child seat, like my seat belt, had done its job. So had the entire car, in fact; though the front and rear ends were destroyed, the passenger compartment remained intact.

By the time I extricated myself and scrambled around the wreckage, there you were, holding my son, as calmly as could be. He had stopped screaming. Supported in your arms, he was looking around alertly. When he spotted me, he lunged toward me, and you gracefully handed him over. Then, as many people crowded around, pulling us away from the car in case its gas tank might explode, you disappeared. You were there, and then you weren't. I scanned the crowd, but you had melted away. No sign that you had ever been there, except for my safe son.

My dear lady, this event remains as fresh in my memory as on the day it happened, almost forty years ago. Surely, you were a kind stranger. Were you also an angel? Human or divine, you had my gratitude then, and always will. I'll never forget you.



POETRY

The Victorian Cemetery at Gray, Maine

Mary Snell

Rows of townfolk lie in a Pleistocene beach — in it, not on it — the sea now many miles and thousands of years away. Their laced leather boots point toward the rising sun, but they have no canvas chairs or wicker lunches, no shade umbrellas to protect their heads. Their names are furred with moss on cracked marble and slate slabs; and scabby lichens etch the edges of these impertinent claims to a three-by-six spot in eternity.

The folk lie in boxes that settle through the sand, dark boxes like boulders of granite sinking from the memory of glaciers. Yet the folk rise a bit each spring — not at the Second Coming, but with the flood of some diluvial tide which swells through these deposits of time, and float shamelessly in their suits, free to get in the water at last.

FINE ART

Winter Church

Acrylic

Gail Worster



FINE ART

Lupines Galore

Pastel

**Kathleen
Sutherland**

*I love color and
flowers that show it!*



PHOTOGRAPHY

Growing Back In

Richard Welsh

*Shaft of sunlight
plays on overgrown
cemetery, where
mullein and day-
lilies converse
across the mossy
stone wall —
carpe diem!*

The Last Goodbye

Kathie Harper

“Now call us when you get to Youngstown. Make sure to keep the TripTik open on the seat beside you so you can follow the directions. Check the gas gauge and fill up when it gets to half, you don’t want to run out of gas,” my father says as he leans into the window of my ’69 baby blue VW Beetle, my first car. He’s gripping a bottle of Windex and a roll of paper towels as I’m waiting to back out of the driveway on my first solo trip from Connecticut to Chicago to meet up with my college boyfriend after a long absence.

The day is sunny and warm. September’s gift of a late summer day. The school bus recently passed through the quiet cul-de-sac on its morning run. I’m trying to get on the road early so I can get to Ohio by late afternoon. But I will never get to leave if my father keeps holding on and shouting instructions through the open car window. I’m getting a bit impatient with his hovering.

I finally put the car in reverse and back out into the street. I press down on the clutch and shift into first, slowly accelerating on the slight hill like he taught me in front of the tidy ranch house where I grew up. I beep the horn a few times while waving my arm out of the driver’s side window. My last view is of my father waving his hands in the air as if he’s signaling for a race to start while clutching the Windex and paper towels, hanging on for dear life.

There were many goodbyes between us over the course of the years. He always managed to remind me about the gas and tires especially if I was going on a road trip. He never stopped worrying.

The last time I said goodbye to him was when he was lying on a bed at Hospice in Branford, Connecticut. He was close to death when we requested to move him to a private space, more like a living room in an old manse. We placed his bed facing the expansive windows so he could gaze out at his beloved Long Island Sound for the last time. My immediate family of mother, sister,

There were many goodbyes between us over the course of the years. He always managed to remind me about the gas and tires especially if I was going on a road trip. He never stopped worrying.

and two nieces was gathered around him, all immersed in our own thoughts and memories, a time of quiet contemplation. It was close to dusk on a cold winter’s day. The water was covered with whitecaps. We were warm and cozy inside as the gas flames flickered in the stone fireplace. Waiting.

He hadn’t opened his eyes in about five days so when he opened them with the color gone, no longer cerulean blue just clear orbs, to gaze at my mother who was seated by his head and holding his hand, she was ecstatic and exclaimed, “Oh Billy, you’ve come back to me.” But it was only for a brief moment as he took his final breath and closed his eyelids.

He was gone from our lives. Our final goodbye. I felt as though I lost my guardian, the only one in my family who truly saw me. There wouldn’t be any more last-minute instructions for the road. I would have to go through my own mental checklist. In fact, it was only the day before that I stopped at the local garage to have my car’s tire pressure checked. Something he would have reminded me to do now that the cold weather was still hanging on and spring was more than a month away.

POETRY

Aunt Josephine

Gail Worster

She wakes to the sizzle of bacon.
Her six-year-old nose catching the heavy scent
beckoning, making promises that it could keep.

With a younger sister still motionless beside her
she spills herself slowly from the bed to the floor
without a sound or a ripple.

Tiptoeing out the door, gliding silently through the small living room,
pausing in the doorway to the kitchen.

The table is set, oatmeal warm in the bowls, small Blue Willow pitcher
holding thick, canned milk, matching sugar bowl next to it.

Three Blue Willow plates wait patiently, while the oriental pattern
plays out its sad tale of love, in triplicate.

Thick slices of coarse bread, from a loaf made yesterday.
Taken out of the oven golden brown, bulging around the lid of its pan
like a huge rectangular mushroom.

A small glass canning jar filled with blueberry jam, picked from
a rock-walled field just last week, across from a pasture
where an old, white draft horse grazed in retirement.

A faded white bowl holds diced white potatoes, pre-boiled
and fried with tiny pieces of browned and crispy salt pork.

Her Aunt is cracking eggs over the rim of her greased cast iron
fry pan, smooth as a black rock living in the path of ocean waves.

The eggs hit the hot pan in a sudden splat of loud protest.
The older woman, spatula in hand, turns to see her.

A month ago, this woman a stranger to be suspicious of,
now a fairy godmother.

Walking the few steps to her Aunt, putting her thin arms around her
as far as they can reach.

She presses her face into the apron smelling of bacon and bread,
trying to hang onto the moment, having her Aunt all to herself.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Snow Shadows

John Tiedje

I enjoy the winter snow scenes for the black and white images they present.



POETRY

The Finish

Robert Petrillo

We moved around a lot when I was young;
my father was a restless soul, not sitting
still for long, not even at the races where
he'd ramble up and down the stands in search
of better luck. I'd tag along to learn
how track conditions could be read by sight
and then confirmed in program histories.
In that sodded university he'd earned
a bachelor's degree, but lost a family.
Statistical analysis was not
his strongest course, but how was he to know
the odds were stacked against his ever winning
what he needed most — a chance to make it right,
the jackpot streaming gold, his horse in flight.

POETRY

january thaw

Irv Williams

i had never heard about black ice before i moved to new
england
like frappes
or elastics
cunnin' or wicked
italians
which was pronounced more like *eyetalians*
like the section at the end of a chapter in a high-school
textbook Terms to Learn
these were new vocabulary words
that once learned would admit you to this club of people
dressed in red checked flannel shirts and bean boots
thick wool socks and hand-knitted mittens
with crystals of snow hanging off of loose threads of yarn
wasn't ice supposed to be clear and transparent
something in a tumbler of gin and tonic swirling
with a slice of lemon
on a blue sky summer sun cloudless day
not an invisible threat in january which could hurl you
towards a certain death
if a large oak tree or boulder lurked at the edge of the road
when you were in a hurry to get somewhere and the
morning sun
low on the horizon glinting off of a snowbank
distracted you for just one instant

PHOTOGRAPHY

Maine Spring

Lynn Lynch

*The day following
the April snow
and ice storm of
2024 was bright
and clear begging
to be recorded.*



A Pivotal Point

Gael May McKibben

A pivotal point. A pivotal point. Well, there have been many, but I need to choose one. And then buckle down and write about it for two pages' worth. I thought of a really good one while I was pretending to be asleep (in an effort to avoid being awake) early the other morning. That's a time when I often have moments of clarity. Trouble is, I have to remember them when I finally rise and shine. This time I failed. So, I'll pick one that is truly pivotal but not exciting at all.

One afternoon I decided to no longer drive after dark. It was not because my friends suggested it, nor had I almost killed a pedestrian or had a vehicular close call. I just decided my eyes couldn't compete with oncoming headlights. They were too bright, particularly those white ones that should be banned by law. Also, my car, which I consider to be an ordinary, quite satisfactory car even though nearly as old as I (in car years), now seems to be very low on the road. Which means that those oncoming SUVs, which everyone seems to think they have to have these days, are truly very big, built on truck chassis. Which means that their headlights are much higher than those on ordinary, satisfactory cars. Which translates into their headlights shining directly into my windshield rather than onto my grille. Annoying, unpleasant, blinding.

So, on that afternoon I decided, perfectly calmly, to take matters in my own hands and make the decision to not drive after dark.

The thing is, I would sometimes forget I had made this decision. The first time I realized I had forgotten was when my house guests and I went to dinner at David's 388 in South Portland. We had a window table, and at one point I looked out that window and saw an oncoming car on the main road. With headlights on! Oh, Lordy, that's when it really hit me like a ton of bricks! I wasn't going to be able to drive home — through the Mill Creek shopping area, across the bridge, up and over and down the other side of the peninsula. (I live in the Rosemont area near Brighton Medical Center). Even if I hugged the right lane and kept a car between me and the oncoming lane of headlights as a shield, I knew I was in trouble.

There would be too much oncoming traffic.

After that involuntary gasp and moment of panic, the solution was simple, of course. One of my guests would do the driving. That time.

But what if I had gone, by myself, to a friend's house for dinner? Would I have to spend the night there? Try to do the drive home, in spite of everything? Call a taxi — and then have to retrieve my car somehow? A real ton of bricks it was. I just want to whine.

So, that brings me to the emotions of becoming limited. By many things. In this particular case, I blame daylight saving time — or the lack of it. I'm controlled by when the sun sets. In the summer I can be home by eight forty-five and I can adjust to that. But in the winter, I have to be home by three forty-five. I have about a seven-minute window of overlap between evening light and headlight-darkness if I'm late. I've learned how to escape most major streets in my limited area by traveling through neighborhoods on side streets. One set of friends offers and does come and fetch me to their house for dinner; then one of them drives me home while the other follows in order to get my driver home again.

Bloody nuisance, I call it. But, it's worse than that. I'm starting to be limited in other ways as well. I'm continually frustrated by not being able to go to evening events. That saying, "Getting old isn't...", but I won't finish it because we've heard it enough. I have to keep adjusting, but am I to take up knitting in the evening? Not likely!

And what other pivotal points will there be in my life to which I have to adjust? I have a doctor's appointment next week because it seems I don't swallow correctly. At age 83 I haven't yet learned how?

Will that be a mini-pivotal point in my life or another biggie? It's all pretty exasperating. But, I shouldn't whine.

Colorado

Toby Hollander

When I was four, my mother and I moved from Albuquerque to Denver to live with her sister, Nissel, and brother-in-law, Clayton Byers, in a two-story house on the corner of 19th Street and 8th Avenue. My mother had just finished her Master's Degree in English Literature despite my editorial intervention. Just days before her thesis entitled "Symbolism in the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne" was due, I had taken her lipstick from her purse and applied "Russian Red" liberally throughout her manuscript. In the primitive days of the typewriter, my toddler's edit forced my panicked mother to retype the entire document. I can only attribute my survival to her extraordinary patience and to how innocently cute I was. But graduate she did, in spite of my editorial help, and finding no work for an English major in Albuquerque, she followed Nissel to Denver, where Clay was a staff photographer for the *Denver Times*. The relocation was the start of many changes in my young life.

I learned that being "dead" was a big deal, a part of life to be deeply feared. It was a long time before anyone smiled or laughed again.

In 1950 my mother journeyed to the Denver County Courthouse to change her name and mine from Haight (my father's surname) to Hollander, her mother's maiden name. At birth, I had been named Toby Alex Lucien Haight after the protagonist of the book *Toby Tyler: Or Ten Weeks with a Circus*, the 1881 novel by James Otis, of a child who escaped from foster care to join a circus. I have no idea where the silly Alex Lucien part came from and have always been grateful that it had been dropped. Thereafter, I was Toby Haight Hollander.

In the short time we lived with the Byers, I fell completely in love with my little cousin, Tammy — a happy, giggly, brown-haired toddler, with chubby cheeks and a round face. Named after her deceased maternal Aunt Tamara, Tammy was always ready to follow me on a back-garden

adventure or to the mom-and-pop candy store a few blocks away. At five, I was three years older than Tammy, but I doted on her. I was the only one she would tolerate washing her face without throwing a fit. It was a game we played.

One cool fall morning, I woke to the sound of Tammy quietly babbling to herself in her crib down the hallway. The adults were still asleep, and the house was quiet apart from my mother's gentle snoring in the room next to mine. I padded in my jammies down to Tammy's room, hefted her out of her crib and put on her robe and slippers. We played quietly with her "stuffies" until the adults gradually emerged.

After lunch, Mom headed off to teach her afternoon class, and Tammy went down for her usual afternoon nap, and the house fell silent except for the tick-tock of the antique clock on the downstairs mantle and the occasional sound of a car chugging up Nineteenth Street. After an hour or so, Aunt Nissel went to check on Tammy and discovered her lying lifeless and blue in her crib. Nissel's panicked scream shattered the silence and pulled me running into the bedroom. Nissel bolted to the phone, calling frantically for help. Soon the wail of an approaching siren came to a strangled end in front of the house. Stern ambulance attendants in white coats came and went, carrying away Tammy's limp form wrapped in her blankie. Uncle Clay came home from the paper, face flushed, cheeks wet with tears. Lost in their grief, they paid me little notice. I didn't know what to do or where to go. I felt very alone, needing my mother.

I ran to the corner bus stop to meet her, relaying the news in a frantic rush as she returned home. At first, she didn't understand my blubbering, but then she straightened and ran up the sidewalk and into the house. Trailing after her up the front steps, I heard the word "dead" but didn't understand that I would never see or play with Tammy again. My mother hurriedly arranged for me to stay for a week or two with university colleagues who lived near the campus. At their house, I labored to understand what I might have done to cause this

sudden and horrible turn of events. Their assurances that nothing was my fault only reinforced my sense that I must have done something wrong. When I returned home, Tammy was gone and her crib was disassembled and stacked in a corner; despite an air of finality, her presence lingered on in the house. From this first brush with death, which caused such distress, I learned that being “dead” was a big deal, a part of life to be deeply feared. It was a long time before anyone smiled or laughed again.

And yet, life went on. My mother enrolled me in a YMCA day program where the staff did their best to teach me how to swim — for reasons I have never understood, all the children swam nude. Those swimming lessons paved the way for my under-age acceptance into the Y’s summer camp.

Uncle Clay took me to double features on Saturday mornings, mostly westerns, with live entertainment — like yo-yo demonstrations and contests — in between features. I yearned to “walk the dog” and go “round the world” with my own amateur yo-yo. I became enthralled with Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Hopalong Cassidy, Lash LaRue and, of course, the horses they rode in on — Trigger, Champion, Topper, and Black Diamond. The Newsreel was full of ominous black-and-white warnings, music in minor keys, and flickering footage of towering mushroom clouds of atom bomb tests. Soon kindergarten introduced me to duck-and-cover drills, yet another indication that death was always near.

POETRY

When I was Young

William Doughty

I did not wake up with a to do list
Nor review the news with addicted dread.
The robin’s call was for me alone, and that sound,
The whisper of fresh green leaves, still comes
In moments of rare silence.

I was a more natural thing and less a creature of man,
With no value to adults more than entertainment
And relief from the complications they could see
As I do now.

The ignorant simplicity of a summer day was my consciousness;
Long hours staring unthinking at a shaded pool
Adorned with unbobbing bobber and drowned worm
Dug beneath hedges where the robin called.

To wander that shore with nowhere else to be,
Each rock a mysterious island, each stick
A possible snake not to be approached
Each sandy cove a nest for worm-immune sunfish.

I knew nothing and everything:
Nothing of human flirtation with the dark side,
Everything taught by Nature and her dancing light,
Breezes on shore, fish flashing sun
The kingfisher now lifting in the sky.

More than one worm died that day
All I saw was summer and play,
A flicker of the deeper way.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Twilight

Libby DeMille

Both the painter and I were inspired to capture the light.



FINE ART

My Blue-Eyed Boy

Soft pastel

Susan E. Cunniff

From a very small photo of my father at 4½ years old (in 1930), which I discovered when looking for something else.





FINE ART

Greeting the Day

Pan pastels

Mary Barrett

From a photo of an early morning beach walk with friends.

Spare Hands

Stephen H. Dorneman

Spare Hands, *manos libre* to the restaurant's crew of Mexicans and Dominicans, drove the long stretch of Nevada State Road 147 at a steady ten miles per hour over the limit. The Lexus LS's headlights, taillights, and exhaust would all pass either a casual or close inspection, but Spare still worried about being pulled over in a random traffic stop. He knew they couldn't make him open the trunk without a warrant, but maybe the average cop didn't know that.

And there was a body in the trunk, after all.

I'm getting too old for this, he thought to himself. Too old at thirty-nine. Shoveling in the grainy desert soil was hell on his back.

Tonight would be the sixth time in the last twelve years he'd taken this trip, the fifth since they started using the ranch. The second this year alone, and it was only October. Mr. Chen more or less owned the ranch, although not on paper. The owner of record was the mother of a guy that had owed Mr. Chen for a lost kilo, a decade ago. No one lived on the ranch. There was a caretaker that stopped by once a month. Spare had never met him, but he knew his schedule.

Spare turned off the highway and onto the gravel and dirt road, scanning carefully for anything that might have changed since the last time he had been here. No new washouts, no tracks from joyriders leading off the road and into the desert. Good. Finally, the silhouette of the ranch house, a deeper darkness against the night. He killed the Lexus's headlights and waited. No lights came on, nobody came out to investigate. Everything as expected.

He pulled a pair of blue latex gloves from a box under the seat, next to the unregistered Glock. They were the same kind of gloves they'd been using in the restaurant since he'd first started there, a runaway teenager with no papers and no experience.

"Why should I hire you? What are you good for?" Mr. Chen had asked him, after he'd bluffed his way past Felix, the old manager, gone for fifteen or so years now.

"You have stinking garbage; I'll take out your garbage," he said, pointing to a pile of rotting avocados. "You have dirty pots, I'll wash your pots. You need tables moved, I'll move them. Wherever you need an extra pair of hands, whatever you need them for, you can count on me. I'm your spare pair of hands."

That year Mr. Chen paid him in meals and a corner booth that he could sleep in. The years went by, but after that first day nobody in Chen Lee's Mexican Restaurant ever called him by any name other than Spare Hands.

Mr. Chen valued loyalty over everything, except maybe money. And silence. Loyalty, money, and silence. Spare never asked questions about why he was decanting Popov vodka into Gray Goose bottles, and later, he never talked about what was in the packages he delivered throughout Las Vegas, to hotel rooms and bus stops, backstages of shows and restaurant side doors. Mr. Chen had started paying him good money by then, although he still put on the latex gloves every morning and dragged out the trash cans every night.

Even today, good money wasn't great money, although there'd be a bonus for him when this job was finished and he returned to the restaurant. Mr. Chen would ask him how it had gone, and he would tell him "The same as the others," and Mr. Chen would smile and open the little safe mounted in the wall behind his desk and toss him one of the stacks of bills. Spare wouldn't count the money until he was back in his studio apartment, where he would add it to the other stacks zipped inside a spare pillowcase on the closet shelf. His retirement plan, growing ever so slowly, compounding no interest.

He liked the desert weather but didn't like Las Vegas, so he'd been keeping an eye on a handful of Arizona properties that always seemed to be for sale, but lately their prices were only going up.

In the wind he thought he heard a wolf howl, but the only wolves this close to Vegas walked on two feet. It was different in Arizona, he knew. More wild.

Spare picked his spot, moved the car, got out, and started digging in the sand and the cracked earth, working by the taillights of the Lexus. The wind was starting to pick up; good for covering the hole up later, but a pain in the ass now. Spare pulled a red bandanna from his shirt pocket and tied it around his nose and mouth before going back to work. He was definitely getting too old for this.

In the wind he thought he heard a wolf howl, but the only wolves this close to Vegas walked on two feet. It was different in Arizona, he knew. More wild. He finished digging, dumped the body in the hole, and started covering it back up. It was getting closer and closer to dawn, but he knew that Mr. Chen would still be in the restaurant office, all alone by now and waiting for him, with his little safe and his stacks of bills.

Mr. Chen must have been at least seventy, maybe even eighty, but he didn't act like he planned to retire anytime soon. Spare got back in the car and reached down to touch the Glock again, assuring himself the gun was still there.

Like Mr. Chen, Spare Hands valued loyalty, money, and silence. But in what order?

POETRY

A Cold Case

Eric Jensen

I wonder as I try to meditate
Upon the tricks I hear some grocers use.
My ice cream box has lost a lot of weight.

Does inflation lead them to the state
Where changing price or volume they must choose?
I wonder as I try to meditate.

So would it soothe my angst to agitate
And pick a local villain to abuse?
My ice cream box has lost a lot of weight.

The grocer cannot just eliminate
The profit that he can't afford to lose.
I wonder as I try to meditate.

Ah, me! I think I'll just commiserate
With those who second helpings can't refuse.
My ice cream box has lost a lot of weight.

My spoon keeps dipping as I contemplate
The horror that we call the daily news.
I wonder as I try to meditate.
My ice cream box has lost a lot of weight.

POETRY

She: The Farmer in White

Jan King

He is the farmer in plaid and denim.

Who reads the Farmers' Almanac like an inerrant Bible,

Then marks X's for plowing and planting on the spiral-bound calendar the bank sent him at Christmas.

Dog-eared seed catalogues pile on the floor,

Winter's research behind and orders placed right on time.

Now spring, he drops his boots by the door, hat on the hook, comes in all denim and dust, redolent of tractor oil.

But She.

She is the Farmer in White; red-tressed Queen of Earth;

Her two clear-eyed hazel pools inviting you in to dance.

She: whose ten black acres above the lake appeared on wings of prayer.

Then twelve thousand bees; and a dozen and one baby chicks came to the P.O.

And the cleanest of seeds, planted on the perfect timetable of her intuition.

No almanac could portend the sadness of the bees,

Who would need ten raspberry bushes to cheer them.

Only She: who feels the energy of the plants until her hands ache She: who consoles the bees with berries and love.

Rain comes.

He sits at the kitchen table, poring over accounts, counting days, checking forecasts. (As if worry could ever produce a happy crop.)

She lights a candle and says a prayer.

Then drives Betty the baby blue pickup to the farm and plants in the rain. Sunflowers. Carrots.

Snap peas. And lavender.

In summer, she will know to leave the plants and weeds in peace and take the dogs down to the lake for a swim.

FINE ART

Summer Heat

Watercolor

Susan Black

The feeling of being weighed down by a hot summer day.



FINE ART

Harbor Fish

Watercolor

Mary Barthelman



The Brotherhood of the Rope

Lawrence Ricci

Bruce was a storyteller. He loved to tell stories about our epic hiking and climbing adventures, the more extreme the better: six days of continuous rain in the 100-mile wilderness, flash floods twice in the Wild River Valley, climbing five 4,000-footers in a day in the Pemi Wilderness in frozen boots on top of a foot of fresh October snow.

Of all the tales, though, the one he most loved to share with anyone who would listen was our climb of the massive Huntington Ravine headwall on the east face of Mount Washington. The headwall is, according to all accounts, the most dangerous and technically challenging non-rope climb in the White Mountains.

To pass the time during the strenuous dawn approach from Pinkham Notch, I shared a mountaineering story I had just read. A British team scaled an unclimbed 7,000-meter Himalayan Peak fittingly named The Ogre. During the descent one climber fell while rappelling and broke both legs. Rescue was impossible on such inaccessible terrain. In excruciating pain, he asked his climbing partner for help. His partner stared down at him and, in all seriousness, offered, “You’re screwed, mate.” Spurred on by fear of certain death and with the help of that same partner, the injured climber crawled over steep ice and rock for several days back to base camp and rescue. Rock and ice climbers often talk about the brotherhood of the rope, how the rope connecting them symbolizes their common language and experience, their bond.

By midmorning we finally reached the base of the headwall, where the true climbing began. As we struggled up the steep, unrelenting rocks, storm clouds and thunder threatened from above. Because of the threat of rain, the few other climbing parties retreated. Steep, wet rock is not to be taken lightly. We briefly considered doing the same but stubbornly decided to go on. We were alone in this massive amphitheater. Thankfully the rain never came.

Halfway up, with a 500-foot drop below us and still 500 feet of climbing left, I looked down at Bruce. As he often does when in difficulty, He was swearing up a storm, throwing in the odd Americanized Italian curse word. He had gotten his feet crossed up on a steep, narrow traverse and couldn’t figure out what to do next.

“Hey Larry,” he yelled. “Help me out here.”

Thinking of the Ogre story, I hollered down, “You’re screwed, mate.”

He laughed a little and then said, “No, seriously, help me out.”

After what I thought was a hilarious pause, I said, “Make sure you have good handholds then shift your left foot to where your right foot is. Straight up from there is a good hold for your right foot.”

Eventually he figured it out on his own. As is often the case when climbing, a seemingly insurmountable problem solves itself with a simple shift of a foot or hand. If only life’s struggles could be solved so easily.

We topped out over the lip of the ravine, shook hands, and stepped onto the auto road that ascends from the base to the summit. A woman standing outside her car seemed surprised that we had come up that way. She less than helpfully offered, “You know you can just drive up here.” We thanked her for the advice and, quietly laughing, continued trekking up the summit cone to the true summit.

Bruce loved the outdoors. It was while getting ready for a hike that he fell down his basement stairs, shattering his leg, which, in ways I still don’t understand, led to his fatal pneumonia. Slowly dying a pulmonary death is so unfair. His mind was as sharp as ever while day after day his body diminished.

At first, he angrily bemoaned the fact that he was “missing everything.” He would greet me with “this is BS” and “get me out of here.” When he finally realized that he was not going to make it, he told me he wasn’t afraid. I never got to ask him how he came to that profound realization, but I suspect his love of family and his faith, particularly his faith, got him there.

In those last few days, Bruce taught me about dignity and courage as we held hands hour after hour.

In those last few days, Bruce taught me about dignity and courage as we held hands hour after hour. We called each other brother. We spoke of love in ways I could never have imagined. Whenever I left the hospital, we kissed. If I didn’t have to wear a mask, we would have kissed on the lips like the old Italian men we had now become.

His dignity at the end, interspersed with humor, disarmed everyone. The nursing staff said they were Bruce’s fan club. As he lay dying, the hospital administration wanted to move him out of the special care unit to the floor. The nurses refused to let him be taken from them. They saw what we saw: bravery, outsized humor, and love.

The day before he passed, while waiting for the palliative care team to arrive, we again talked about that day on the Huntington Ravine headwall. Our talk wasn’t so much about the hike. It wasn’t even about “You’re screwed mate” or the lady on the auto road. It was about sharing a common language and experience, a bond. Our talk was about the brotherhood of the rope, just without the rope.

Salud my brother. I will see you again as we spread your ashes on the mountains we both loved.

POETRY

Backyard Inspection

Mary Snell

Orderly, straight, with buttons undone,
the shirts hang upside down
next to the pants inside out,
crowded by sock pairs pinned at the toes.
She inspects the ranks for folds, disorder,
striding briskly before the lines
stopping to tug a collar, a hem, re-adjust
a waist. December cold will toughen
this loose group into a stiff-legged squad,
now flapping on cotton lines strung
between wooden arms spread wide
as if ready to welcome them home.

Neighbors

Daphne Gregory-Thomas

I am a serial mover. I've moved more times than anyone I know.

Everyone keeps asking, "How many times have you moved? Why so many changes? How come you can't just settle down?"

I never answer the "how many times?" question. It's a private number, counted more in neighbors than in digits.

Ed is my newest neighbor when I move to a small historic town in southern Maine after living many years in New York City. He is 80, toothless, and smokes a lot.

I meet him on a gray slab foundation, a set of plans in his hand depicting what will become the one-floor house that he will build for me. He eyes me and my husband up with the baked-in look of a lifelong Downeaster.

"I live out back," he points to the house behind the foundation. "I built that too. Been doing this for sixty years."

Ed is a man of few words and sharp wit. My new-neighbor radar tells me he's a keeper.

Before this, there are MANY new neighbors populating our life in New York City. Early on, there's Miss Marni, the upstairs Jamaican nanny who greets us with a plate of savory jerk chicken when we move into the old brownstone on West 7th Street. She lets us know what to do when the fritzzy fire alarm goes off, and, with one eyebrow raised, warns, "This building is old. GOOD people keep it new!" informing us of who's really in charge there.

Mr. Chu is a fine neighbor too, always greeting my husband at his laundry shop on West 69th Street with a cheery: "Hangers! No box!"

For the same reasons many New Yorkers decide to continually change their living circumstances, we follow suit.

Eventually, friends start asking, "Is your relationship OK? Why so many changes? What are you running from?"

"Too light! Too dark! Rats! Too noisy! No heat! Too hot! Too quiet! Too expensive!"

All great excuses to find new neighbors on the many blocks we inhabit on the Upper West Side over the years: the nosey man on the West 75th Street Co-op board who asks offensive questions but ends up trusting us with his dog when he travels; the bottle collector who roams the streets, always ready for a good chat; the artist living in the basement on West 69th, painting scenes in the hallways to brighten the space; the opera singer practicing every night with her window open, a free concert for all; the woman across the court yard on West 68th dressing and undressing with the shades up on purpose; the grande dame of West 75th Street, who even at ninety-two, will not leave her apartment unless dressed to the nines, makeup perfect, hands gloved, hat just so; the mystery writer across the hall on West 64th, who, when I tell her I have always dreamed of putting pen to page, encourages me.

"Start writing it all down. Lots of life's mysteries are solved on the page."

Eventually, friends start asking, "Is your relationship OK? Why so many changes? What are you running from?"

I never bother to explain my itinerant life and just keep adding to the new neighbor tableau.

In spite of all the changes up and down the blocks, there is one constant: summering each year on the coast of Maine, the place of my immigrant grandparents' origin story, fleeing from poverty and starvation decades ago to work in the coastal textile mills, never to return to the old country, new neighbors, both welcomed and resented, in a foreign land.

Shell Still Life

Ann Landsberg

Inspired by how perfectly these shells just nestled into one another. Even though they were all different.



When my eight-year-old grand-daughter announces her family is moving to Maine for good, it does not take much convincing.

“You know how to move, Yia Yia! You do it all the time! Besides, I want you close.”

Which brings me back to Ed, my newest neighbor, ever a cigarette hanging from his toothless mouth, hammer in hand. Each morning, we greet each other with a wave, a smile, a few words about the day ahead.

When we decide we need a storage shed, he notices from afar how the parts and pieces have us befuddled from the start. Within minutes, he’s there, saying little other than “hand me this,” “just hold that.” A few other new neighbors whom we haven’t yet met stop by to lend a hand, reminding me of an old movie scene, people pitching in to raise a barn and build a community at the same time. I run into the house, make coffee and sandwiches.

Ed and his helpers are not so different from Ms. Marni reminding us to be good; the nosy co-op man entrusting us with his dog; the grande dame dolling up every day; the bottle collector and his friendly chats; Mr. Chu, who always put the shirts on hangers.

Ed is the same, even at 80, seeking out in others all that we have in common, proof that we are cut from the same cloth, people who need other people for the simple things: a word of kindness, a plate of jerk chicken, a free concert through a window, a hallway painting to bring some light, help with a shed, coffee and sandwiches.

These days, when friends make jokes about my endless moves and many changes, who still ask how many times, who wonder out loud what I’ve been running from, I keep my own counsel on the exact number. Instead, I count our neighbors, all adding to the richness of my life. Running from something? Not one bit. Running toward it is more like it, diving into all that makes us human, neighbors one and all.

POETRY

Passing

Gail Worster

The room is small, walls whitewashed and bare, a monk's room.
The bed is cot-size, supported by sturdy wooden legs.

A woman lies on the bed, neatly tucked in, arms at sides,
hands folded over her belly. Waiting in perfect stillness.

Sitting next to the bed, on a plain wooden chair is the witness.
A heavy-set young man, in a black suit, clean, well-groomed,
hands folded in lap, staring straight ahead, patiently waiting.

The woman spots the veil descending from above, like a curtain
coming down on a stage. Thick, gray, fog-like, slowly, methodically
falling. It's happening. Finally. She's ready.

Then, out of the corner of her eye, she detects the young man
shifting. Unsettling, creating a small ripple on her pond of stillness.

Now he's standing, emitting a sob, trying to hold back.
The door opens and he's gone, her resolve sneaking out behind him.
The door shuts like the sound of thunder.

That f—king coward!

How dare he break her fast of stillness!

It took so long to cultivate, painstakingly!

Her mind is screaming! Wait!

The wall of fog takes no notice, continues its slow, steady descent.
Until she can see nothing else.

Seconds of grappling, shapeshifting. Merging with the fog,
dissipating along with it. From matter to energy, from particle to wave.

Looking down at her body motionless on the bed,
like the shell of a cocoon she has broken free of.

No feelings of love, no need of manmade constructs.
No loved ones waiting at the end of a long tunnel.

Just a sense of joy. Pure joy.

POETRY

Volley & Thunder

Anne Cyr

Oh, hellish hail, pelt on
against the skylight

in mounting fury — a barrage
of arrhythmic drums.

Clatter away, keep pouring thickly,
bouncing off the verdant green
of new lawn. Pure white popcorn
pellets turn forsythias into

writhing giants, flinging neon yellow
blossoms to the ground,

while delicate daffodils
shake in distress, begging for mercy.

But don't give in yet — let forth
a roar of thunder,

add to the cacophony, the terror
until — true to cloudburst life —

you are finished, leaving your mark
on leaves of newly emerged lilies,

my beloved lady's mantle
now in tatters. What a way to shatter

spring's beginning.



PHOTOGRAPHY

Deep Winter

Sharon Roberts

I love the lacy definition of the branches and the sense that something hidden has been revealed.



FINE ART

Portal to the Sky

Chalk pastel

Susan Black

Sitting on the ground under this tree and looking up through its bare branches to the sky.



FINE ART

The Definition of Happiness

Soft pastel

Susan E. Cunniff

My dear cat, Marcella, who lived to be over 20. Always adoring and affectionate, as you can see!

The Search for a Nest

Elsa van Bergen

An early sign of the turmoil within our home was brought by a male finch that swooped into the covered front porch, flying erratically, in confusion, in disbelief. For every past New Years we had mounted a dried wreath around our welcome plaque so that birds could use it as foundation for a nest. We had watched through the door's sidelight how the female would visit, tweaking what she found, tossing some straw, adding soft grasses for the comfort of her coming brood. We celebrated the cracking of the eggs by eager beaks. We applauded the parents who fed the one, two, then four babies. We shed a tear or two when their fluttering wings were strong enough and one by one the family left the nest.

This year there was no possibility of having a nest right outside the door. We had come to the painful realization that this house and the gardens we loved could not overcome complaining backs and knees as they worked in flower beds or checkbooks as they filled up with entries to mowers and plowers and lawn carers and arborists and more. We would list the property and expect potential buyers would not want to be greeted by unhappy finches.

This year the would-be papa finch returned to the porch, unwilling to accept change, off and on for sad weeks. And then he did what no bird sitting in the red twig dogwood near the backyard feeder had ever done. He did not face it, watching for a turn on a perch, but sat very still for a long time, facing me as I looked through the kitchen window. If a bird can muster an accusatory look, there it was, as if asking me "No nest here this year? Really???!!"

It was the realliness that the two humans within were working to absorb. We had moved so many times; this was to be our forever home, not another fabled stepping stone. Previous relocations had been largely dictated by circumstances — such an odd term for the arrival of a child, the temptation of a work transfer... Was this new move more one of choice? It took some time of contemplation to accept a new circumstance and choose

It took some time of contemplation to accept a new circumstance and choose to foster the belief that yet a new adventure might await. Before that could reveal itself lay growing chaos.

to foster the belief that yet a new adventure might await. Before that could reveal itself lay growing chaos.

For the first time in recent years we would be drastically downsizing, and anyone who took the OLLI course in Swedish Death Cleaning knows what was in store. Instructor Barbara Rich, generous with sharing her experiences and advice, had in an earlier class gotten me to open an Etsy vintage shop. Now after two years and more than a hundred sales of one-off things treasured in our home but out of sync with the way our children live, the Etsy outlet would become part of a panoply. We sharpened all our weapons against clutter.

At first I had copied the mama finch and rid our nest of dross, of lone survivors of an erstwhile pair — of mugs, of earrings. We piled cartons and bags and bric-a-brac of all sorts into what became The Little Car That Could as it mused on with donations to Goodwill, several libraries, ReStore, neighbors, and friends. We discovered the boon of Facebook Marketplace. We made many, many trips to the ever-receptive town dump. Come evening we raised a glass of wine in smug recognition of the day's sorting and tossing and packing accomplishment.

But no expert in decluttering can really guide one through the slow, painful, revelatory experience of going through bins of memorabilia. I could have simply tipped the contents into a dumpster. Who, after all, would be interested in all this stuff? It was simple to consign school notebooks to a trash bin. A rent stub from my first studio apartment in a doorman building on Manhattan's East Side (\$155) brought only a brief smile. It was not so easy

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 33]



PHOTOGRAPHY

The Quiet Man Bridge

Libby DeMille

A scene from the movie The Quiet Man was filmed at this beautiful spot, on an old stone bridge in Connemara, Ireland.



PHOTOGRAPHY

Sisterly Encouragement After a Tough Loss in the Pie Eating Contest

Reenie McCormack

POETRY

sign this petition to stop this execution

Irv Williams

tell the person standing behind the curtain that they need to walk away

tell the warden that the show is off for tonight

tell the guard that the last meal was a total waste

tell the reporters that the news at eleven will be edited in a different way

tell the minister/priest/rabbi that prayers are needed elsewhere

tell the witnesses that their services are no longer required

tell the family that the man strapped to the gurney whether guilty or innocent deserves better

tell the prison nurse that the stethoscope can be put away now

tell the prisoners that there is no need to bang on the doors of their cells

tell the crowd gathered by the highway it's time to go home and get into bed

and hug their loved ones like there is no tomorrow

rise tomorrow to face a new day

gaze at the sunrise with blinking eyes

feel the breeze off the bay rustle your hair

smell the crocus by the back door

drink your coffee and search the morning paper for the report

could it be that the governor actually read the petition and had this to say

no, no more, never again, this is wrong, we can do better, we know better,

close the killing room while we still have time to save ourselves no matter what

save ourselves from the tyranny that surges from within

save ourselves from the most awful hate there is

save ourselves while we still have time no matter what

Nici o problemă!

Don Bouwens

Before the end of our first week in Bucharest, on a quest to adopt an infant, we were given the contact info for an attorney. Elena would work with us and try to locate a healthy infant available for adoption. The anxious waiting began. New friends helped us pass the time, taking us on a trip to the Carpathian Mountains (home of Dracula's castle.) The scenery was dramatic and sinister.

Back in Bucharest and nearly asleep, we heard the phone ring at 1:00 a.m. Elena: "Come quickly. We have your beautiful boy!" It was the attorney telling us she had our baby, and we must come to fetch him. We couldn't reach anyone to drive us. We called Elena back telling her to come to us. "We will meet you at the main gate of Heroes Cemetery," the only landmark we both knew. We packed our large suitcase, took all our money, and headed out.

Walking to the cemetery in the middle of the night was spooky. Rats scurried; packs of wild dogs roamed the streets. We stood on the curb waiting. None too soon, my wife blurted "What if we get mugged standing here?" We crept into the shadows of the cemetery and waited. Elena and her sister pulled up, bringing a heavily bundled and pale three-month-old boy, who was indeed beautiful. His name was Stefan. The woman hosting us had made it plain that, before bringing a baby home, it must have had a negative AIDS test. We told Elena that she needed to take us to a hotel. She declined. We insisted. We had no other way to get there. With our large suitcase, her sister, the two of us, and a baby, we became a clown car. They took us to the Presidential Hotel, just recently opened to the public after years of accepting only the Communist Party elite.

What a feeling to be alone with "our" baby. He looked perfect to us, just pale... and sopping wet... and hungry. We had formula, bottled water, and an electric coil to heat water one cup at a time. While my wife tended to dry diapers and a clean onesie, I started a mug of water heating, inserted the plastic bottle liner in its holder and carefully measured the prescribed amount of formula. It seemed like it took forever for the water to boil, then cool, with the baby making it clear he needed food... now!

I was finally able to pour the water into the bottle. How was I to know the liner needed to be *firmly* stretched back over the lip of the holder? Water, formula, liner all on the floor requiring me to start over. No one was happy... certainly not Stefan. Eventually, we had the satisfaction of seeing this child happily sucking down his first meal with us.

We were exhausted. Baby was exhausted. Did the hotel have a crib for us? Of course not. Resourceful, we emptied the suitcase, lined it with towels, laid it between the two twin beds and squeezed them together making sure the suitcase lid couldn't close, and slept. All of us. All night! This child was an angel.

His blood needed to be tested. Dr. D and his staff came to the hotel. They insisted we leave the room while they drew blood from this tiny baby. We heard him cry. We all survived. We took the sample to the "illustrious" Cantacuzino Institute, where we found dirty floors and pets on the counters. We just wanted to know that the baby was free of the AIDS virus. Soon we had the result we hoped for, *and the all-important certificate!*

To obtain the visa that Stefan needed to enter the U.S., a Romanian clerk at the American Embassy gave us a list of fifteen documents we would need completed, notarized, and copied. "Do not schedule your appointment until you have *every item completed*," she warned us sternly.

Bebe was our guide, translator, and chauffeur. He drove us around the city, helping us find the appropriate offices. Coming back from one office, Bebe stuck his head in the car window.

"This secretary says it will be five days before we can see the Director."

"My god, Bebe, Don has to return to the U.S. before then," my wife cried. "Can't you do something?"

"*Nici o problemă*. You have American dollars?"

I opened my wallet, offering twenty-, fifty- and hundred-dollar bills.

The Search for a Nest

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29]

“No, no, too much. You have five-dollar amount? That is best.”

Of course I did... *nici o problemă*. Problem solved.

After two days, our checklist needed just one thing more, the signature of a “chief notary,” whose office would open at eight the next morning. Not complete, OK, but close enough for us. We called the Embassy and scheduled our visa appointment for 11 a.m., giving us plenty of time for the last item.

A note on the notary’s door: *The Director can be found at his satellite office. My watch showed 11:10 already. Race across town and finally, the signature.*

“Get two copies,” we directed Bebe.

“They have no copy machine.”

“You’re kidding!?”

“*Nici o problemă*. I know a copy place,”

“Hurry, we are already late.”

He drove like a madman. Cars in the way? *Nici o problemă*. Around them on the sidewalk. Finally, we reach the building with a copy machine, only to see a line going around the corner.

“Go to a different copy center!”

“No, this is the only copy machine this side of town. Give me some of those.”

Three packs of Marlboros got him to the head of the line, and we were off again. *Nici o problemă* was now part of our repertoire.

At the Embassy, our official wasn’t happy.

“You are very late!!” she glowered.

“But we are here now, and we have everything.”
We weren’t leaving without that visa!

to avoid scanning letters and memos from co-workers and authors I partnered. Like our home’s “memory wall” of old maps and prints, souvenirs from places where we had lived or loved, these pieces of paper were like a trail of breadcrumbs, documenting where I had been, who I had been before children and ever-changing neighbors developed their views of my evolving self. With the image of a much smaller new home on the horizon, I did try hard to eliminate but found I could only cull in a limited way. Maybe after our furnishings and art had ended their coming battle for precious space I would regain strength and time and confidence in my future to divorce myself from the documented esteem of others that had cheered and supported me.

One needs to be not melancholic or pessimistic but remain realistic during one of life’s many transitions. Gone are those craft projects that — let’s get real — will never be completed. Yet there will be more leisure and wherewithal for travel and for the activities that do truly enrich. As I write, the closing on our condo is days away. The road to finding a suitable unit in the area we coveted was a bumpy one until out of the blue one was listed and we were sure to be first in line in the parade of open house visitors. Closing is not the word I want just now. It does, however, symbolize the ability to tweak a new nest, one for the birth of new ideas, new friendships, and the positives of a new lifestyle. So let me call it an opening.

east

David Agan

It's 3 o'clock hot. The sun's beating heavy on my back. On the steep, gravel slope above the San Bernardino bus station, stones are jamming into my shoes with each step up. I'm climbing to Route 66 to start hitching back to Maine. Traveling light with a fake leather suitcase and raincoat, I bussed out here from LA. I'm thinking about this past week of canvassing for Gene McCarthy in the California Primary. Kennedy won. Then, they shot him in the kitchen. Yesterday was a National Day of Mourning and my 21st birthday. What a drag.

Up on the road, a ride takes me all the way to Barstow. Pretty soon, I get another ride. It's with a guy heading home to Indiana from Las Vegas in his old Falcon. We agree to share driving and gas. Larry talks about Indiana.

In the desert, I open the window to cool off, but the breeze is hotter than the still air in the car. I try not to think about suffocating. It's just as hot when dusk drops and we see the lights of Needles. There's the Highway Patrol stopping inbound traffic at the border checking farm products. They turned back Okies here thirty years ago.

In the desert, I open the window to cool off, but the breeze is hotter than the still air in the car. I try not to think about suffocating.

We stop in Arizona. The first tank of gas costs me almost five dollars. I take the wheel. He gets in back and snores. Some mountain outlines show against the hazy, moonlit sky. Flowing adrenaline keeps me alert despite the white broken lines flashing on black road. Flagstaff shines bright. A little later, we switch drivers again and I curl up in the back. It can't be much over two hours I sleep when Larry says, "Wake up. I'm starting to nod off. Let's change again." He pulls off the road at an all-night diner with a gas pump. I look at my watch. It's 4:50. Larry says, "We're just into New Mexico, outside of Gallup. We need gas. Why don't you go in and order us a couple of coffees."

"Alright." I'm groggy, sort of stumble into the diner, order two coffees. The guy behind the counter gets on it right away. We're his only customers. I use the little restroom, sit down on a stool and pay for the coffees. Larry fills the tank, parks out back of the diner, comes in the front door. It's the only one. Larry says to me, "Gotta pee. Will you get this tank? I'll get the next two. It was three bucks, thirty-one cents." Larry heads to the restroom.

"I guess so." I'm thinking "Why?" Well, why not? I give the guy a two and two ones. I drop the change clink, clink, clink into my pocket. I take a sip of the coffee. I don't like it this hot. My dad always says he likes his coffee hot enough to burn his tongue. I'm not like him.

After a while, I take another sip of coffee. It's ok now. I drink it slowly. This'll wake me up for driving into the sunrise. Ten minutes pass. Larry doesn't come out of the restroom. Is he sick? In another couple of minutes, I get up and knock on the door and say his name. No answer. I go in. No one's there. The little window is open. I lean over the toilet so I can look out. His car's gone.

I hustle out back, mumbling curses. He got a lot of my money for gas and he stole my suitcase. I'm going to call the Highway Patrol. You can't trust anybody. There's my suitcase standing on the gravel with coat draped over it. So, he didn't steal it. I take a big breath. I'll be OK.

Along the road, I walk toward a thin white glow on the horizon expecting to get a ride when the sun is up. Right away headlights approach behind me. I turn and extend my thumb. An old Thunderbird stops. A guy, older, maybe almost thirty, is driving. Putting my stuff in back, I see an empty beer can on the floor, a child's moccasin and a red toy car on the seat. This guy's a family man and he's been out way too late. That's what it looks like anyway.

The driver asks me where I'm going. Not Indiana anymore, so I tell him Denver. On the phone last week, I had promised my mom I'd stop in Denver to see her Uncle Bill

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 36]



PHOTOGRAPHY

Snowless Winter Afternoon

Dawn Leland

*I was inspired by sharp light
on a bare landscape.*

This and That

James Crary

When the last of the guests pass through the front door,
dishes having been washed and put away,
and we've collapsed onto the sofa,
leaning into one another
like spent embers from a knotty log.
This.

When the two-year-old grandchild has expired in nap,
And exhausted we survey the carnage
of toy parts and stuffed animals strewn across the floor,
as well as the aftermath of lunch: half eaten, half flung.
This.

When we have faced off against one another,
squaring ourselves on opposite sides of the kitchen table,
you speaking righteous fire,
me seething in white hot anger,
each so justified, so convinced, so murderously right.
This, too.

May we give it everything we have.
May we pass it on.
May it keep refining us, like the magma heart of the sun.
That.

east

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 34]

if I went through there. The guy says he
can only take me five or six miles.
“That’s ok.

It’s a little closer.”

He shifts into first, second. The engine
winds up again and he shifts into third.
Then, the T-Bird slows and stops. “Damn.
Out of gas.” We get out. He takes a
5-gallon gas can out of the trunk and
tells me there’s a station a short way
back. I know that. “Why don’t you walk
back with me.”

I’m not falling for that one again. I’ve
only got about \$32 left to get to Maine. “I
think I’ll try to get another ride.” I grab
my suitcase and coat. He walks away
carrying the empty can. I start walking
east. I keep looking back for headlights.
After a while, I see the guy walking
toward his car with the tank hanging
lightly from his right hand. Maybe about
a gallon of weight, maybe two. He opens
the T-Bird tank and pours in what gas
he has.

Back behind the wheel, he hits second
before he reaches me, stops and says,
“hop in.” I do. We talk about the weather
a little. He tells me he lives a few miles
into the foothills. When he lets me out
and wishes me good luck, he turns left
up a gravel road. Early rays reflect off
the dust specks the T-Bird kicks up.

So, there are kind people in the world.

I’m beside the road, headed toward
dawn. It’s gonna be a good day, but hot.

Contributors

DAVID AGAN lives and writes among pines and oaks in a place called Perkiinstown in beautiful inland York County. He loves being a grandpa, walking in the woods, and writing.

MARY BARRETT has been painting, primarily in pastels, since retiring.

MARY BARTHELMAN enjoys capturing colorful images of Portland in color.

SUSAN BLACK is an artist and writer living in Aurora, Oregon, retired from a long career in public relations and corporate communications.

DON BOUWENS was inspired to try writing memoir when he was fascinated by histories written by his grandmother and kept hearing his adult children respond to his anecdotes with “I never knew you did that!”

LIBBY DEMILLE is a retired instructional designer who enjoys photographing the natural beauty of Maine, and is a member of the OLLI Teaching & Learning Committee.

STEPHEN DORNEMAN's short fiction has been published in *Bartleby Snopes*, *Prime Number*, *Cricket Online Review*, *Weave Magazine*, *Juked*, and *The Drum*, along with other publications. He recently retired to Portland from Boston.

WILLIAM DOUGHTY is a retired Maine educator who has written poems throughout life, seeking to understand the mysteries of nature, humans, and gratitude. He lives in Scarborough with his family, dogs, and kayaks.

JAMES CRARY is a retired hospice chaplain. He loves gardening, home repair, poetry writing, and trying to make sense of the world.

SUSAN E. CUNIFF is dedicated to creative expression; She finds inspiration in our emotional connection to people, animals, places, and cherished objects. For her, feeling and light must both be present for a painting to succeed.

ANNE CYR is a retired educator who is grateful for having talented writers as parents, for her instructors at OLLI, and for her writing workshop cohorts. If she's not in the house, look in the garden!

CHRIS ESSLER is a member of OLLI.

DAPHNE GREGORY-THOMAS, a former high school educator, began her writing journey through the Memorial Sloan Kettering Visible Ink Writing program. Her essays have appeared in the *Visible Ink Anthology* and in *Zibby Mag*. She is working on a memoir in essay form.

KATHIE HARPER is a retired teacher, children's librarian, and literacy specialist. Both her personal and professional life has revolved around children and books. In her spare time she enjoys gardening and traveling.

TOBY HOLLANDER lives in Portland and is presently serving as the facilitator for the “Art of Memoir” writing workshop at OLLI and is writing a memoir of his own, of which this submission is an excerpt.

ERIC JENSEN is a retired computer programmer who has been known to attack his garden with a chainsaw.

JAN KING moved to Maine in June 2020, and graduated from the Chaplaincy Institute of Maine in 2022. She is hoping to resurrect her regular writing practice one of these days!

ANN LANDSBERG is still taking photos, after 70 years, of people, places, and things that catch her eye. From Kodak Brownie to 35mm cameras, point and shoot, and now exclusively her Google Pixel phone.

DAWN LELAND takes random iPhone photos.

LYNN LYNCH enjoys landscape, nature and travel photography. Flowers in the garden, and later in photos, bring her joy twice over. It is most fun to capture everyday common moments.

REENIE MCCORMACK has been taking photographs for many years. During the pandemic she joined an online group of Street Photographers as a new challenge. She likes the stories they tell.

GAEL MAY MCKIBBEN has been an OLLI member since 2007, she's not used to writing about herself. But this flowed. Next try will be an obit, though it probably won't be a “proper” one.

ROBERT PETRILLO has just begun his second decade of OLLI. He has yet to grow up, though, and hopes to remain in touch with the childlike joy of learning new stuff for a good while longer.

LAWRENCE RICCI has published on various personal topics including the death of his father (JAMA), hiking with his family (Maine Senior Magazine), and most recently a book on his experiences as a Child Abuse Pediatrician (Praeger Press).

SHARON ROBERTS has been taking photographs since she was a child. After taking Tim Byrne's photography class at OLLI, she started the OLLI Photography Special Interest Group, which she still heads today.

MARY SNELL is a huge fan of OLLI and is a many-year member of its “Memoir Workshop.” A native Mainer, she spends each spring on the island of Lesbos. She holds an MFA in Poetry.

Contributors

KATHLEEN SUTHERLAND has been painting for more than 20 years. She has focused on the pastel medium. Kathleen has exhibited in several art shows in Maine and has taught art workshops at OLLI.

JOHN TIEDJE is a photographer living in Gorham. He's been shooting for over 25 years. His work has appeared in national and local shows.

ELSA VAN BERGEN has, with her husband Richard, and to some extent with their sons, experienced the full spectrum of relocations. Bottom line, she feels the richer for them.

RICHARD WELSH is most at home in borderlands, inviting others to join him in his OLLI courses (usually where Shakespearean drama meets history, most recently where the brain meets the mind), and with occasional photography.

IRV WILLIAMS grew up in Baltimore, immigrating in 1973. Red neon signs in the windows of corner variety stores advertising ITALIANS were the earliest mystery to solve.

GAIL WORSTER worked as a video producer and writer at L.L.Bean. After retiring in 2018, she joined the OLLI community and is currently a member of the OLLI Teaching & Learning Committee.

NONDISCRIMINATION NOTICE The University of Maine, including USM, is an EEO/AA employer, and does not discriminate on the grounds of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, transgender status, gender expression, national origin, citizenship status, age, disability, genetic information, or veteran's status in employment, education, and all other programs and activities. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding nondiscrimination policies: Director of Equal Opportunity, 101 North Stevens Hall, University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469-5754, 207-581-1226, TTY 771 (Maine Relay System).



CONTACT US

207-780-4406
olliatiumsm@maine.edu

Portland Campus
Wishcamper Center, Room 210

44 Bedford Street
Portland, Maine 04101

We are thankful for our many talented board members, volunteers, and staff who make OLLI programming possible.

STAFF

Donna Anderson, Director
207-228-8181
donna.anderson@maine.edu

Rob Hyssong,
OLLI Program Coordinator
207-228-8336
robert.hyssong@maine.edu

Anne Cardale, Program Director,
Maine Senior College Network
207-780-4128
acardale@maine.edu

SELECTIONS COMMITTEE

William Doughty
Veronica Hartman
Robert Petrillo
David Platt
Kathleen Sutherland

PRODUCTION EDITORS

Tim Baehr
Ann Landsberg

PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE

Rick Gammon

DESIGN

Jen Bradstreet Design

© 2024 by The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Southern Maine. All rights reserved.



FINE ART

Last Light

Pastel

Chris Essler

Celebrating
25+ YEARS
of Learning



1997-2023



OSHER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE
P.O. BOX 9300
PORTLAND, ME 04104-9300

NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE

PAID

PORTLAND, ME 04101
PERMIT NO. 370

Stay Curious.