



THE LOYALHANNA REVIEW



ONE GIANT LEAP BY CAROLYN CORNELL HOLLAND

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FROM THE EDITOR

If I learned one key lesson through many experiences, it's that very few things can be done totally alone. I've directed plays, managed bookstores, taught college courses, counseled adults, and recruited volunteers, but each of those activities required the cooperation of connected individuals.

This magazine would not be possible without the time and talents of many. So I would like to thank the authors and artists who took that brave step and submitted their work. Thanks to the dedicated editorial committee who read every word and considered each photograph and art piece. Thanks to the copyeditor and graphic designer who used their special skills in finishing the contents. To the generous public who donated the dollars to take this to press and the people at Fotorecord Print Center who produced a quality magazine for us once again. Thanks also to the families and friends of all those people; without their support, encouragement, and sacrifices none of this happens. Thank you all for trusting me to helm *The Loyalhanna Review*.

Last year, to honor our retiring Editor-in-Chief, we instituted the Ruth McDonald Fan Favorite Award. As you peruse this year's magazine, note your favorite piece—prose, poem, or photo. Email your vote to rebed1020@gmail.com by August 13, 2025. The author or artist receiving the most votes will be awarded a \$50 honorarium. (Please: One vote per reader.) The winner will be announced at LVW's August picnic and on the website where you can also read past issues of the *LR* and watch for upcoming events.

In joining the America 250 celebration, our call for the 2026 *Loyalhanna Review* submissions will include encouraging authors and artists to use the sesquicentennial for inspiration. In addition, we will be changing submission dates and guidelines. Check LVWonline.org as we update the information.

We welcome your feedback on making the *LR* enjoyable, relevant, and reflective of our readership. Contact us via email, Facebook/Meta, or our website.

Finally, your financial support makes this magazine and our other programs possible. Thank you!

—Rebecca E. Dunn, Editor-in-Chief

SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OUR 2025 MEMBERS, CONTRIBUTORS, AND FRIENDS

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The list includes gifts received as of July 9, 2025. Thank you for your generosity.

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LEAVING CUMBOLA

© by Terry Sanville

Connor aimed his Boy Scout flashlight at the path ahead, its fading yellow beam blurred by the storm. Raindrops the size of half dollars smacked against the broad-leafed maples and oaks, their branches whipped by the wind. The fleece-lined Indian moccasins that he'd sent away for from an ad on the back of a comic book were squishy wet, his Rawhide Kid pajamas soaked.

But he cinched his knapsack tight and pressed forward along the trail he'd climbed much of his eleven years, moving steadily uphill toward the plateau and the coal mine where his father once worked. He could have hiked the mine road that wound gently up the slopes. But the mountain trail seemed shorter and he hurried to get away, from what and toward what he wasn't sure.

The leaf-covered ground proved slick as pond ice. He slipped and fell, landing hard on his side, the breath forced from his lungs. But surprisingly, he felt no pain. Connor scrambled up. A dim light outside the mine watchmen's shed shone through the trees and he stumbled toward it, his arms protecting his face from the thrashing branches. The mine had closed down just before Easter, but the company still kept old man Hawkins on, to watch over things until they could remove the equipment and seal the mine shut.

"The end of an era," his mother had muttered when they got the news.

"Why?" Connor asked.

"Just is. Good riddance."

"But we've always—"

"Yeah, and look where it got us."

Reaching the edge of the woods, he stepped into the clearing. The strippins pond lay before him, its black water textured by the rain and wind. It would take years, but Connor knew that some day he could fish that pond, like all the other mining pits that had filled. Fishing them was great sport, unless you fell in and couldn't climb out. It had happened to his friend and first crush, Lily, the year before at another pond. The company put up a fence, but it didn't last. Everything about coal seemed dangerous.

In the blackness, Connor steered clear of the pond's edge and moved silently across the yard. Puffs of smoke floated up from the shed's stovepipe. He heard laughter from a TV comedy, probably Jackie Gleason and *The Honeymooners*, the noise filtering through the shed's tin walls. The aroma of Hawkins's greasy supper still fouled the air.

He crept toward the entry to Shaft A, his body shuddering from the cold. Once inside, out of the rain and wind, he crouched on a rail that already sported rust. The stench of coal dust, creosote, and human sweat still filled the tunnel, as if the day shift had just ended and the night crew was on its way.

After a few minutes Connor stopped shivering. He played his flashlight's beam against the opposite wall. It caught the glint of small bits of anthracite that peppered the tunnel. As he watched, the pieces of coal seemed to turn into marbles: puries, cat's eyes, swirlies, red devils, all his favorites that he played with at school, all there for the taking.

He slipped off his knapsack and untied one of its pockets. But when he looked, the marbles had become coal once again. He shook his head and wondered if he'd wished them into existence, if some leftover gas in the mine shaft had caused him to dream, to get a bit crazy like his pop sometimes got.

He looked toward the entrance. The wind had died and the rain had turned into spring snow. Everything got quiet as the soft fluff covered the ground. He stood and pushed deeper into the mine, trying not to stumble over the crossties. Ahead a soft light glowed in the passage. Connor sucked in a deep breath. He felt dizzy and slumped against the wall. But slowly his mind cleared and he continued to move toward the glow that seemed to come from a side gallery.

He turned toward the light and into a large, softly lit cavern with a low ceiling, his mouth open, breathing hard. In the middle of the room stood the miners, gray-faced, dust covered, unmoving, frozen in place and time, as if Connor had interrupted a conversation in mid-sentence.

He recognized the men. Angus was his pop's shift boss. Jones had come to the house one time, gotten drunk on the front porch, and puked all over his mother's potted geraniums.

Leroy always messed up Connor's hair when Con brought his father's lunch. The constantly grinning Smiley had no front teeth. And Rich had worked only one summer before getting trapped in a cave-in that closed down Shaft B.

As Connor watched, the figures slowly unfroze and the gallery filled with boisterous conversations about the goddamn prices at the company store; about the girl Rich had just met in the village and had already made it to second base with; about others Connor didn't know who had died of the black lung or simply stopped showing up for work and passed out of their lives; about the pending strike and what they would do to anyone trying to cross union picket lines.

Color had returned to their faces, all except Rich's. Their hands grasped mason jars filled with boilo, their belts loosened, lunch pails and helmets stacked against the wall.

"Hey, everybody, Connor's here," Jones hollered, and the crowd lifted their jars.

"To Connor! May he never again set foot in a goddamn mine." Their voices rang out in a seemingly practiced chorus.

Leroy stepped forward and tousled Connor's hair. "About time you got here, kid. We were just about to start."

The crowd of jostling men parted. Two caskets with their lids open rested on sawhorses against a far wall. The men gathered around. One of the coffins looked small. Edging forward, Connor stared down at his first sweetheart, Lily, dressed in her Sunday best, her lips painted a pale pink, eyes closed as if asleep.

"Yeah, she woulda been a real dreamboat," someone murmured. "But at least you got one good kiss. That's better'n some."

Connor's eyes leaked tears. "We was just fishin', just havin' fun. She fell in when I wasn't lookin'. Turned around and she was gone. Couldn't save her . . . lost her in the black water."

"Should be a crime to leave them mine pits open like that," Angus muttered.

Connor reached forward and touched Lily's lips, willing her to speak but knowing she never would. The pain in his chest grew when he glanced sideways into the other casket.

His father lay stern-faced, wearing his dark suit and flashy red tie, his face showing the damage from every scrape and rock fall, every cave-in that he'd experienced, even the scar on his forehead where a long-gone miner had hit him with a shovel.

"We're sorry about your pop," Angus said. The crowd murmured assent. "None of us should die from black lung. But some of us will."

He raised his jar of boilo. "To Joseph and Lily. May they rise above this darkness and forever breathe heaven's fresh air."

Connor bowed his head and studied his feet, tears dripping onto the gallery's rocky floor.

Rich approached. "It's okay, Con. You'll beat us all. You're smart. You'll get the hell out, fall in love, work with your mind and keep your body safe."

He gave Connor a good shake and turned to rejoin the other miners, who downed their homemade brew.

Connor turned and moved toward the main passage. But the noise of their conversation died. He glanced back. The miners had frozen in place again, gray-faced, coated in dust.

Someone grabbed him by the shoulders and shook. "Wake up, Con. It's time to go."

He opened his eyes to darkness, lying in his bed under heavy woolen blankets. His mother bent over him and ran a hand along his cheek. "Come eat your breakfast before it gets cold."

He pushed himself up and stumbled into the kitchen. A row of suitcases lined one wall near the door. A bowl of oatmeal and a glass of milk awaited him. His mother sat at the table and sipped her coffee.

"We've got an hour until Uncle Frank shows. You be nice to them. Ya know, they didn't have ta take us in. You'll like Philly."

"But Mama, I got friends at school here. And ya can't fish and hike around and do stuff in Philadelphia."

"Yeah, it'll be a big change for both of us."

"I don' wanna change."

"Sometimes we don' get a choice. Jus' don' let nobody call you a coal cracker. Besides, those fools would freeze in winter if it wasn't for King Coal. Now go put on your slippers. You'll catch your death in those bare feet."

"Yes, Mama."

Connor returned to his room and pulled on his Indian moccasins, still squishy wet from the storm. ♦

THE SHEARERS

© by *John Grey*

In a barracks-type building
in the outback,
shearers slept and spat,
stored their few possessions,
none more precious than the blades
that separated wool from sheepskin
in the early spring.

The cots were crammed together,
so men lived in each other's smell,
played cards, told jokes
in their meager spare time,
got by on the station cook's slop
served tepid on metal plates.

Moving as one between properties,
they knew two seasons,
shearing and drinking,
the first at a speed that kept them in work,
the second till the pubs closed
in the city or some thereabouts town.

They aged two years to another's one,
with bent backs, twisted hands,
and skin as parched as evaporated lakes.

Some were legends in the trade.
Others did just enough
to make it to another year.
As the country mechanized,
their numbers fell away.
Some who once knew two seasons
now drank enough
to remember just the one.

CITY LIFE,

YEAR 10

© John Grey

Year after year,
city life defeats me,
hard on the heart,
heavy in the lungs,
and the closeness
of so many strangers
obscures the few friends I know.

Buildings tower in ways
lives cannot.
And, down below,
nothing blooms in cold cement.
As for my feelings,
they're mostly thumps
from bumping into people.

Yet I stay,
dream of making it.
But there's so little light.
And so much shadow.
Night comes in
like it never left.
The purpose of day
is to amuse the penthouses.



I tried to convince hubby to get rid of his six guitars. He resisted all efforts. Hubby tried to convince me to get rid of my sixty-plus bridal gowns. (Yes, you read that correctly.) I also resisted.

Then there were the books. It was too terrible to contemplate getting rid of even one of our treasured books.

We reluctantly sashayed on over to the next stack of boxes. What treasures awaited us there?

Valuable Lenox dishes? Out the door.

Tattered recipes written in my beautiful mother's handwriting? Priceless. We keep!

Real silverware in a mahogany box purchased at a yard sale? Gone.

A leather wallet belonging to my dad with baby's tooth imprint on it? Are you crazy? KEEP!

A framed picture signed by a celebrity? Goodbye, Eddie Van Halen.

Piles and piles of family photos? I clasped these to my bosom.

As time went on, our efforts to clear out forty-plus years of belongings revealed a theme. If it held a worldly dollar value but had no value in our hearts, out the door it went.

A beloved nine-foot Christmas tree was given to a friend's daughter who was celebrating her first Christmas as a new bride. A beautiful Lenox ornament still in the box was released without a twinge of regret. But I ferociously hung onto the Styrofoam ornament our daughter made in kindergarten.

During our dangerous travels into the unknown abyss of the basement, we came across outdated address books shoved into a dark, dank corner. They turned out to be buried treasures as I looked at the addresses of friends and family from so long ago. Some people listed in those books had passed on. Some were still in our current address book, but their address had changed several times. Those simple address books became historical documents, evidence of our family's and friends' changing lives as the years passed.

Unearthed greeting cards contained signatures of relatives and friends who were no longer with us. There, written in ink, were reminders of people loved and lost with the passage of time.

In the end, we did get rid of a few items that tugged at our heartstrings. I realized I could not keep sixty wedding gowns and hubby admitted he could not keep six guitars. I was eventually able to release a few books from his clutches as he pleaded with me to reconsider. It was a compromise of epic proportions.

At some point we knew our personal relationship with the Vietnam vets who had faithfully picked up our treasures each week was coming to an end. We promised to exchange Christmas cards. It was a sad day as we waved goodbye to our heroes.

But we learned an important lesson during those four years it took to downsize our modest three-bedroom home:

Useless stuff has a magic of its very own. ♦

THE MAGIC OF THE USELESS STUFF

© by Susan Potts

One cold, wintry evening before a warm, comforting fire in the fireplace, my beloved spouse whispered three fateful words that crashed my sense of security.

"Time to downsize," he said.

I replied with an astonished, "What? Not downsize! That's what old people do."

Husband: "We ARE old."

After the room stopped spinning around me, my dear husband tried to revive me as I lay flat on the floor. When I regained consciousness, I began to think like a rational adult. He was right. We had a home packed to the rafters with stuff. But how could we get rid of so many items that we held dear to our hearts? Sure, we hadn't looked at some of those precious items for decades, but we treasured them.

How could we toss the Christmas dishes, the Halloween dishes, the St. Swithin's Day dishes? There were too many anguished decisions to make.

JAMA MICHALICA

© by Walt Peterson

I want to go back to that café on Florienska Street where the puppets live. The café with the wrought-iron gate, Michael's Cave, with signatures scrawled on the wall and framed napkins of artists' doodles.

Not listening, you confessed, to lore your teacher once taught in this place of art. You lowered your young eyes as one would fold the corner of a page for later reading. At our table, sweet cream washed the *ciastko* and settled on white plates.

Later, you borrowed my book, read with friends a poem each in English, then passed it on. It was my turn to look away. At the end of the hallway, four students strummed and sang "Go Down Moses" in your language. All of us far away from the disco's throb in the community room.

Pani, I want to go back to that cobblestone street and that café with that air of a burnished polonaise. I want to speak hush-breath stops of your language to those wooden women and men. Ask them about you, see their eyelids flutter, lips moisten and red paint turn to rouge after one hundred years

BABA'S FIRST LAW OF FINANCE

© by Don Ellenberger

The Bible tells us that love of money is the root of all evil. Yet we just can't seem to get enough of it.

So what's the truth about money? I think I know. But I didn't discover it during my student days at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, or my years trading sophisticated financial derivatives at a large bank, or in my current position as a portfolio manager overseeing billions of dollars in client assets.

I learned it as a child from my grandmother, an immigrant from Eastern Europe whose formal education ended in third grade.

"Baba" (Slovak for grandmother) came to America by herself at the age of 16 in 1924, looking for a better life. She stayed with relatives in the smoky mill town of Braddock, bringing with her the old country's traditions and recipes, as well as her unshakable faith.

Baba worked as a housekeeper and nanny for a doctor's family before marrying my grandfather, a fellow immigrant and carpenter. Together they raised four children during the Great Depression.

Baba was a hard worker. While she trusted completely in God's providence, she understood that God helps those who help themselves.

With my grandfather often out of work during the Great Depression of the 1930s, she took in laundry to pay the bills. Those were hard days. Money was scarce and hunger a daily threat.

One day, walking home from the grocery store, Baba was consumed by worry about how she was going to feed her family with a single sack of potatoes, all she could afford to buy. Just as she was about to cross a railroad track, a train thundered past, barely missing her. She was so distracted by her cares that she hadn't even heard it.

But with unswerving faith that God would provide, and an uncanny gift for turning a sack of plain potatoes into delicious potato pancakes, potato soup, and other Old World delicacies, Baba made sure her family didn't go hungry, no matter how tight money was.

She understood that, up to a point, money had tremendous importance: to keep a roof over her loved ones' heads, to keep the house warm during cold winters, to put food on the table for all to share.

But her great insight was that once these basic human needs were met, money had value only to the extent it could be used to help other people.

She never owned expensive clothes or jewelry, never had a maid or gardener, never owned a car, never held a stock or bond. Her vacations were annual weekend retreats to pray with the Vincentian Sisters of Charity.

Once the bills were paid, Baba just stopped worrying about money. Anything extra she had was shared with others. I remember coming home from visits to her house with bags full of soup she had made, bread and cakes she had baked, anything she knew I liked and happened to have in her pantry.

For someone who had so little, she gave so much. Baba would have agreed with Mother Theresa's plea that we all need to "pray for a generous heart," because Baba understood that sharing from our abundance wasn't just an option. It was an obligation.

Baba died in 1992 at the age of 90. She had very little money in the bank, having lived her last years on a small Social Security check and my late grandfather's pension from his carpenters' union.

But she saw her children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren grow and thrive. She instilled in them her work ethic, her humility, and her faith. She had given everything she was and everything she had.

She died almost penniless, but she left her grandson, the career investment professional, with the most important lesson he ever learned about money, something no business school or market guru teaches. Let's call it Baba's First Law of Finance:

Work hard to earn enough to take care of your family so they don't suffer from hunger or homelessness. Trust that God will provide. And try not to worry if you have too little money.

Worry if you have too much. ♦

"I don't like that cat," Aunt Jean complained. "She never comes when I call her."

I rolled my eyes. "No cat comes when you call it. They come when they feel like gracing you with their presence." I ran my hand over Artie's long, white fur. "But in Artie's case, I told you that she was blue-eyes and deaf."

"What good's a cat that can't hear?" My aunt shook her head. "How's she going to catch those rats if she can't hear them squeak while they scamper around in my basement?"

"Her other senses work just fine. She can see and smell them. Give her a chance and she'll touch and taste them, too. Besides, she's named for Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt."

"I want to get rid of the rats, Rick, not see bloody corpses."

I opened my mouth and then shut it again. No use pursuing the illogic of that statement.

Since the sun had sunk behind the hills, I figured the rats would soon come out to play. After my aunt went to bed, I settled down in the kitchen with a cup of coffee and a magazine.

Artie lay on the floor staring mesmerized at the open door to the basement. Her purrs eventually lulled me to sleep.

Sometime later, I jerked awake to see Artie crouched at the top of the basement steps, blue eyes squinting and tail flicking, obvious signs that she smelled a rat.

When she disappeared down the basement stairs, I heard the squeaks of alarm as the rats realized their dilemma. For too many nights they'd been free to roam, scavenging for food and leaving poop on Aunt Jean's spotless linoleum.

I smiled as I heard a growl and the scrape of claws across the floor. A sudden crash was followed by a yowl. Artie shot up the stairs, skidded across the kitchen, and ran into the living room.

I hurried over and clicked on the light to the basement. All was quiet: not even a squeak or a scamper of tiny rat feet.

Sighing, I marched down the steps and searched the basement. The floor plan consisted of one main room with a washer and dryer, sinks, and shelves for canned goods and rarely used items, such as a giant soup pot and a waffle iron.

Old furniture and boxes labeled in black marker filled the rest of the space. Several boxes lay scattered across the floor, obviously the culprits that had frightened Artie.

The furnace and water heater occupied a separate room in the back. I picked up the boxes and stacked them neatly again. And that's when I heard the snarl. A very loud, frightening snarl. It didn't sound like any rat I'd ever heard.

I looked around for a weapon of some kind and grabbed the waffle iron. Hefting its weight, I crept toward the open furnace-room door.

Then something soft and furry wrapped itself around my legs, and I plowed into another stack of boxes. Down they tumbled.

I caught myself from falling by crashing against the wall, banging my shoulder with the old football injury. Curse words spewed from my mouth before the pain eased, and I stared down at Artie.

Her blue eyes looked back at me before she shook her head at my clumsiness. Turning, she headed straight toward a hole in the wall behind where the boxes had stood. My anger dissolved when I realized she'd found one of the rat holes.

That was when another snarl, closer this time, rent the air. I went rigid, and Artie picked up on my reaction. She lowered her body to slink along like a lion on the prowl. Getting a tight grip on the waffle iron, I moved toward the open doorway.

Peering into the shadows of the furnace room, I spotted what I thought was a cat—a furry brown animal with a black mask around its eyes and a striped tail. Um, not a cat then. A raccoon! A very unhappy, confused raccoon.

I glanced around, wondering how a raccoon had gotten into the basement. Aha! The window beside the furnace had a broken pane.

Against Artie's strident objections, I shoved her out and closed the door. I didn't want an all-out war; I wanted a peaceful resolution.

Giving the raccoon a wide berth, I crossed the room and opened the window all the way. Then I piled a few boxes like steps under the window and moved back to the doorway.

After eying me with teeth bared, the animal edged across the room and sniffed the outside air. Three quick leaps, and it was up the boxes and out the window.

Success! I shut the window, planning to come back and fix it later.

In the main room, Artie stood sentinel beside another rat hole. I filled all the holes with caulking and sealed them off.

By the time we finished our job, daylight was creeping in the basement windows. Artie marched upstairs ahead of me, her eyes bright and tail waving.

Aunt Jean waited in the kitchen, the coffeemaker gurgling its final tune. She smiled at my thumbs up before leaning over to pet Artie.

"I knew you'd do it, kitty. Good job!" She offered a few cat treats. Artie accepted them as a suitable reward.

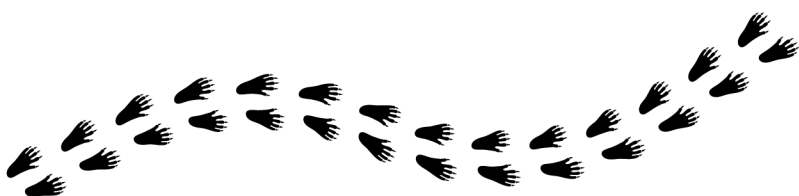
"I'm exhausted," I said. "Wait until you hear what I had to do—"

"I'm sure you were very helpful, dear. You don't mind bringing Artie back again tonight, do you?"

Artie? What about me? My shoulder was killing me, I'd almost been bitten by a raccoon, and I desperately needed sleep. And she was talking about Artie.

"Why?" I asked, getting a bad feeling.

"Didn't I mention it before? Now I need Artie to get rid of the bats in the attic." ♦



Moonlit Magic

© by Janice McLaughlin

It was one of those evenings
when everything goes well.

The night was warm, the moon rose early,
huge and red in the clear eastern sky.

The old laurel trees screened the side porch.
Moonlight struck their dark branches;
the ragged edges of untended shrubs
melted and merged.

Even the bare grassless ground
under the arbor was transformed,
The moon making leafy patterns of lace,
springing up as if alive
on the pale dresses of the wandering ladies.

Little Marika

© by Chris Cottom

Once upon a time in the Kingdom of Prussia, when wolves and bears still prowled the hillsides gobbling up unwary children, lived a girl called Marika. She was eight years old and lived in a wooden cottage at the edge of a forest with her mother, her two big sisters, and a white sheepdog called Olaf.

Her sisters were winsome and slender, while Marika was plain and stocky. The other two shared a bed, but Marika slept on a thin mattress in front of the hearth.

When Lena, the eldest, became betrothed, Mama made sour cherry soup to celebrate.

"After the wedding," she said, filling each girl's wooden bowl, "Marika will join Karina in the bed. Artur is a big strong man; he will look after Lena and she will sleep at his house."

Karina giggled while her sister blushed as red as the soup in front of them.

"Lena can't marry Artur," blurted a shrill voice. "For he will beat her."

They all stared at Marika before Mama bundled her from the table.

"No soup for you, you insolent child," she said. "You shall sleep here as your punishment."

She pushed Marika into the scullery, flung the mattress after her, and drew the bolt. Later her heart softened and she let Olaf into the cold room so he could keep Marika warm. She knew how much her youngest daughter and the old dog loved one another.

As Lena left the wooden church on Artur's arm, the villagers showered them with grain, as was the custom. At midnight the bride's veil was lifted and her long braid cut off to show she'd arrived at womanhood.

For three days, everyone feasted and danced. At last Marika slept in a bed, even if it was old and lumpy and she had to share it with Karina.

But by Whitsuntide, everyone could see that Artur had raised his hand to Lena, for her eye was like a plum. Mama rued the day she had failed to heed the strange warning of little Marika.

"What about me, Marika?" Karina said, across the bed. "Who shall I marry?" Karina was prettier than Lena and had many suitors. "Will it be Lukasz? Or Stefan? Or Emil?"

"I can see husbands only when the moon is round," Marika said, yawning.

Karina had to wait for the moon to complete its cycle before she heard her sister say, as she looked up from stirring the cooking pot over the fire, "You will marry Wiktor."

"Wiktor! But he is only a woodcutter. And he has a warty nose. Are you certain it cannot be Lukasz?"

"I am certain," her sister said, slipping Olaf half a dumpling.

Sure enough, when Marika was collecting eggs a week later, she peeked through the slats of the hen coop to see Lukas on one knee before Karina in the dirt. She heard her sister tell him tartly that she would not marry him. And by the following Midsummer's Day, woodcutter though he was and despite his warty nose, Karina had married Wiktor, exactly as her funny little sister had said.

Marika's prophecies spread throughout the forest. Once a month when the moon was full, fathers would bring their daughters from far and wide through the pine trees to meet her. The men would smoke their pipes outside, keeping close to the oxen hitched to their carts, ever watchful for the glint of amber eyes that meant the wolves were hunting.

Inside, the girls would snuggle around the hearth and watch the pinecones crackle in the blaze, nibbling the gifts of cinnamon cake and gingerbread they'd brought. As they giggled and chattered, their cheeks would shine in the firelight, while the air hung heavy with spices and hope.

"Who shall I marry, Marika?"

"Will mine be handsome, Marika?"

"Shall I marry a prince? Do tell me, Marika. Do tell."

Marika's face would radiate kindness as she looked around the noisy room. Only once did one of the others ask, "What about you, Marika? Who will you marry?"

"I shall always be plain and stocky," she said. "I know I shall never marry." But this time Marika was wrong. When she was sixteen, a young pedlar called Jakub knocked on the door to ask for a drink of water.

Marika's plain face was beautiful to him, and she cared not that he was but a ragamuffin pedlar with his toes peeping through his boots, for she saw that his heart was pure. They fell in love, and before Marika turned seventeen, she and Jakub were dancing at their own wedding feast. Marika was so happy being Jakub's wife that she set aside her remarkable ability to foresee husbands as though it belonged to her girlhood, like the wooden toys she kept in a battered old box.

One evening when the branches were creaking with snow in the light of the full moon, a young woman came to the cabin where Marika and Jakub had made their home.

"Please help me," she pleaded. "I have three children without a father. Tell me who I shall marry."

Marika looked at the widow's patched clothes and invited her to warm herself by the fire. She looked long and hard but could see nothing for the poor woman.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"It's because I've been married once already, isn't it?" the widow said, jumping up.

"No, no. It's because the gift has left me. It's because I have found love and am now married myself," Marika said.

The widow pulled her thin shawl around her shoulders and hurried through the trees as flakes of snow drifted down.

"I hope with all my heart that you will again find love," Marika called after her. As much as she wanted to help the desperate widow, and others like her, she knew her gift would not return while she remained married.

"I hope it never comes back," she said to her mama, "for it would mean I was widowed myself, and I could not bear to lose Jakub."

Marika and Jakub had many children and grandchildren and grew full of years. At last, the family gathered around Jakub and watched his chest rise and fall so slowly that everyone held their own breath, wondering each time if the old man would ever exhale again. As her husband neared the end, Marika took his bony hand, its knuckles red and swollen, the skin stretched and shiny, and placed a candle in it to ease the path of his soul to the afterlife.

When, finally, Jakub's struggles were over, the family spent three nights, the Nights of Emptiness, praying and watching over his body.

As Midsummer drew nigh, the village's young folk gathered wood for the St John's Eve bonfire. Marika's older granddaughters speculated without pause about which maid would dance with which admirer, while the younger ones helped their mothers to make garlands of mugwort and vervain for throwing into the fire to ward off ill luck.

When night fell, under the light of the full moon, the young men would leap across the blaze so their corn would grow as high as the flames. Marika had a special place in her heart for her granddaughter Aniela. The girl was sixteen, plain and stocky as Marika herself had once been, and as shy as a harvest mouse.

Aniela said she wouldn't join the feasting and dancing but would sit with her grandmother, her Babciu, in the cabin the old woman had shared with her husband for so many years. Yet when the singing started, Marika said, "If you will give me your arm, I should like to stroll across there and take a cup of wine. And you can join your friends in the dancing."

"Certainly, Babciu, if you would like to," Aniela said. "But I shall remain by your side to look after you. I know little of dancing."

As Marika and Aniela walked slowly over to the clearing where couples skipped and twirled, they saw a young man standing at the edge of the trees, looking on.

"A raggedy pedlar," Aniela said. "Without even a good jerkin to his name."

"Walk me over to your mother, will you?" Marika said. "And then take that man some food."

"Heavens no, Babciu," Aniela said, trembling a little, although the evening was warm.

Marika stopped, let go of Aniela's arm, and turned to face her.

"You must," she said, in a voice Aniela knew she dare not disobey. "He's hungry. And he wants to dance with you." ♦

With Thanks to Morning

© by Sally Witt

Night sat on me like
a gorilla until the
morning tiptoed in.



HOW TO BECOME A GODDESS

© by *Judith Gallagher*



I suppose most people would suggest that to become a goddess, I should marry a god. But I don't want to do that. I've never sought my identity through a man. Besides, all the gods I know have major personality flaws.

Apollo is a hunk but also a classic narcissist. (Most of them are, almost by definition.) Ares? I'm not fond of adults with the impulse control of five-year-olds.

Haephestus? I really don't mind if a man's homely, but he's a workaholic. Eros? I can't block out the image of him as a toddler; I like younger men, but that's ridiculous. Only the Greeks would arm a cute little cherub with emotionally lethal arrows.

And there's no guarantee that marrying a god will confer any status on a woman. Both the Greeks and the Romans make any children of the union demigods, but the mother remains mortal—and profoundly disliked by the god's wife and ex-wives and pre-existing children, most of whom have godly powers themselves. And pitied by everyone else, as in "So that's the latest human Zeus is cheating on Hera with? Poor thing." So a man is not the answer. I have to figure out how to become a god, not marry one.

"Why?"

What do you mean, why? Every woman wants to be a goddess. I'm talking about how.

"Not every woman. Why do you want to be a goddess?"

I want life to be fair, and clearly the only way that's going to happen is if I have the power to make it so. I waited until I was forty to fall in love, and after only five years of bliss the gods killed him off.

Collateral damage, they say; they had to start that war for geopolitical reasons. But I know they started it for the same reasons they always do. They were just showing off, flexing their muscles, easing their boredom. They didn't care a fig about all the humans they harmed, all the misery they caused. We're just chess pieces to them, to move around on their giant gameboard at their whim. I need enough power to resist them. And maybe save a few other humans from their unfair fates while I'm at it.

Maybe I should emulate an existing goddess. Hmm. Hera is insanely jealous. (Of course, she has reason to be.) Athena is a prude, Hestia is a stick in the mud, Aphrodite is an airhead.

So let's look beyond the Greeks and Romans. Ishtar, perhaps? Maybe, though she's a little too angry for my taste. Not that I blame her. How would you like to start out giving birth to the entire cosmos and end up a mere handmaiden to a male god? Kali? Anger issues. Isis? Her dedication is admirable, but I don't really feel Egyptian, nor do I believe that incest is best.

I've always been quite taken with Kwan Yin. She's just about the only god I can think of whose actions show compassion for us mortals.

"Us? I thought you didn't want to be a mortal."

I thought so too. A human lifespan isn't long enough to accomplish much.

Maybe to improve the position of a few pieces on the gameboard, but it's not long enough to wrest our destinies away from the gods. I'd probably need a thousand years to make an impact.

"Be careful what you wish for."

Hmm?

"A thousand years is a long time. Too long for bone and muscle and blood vessels to keep doing their jobs. Even the gods are not actually immortal, you know. They just age very, very slowly. And while most of them keep looking young, they suffer the aches and pains of aging."

Really? I thought they didn't age or suffer at all. I thought that was why they lack compassion and empathy. If the gods suffer, why don't they learn from it?

"They do. They just don't learn what you want them to. They learn to be even better at manipulating people. If you became a god, you would be hard-pressed not to go down that path."

I would never forget my origins, or my empathy. What I need is to achieve—transcendence, I guess. To rise above the petty concerns that engulf mortals' daily lives by doing something so spectacular that the Great Goddess herself will notice and elevate me to godhood.

"Kind of like becoming a saint?"

Kind of, but better. For one thing, you don't have to die first. You just have to do a lot of good for a lot of people.

"But that's not what most of the gods you just named do."

True, but they inherited their jobs. It's all nepotism up on Mount Olympus, you know. Same in Jondenheim and Yaochi.

I don't have that option. My mother was a waitress and my father was a bookkeeper. They were good people—well, she was, anyway—but not god material by any stretch of the imagination. So I have to earn it on my own.

"How? Perform the twelve labors of Hercules? Kill a dragon, maybe?"

Certainly not! Why should compassion be limited to only one species?

"Some would say humans are the only deserving species."

Some would be wrong. When you think how much damage we've done, you realize we're not even the most deserving species. Hey, that's it!

"What?"

I'll redeem us, at least partway, by undoing some of the damage we've done. I'll do so much good that the Great Goddess will look on me with favor. I'll spend the rest of my natural life helping others.

"Goals are good. But speaking of your natural life—"

What?

"It's over."

No! Where are we, then? Am I in Hell?

"Sorry. You can always try again next time. You might get eighty or ninety years then, if you're lucky. And if you don't take the names of the gods in vain. They hate that." ♦

CHILI SONNET # 18

(after Will Shakespeare)

© Walt Peterson

Shall I prepare thee on a winter's day?
Thou art spicy and more temperate.
Rough winds have blown the buds of May,
And winter's lease hath all too long a date:
Yet sometimes too hot, then eyes shall water
As a maid's complexion reddens.
Still, whiff it in the pot as it doth simmer.
Praise garlic, onions, tomatoes and ground cumin,
Eternal winter shall be thy only loss.
Beware of knaves who brag theirs tops.
Only fools use Herm's Hot Sauce!
O, be bean-humble at the chili fest.
So long as folks do shiver but eyes can see,
So long will honest chili give warmth to thee.

LUCKY ENOUGH

© by Rod Cross

There was a sign on a shed along a trout stream in Bedford County that claimed, "If you are lucky to live close to the water, you are lucky enough."

For a while we were lucky and lived along a limestone spring creek in central PA. To be able to walk to quality fishing is an opportunity to build a delicious intimacy with the stream, its changing moods and the community of wildlife sharing it with you on a daily basis. A deeply satisfying intimacy.

One May evening I was trying to fool a large wild rainbow trout that was rising to the hatching mayflies we call "sulphurs" because of their pale yellow bodies. The trout was holding under the overhanging branches of a willow tree. The difficult casting situation required artful presentation of an imitation of the natural insects. You usually do not get more than one cast over these stream-bred trout before they smell a rat and sulk to the bottom. I made him sulk.

The evening shadows grew soft and long, and I took my rod down. I caught a natural mayfly and saw that the body was a lighter yellow than my pattern and a hook size smaller. These changes happen as the season goes on. Familiarity with the stream helps the observant angler adjust. At home the next day I tied one fly to match those changes, only one. I was determined to take that fly and make the one perfect cast that would rise that spooky fish.

The spring creek flowed through a lush meadow bordered by woods, and as I walked to my spot on the stream a red-winged blackbird made the usual strafing passes at my head as I got too close to the nest.

Sometimes she would muss up my hair. Planning my attack for that evening, I mentioned to my friend Terry what I had in mind. So I wasn't surprised to see him and his two collies coming down the meadow, probably to witness my defeat. Terry sauntered. The collies bounded, with their long fur flowing through the tall grasses as soft as a melody.

Terry and his wife always kept two collies at a time, and they were so well trained to society and field etiquette that I called them the Collies of Distinction. There was no need to tell them they were good dogs; they knew that.

I was already sitting back from the stream, waiting for the rise of the trout. The collies and Terry sat behind me. Soon a mayfly appeared on the surface and was taken by the rainbow in what we call the ring of the rise. Then another. The rhythm was set.

I got up below the fish and gauged my cast over the meadow so as not to scare the feeding trout. Their enemies come from above, blue herons and ospreys. Then the cast was shot upstream, curved to the right and low under the willows. One fly, one cast, and one high hope.

The clear water bulged under the fly. In an explosive instant it was gone, but all four of us were wound too tight and I missed the strike. I could only laugh at my mistake, but I counted the evening as a success. My fly was right, the cast was thought out and artfully executed, and the wild trout was duped.

That was all I needed. The melting twilight got deeper, and we walked out together across the meadow, which was now glittering with fireflies. It looked like a broad, twinkling city.

Terry teased me about missing the fish, of course, but we both knew I was satisfied. The Collies of Distinction led the way through the dark meadow, toward a home that was close to the water, and I knew that I was lucky enough. ♦

*Dedicated to the memory of my fishing partner Terry Ward.
May he forever saunter with his Collies of Distinction.*

NEW RULES FOR WRITING POETRY

© by Candace Kubinec

Go to a library
Find an old book
The well-read kind with
a tattered cover and dog-eared pages
Gently shake it over a blank sheet of paper
until it has no more words to give
Spread the loose words evenly
Fold the paper into a crane and let it fly away
Wait
When the crane returns open it and read its poem aloud
Turn it into a small boat
Set it adrift on the current of dreams encircling the universe

THE ROAD WASN'T ON THE MAP

© by *Janice McLaughlin*

The road wasn't on the map, but when it appeared, apparently out of nowhere, I took it as a sign. My motorcycle sliced through the heavy, damp morning mist that shrouded everything around me. I followed the spiraling road upward into a narrow lane flanked by dark, age-old pines.

The rhythmic cycle and I were one as I cut the morning silence with a rumble. Wind shrieked past, bringing with it the fragrance of pine, fallen leaves, and occasionally pungent smoke.

The road wasn't on the map, but I was glad to explore. I got off my bike as the road became steeper, turning into a pathway. Wildlife abundant came into view as deeper into the woods I walked. From on high I heard an eagle call, and off in the distance the sound of a waterfall.

Eventually the sun burned away the mist, and the brilliance of autumn surrounded me. Leaves of red, gold, and amber fluttered from branches. Cobwebs embellished with sparkling dewdrops trimmed the bushes.

A stream beside the path flashed hypnotically. A startled deer bounded gracefully away. As I continued toward it, the sound of the waterfall increased.

Then finally, on the road that wasn't on the map, there it was—the most exquisite, intense, furious waterfall, frozen mist hovering incredibly above it. The ceaseless roar that had started as a trickle of water upstream exploded, cloaking all other sounds.

Like a many-tiered gown, its cascading layers bounced opalescent liquid silver off the jutting rocks of the cliff. Mesmerized by its fearsome beauty, I lost all track of time.

I realized the sun was setting when I saw small pastel rainbows reflecting off the falls. I felt as if I had been there only a short while, but daylight was quickly vanishing, and I had to return to my bike.

The road wasn't on the map, but I promised myself that someday I would return to retrieve my soul in this peaceful hideaway.

As I got back to the highway, people were already intruding on my solitude. The blare of horns and radios jangled in my ears.

I looked back in the direction of that elusive road, but it seemed to have disappeared. With a sigh, I headed homeward, knowing that I had tasted perfect freedom, if only briefly.

Will I ever again discover the road that wasn't on the map? ♦



Suddenly You!

© by *Tim Landy*

Like a dove
still hungry from
the deep of night,
a thought of you
—from you—
lights upon a
branch of my brain,
fluffs its feathers against
the chill, then
plummets through the
gray of dawn
down to the snow, now
trampled and scratched by
other winged visitors
who peck the seeds
of my thoughts.

Yet to Come

© by *Erin Jamieson*

violet umbrellas
in a field of sunflowers
we raise our glasses
to women with
white cloaks

our heads raised
towards years
yet to come

chanting in unison

YES, YES

© by *Jim Busch*

Raindrops strike pansies
They answer the great question
Nodding yes to life



HUNGRY FINCH BY JANICE MCLAUGHLIN



JANUARY

© by Tammy Rullo

January is a bad bleak bitch
with powerful icy winds that cut
like a sharp tongue chafing exposed flesh
out for blood
lying in stillness waiting to lash out at anyone
who dares to tread in harshness
like gray geese blending with gray sky that huddle together
in fearful masses for protection from the pelting
of below-zero sleet
causing my feet to slip out from under me
the thud of my body echoing through the still forest
while her crony crows
cackle with laughter.

challenge accepted.

oh January,
i shout,
staring her down and steadying myself determined to
prove my resilience on the slick trails lost in deep snow made
visible only by
the coyote tracks guiding my steps forward
in awe of her strength
divinity
solitude
her ability to equalize humanity
navigating the final steep hill and turning to look out over
her stark beauty nodding in reverence
a red-bellied woodpecker crying out
touché touché.

FOX ON ROCK BY TAMARA DIBARTOLA



THE FOREST

© by Carl Smith

In the early morning, as the darkness leaves the dark and the light eases over the hill, stride through the dew-dampened blades and enter the forest. Do not fear the foreboding darkness of its morning-shadowed entrance. Push past and enter a world unseen.

Pass under the leafy sun-filtering canopy overhead and continue your journey. Walk along the narrow, winding pathways. Let your footsteps take you into the deepness of the unknown.

Begin to slow your steps when your senses fill with the musty, moist earthen smell of this secret hidden world. Stop, sit and listen. Quietly let your mind hear the music of the woods. Turn your ear to the energy of the forest. Remain still and its energy, its voice will find you.

In the quiet . . . in the stillness . . . a bird trills . . . behind you around you . . . unseen creatures scutter and scurry over the damp earthen carpet, hurrying to somewhere yet nowhere.

Stay still and listen to the forest sing to you. Bubbling, bursting brooks . . . creaking, cracking, crying sycamore . . . bending, bowing branches rubbing and scraping against each other creating songs for your ear alone. Listen.

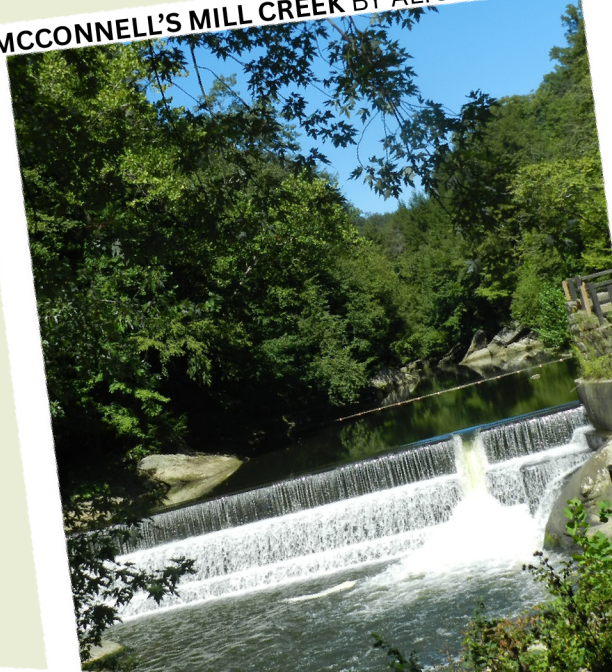
Become lost in the woodland's rhythm. Get lost in the sights and sounds around you. Experience the in and out of your breathing . . . the pulsing of your heart . . . the freshness of your thoughts. Let the pungent smells of the dark, damp forest wrap around your senses. Let it calm.

Listen to the forest.

TIGER SWALLOWTAIL BY ALICIA STANKAY



MCCONNELL'S MILL CREEK BY ALICIA STANKAY

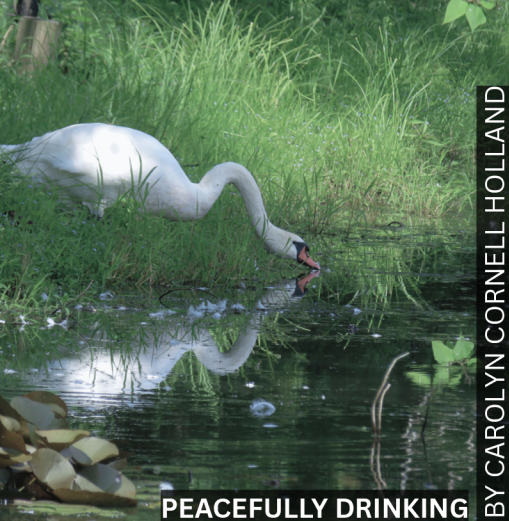


BRILLIANT FALL LEAVES BY ALICIA STANKAY



HAVING A FEAST BY CAROLYN CORNELL HOLLAND





PEACEFULLY DRINKING

BY CAROLYN CORNELL HOLLAND



PINK HIBISCUS

BY CAROLYN CORNELL HOLLAND



BRIDAL VEIL BUSH

BY MARGE BURKE

Refrain

© by Janice McLaughlin

The rosebud opened its petals wide,
fragrance wafted into the air
forming musical notes.
The notes circled the trees,
the trees swayed to the song.
Bees danced merrily
among the flowers,
all alive with music.

**

Humidity began to build
with sultry tones.
Soon the notes fell as raindrops,
gentle, but still with rhythm.
The earth soaked them up.
Grass grew green with melody,
humming happily in the moisture.
Night appeared on the horizon.

**

Fireflies twinkled rhythmically
Nature's thirst was quenched.



BUBBLES THRU THE WINDOW

BY JANET R SADY

Aging Wabi-Sabi Style

© by Tammy Rullo

my bones sing
a nightingale's song

announcing a crimson sky twilight
in whispers of bamboo limbs

whose uprooted tendrils
spawn life and death

wearing phlox
and fungi and otherness

and a haunting of pale blossoms
that float on gentle winds

blanketing memories
embroidered on silk

tears that pool on rounded stones
beneath late-blooming trees

gnarled into humility
by enshrined regrets

sprouting plums
sweetened by life's purpose.



SUMMER BEE

BY VICKIE BABYAK



AUTUMN SUNFLOWERS

BY VICKIE BABYAK



BEE ON DAFFODIL

BY CAROLYN CORNELL HOLLAND

TELL ME

© CANDACE KUBINEC

Don't tell me about your new car,
with its fancy dashboard and backup camera.
Don't tell me about your latest trip to
some foreign country with beaches and sunshine.
Don't tell me how long you waited in the drive-thru
line for your morning latté.

Tell me instead about birdsong in the morning,
the male goldfinches singing their hearts
out, dressed in their brightest yellow feathers.
Tell me about the row of orange and pink
zinnias, planted especially for bees and butterflies.
Tell me how much you care about this old planet
with all its light and darkness, its joys and sorrows.
Tell me the stories of its creation and the hope for its future.



RAIN-KISSED BI-COLOR ROSE BY LOUISA FORDYCE



TANGLED HAIR BY TAMARA DIBARTOLA



BRILLIANCE OF SUMMER SKIES BY SUSAN POTTS

ONCE THERE WAS A TIME

© *by Joe Potts*

Journey with me to long-lost yesterday, to the time of my youth. Was it a better place? In my mind, in many ways it was.

We arrive at a Christmas of yore. Look, there's my mother in the kitchen. She's busy baking and getting the holiday meal ready. Her homemade frilled apron has embroidered holly branches and candy canes. She's singing softly as she works. My mother, you see, loved Christmastime above all else. And it showed. As the December holidays approached, a Christmas song was always on her lips.

Wonderful aromas filled the air. Sometimes I'd sit at the kitchen table pretending to help her, and she pretended I was being helpful. "Joey, would you like to test the cookies?" she'd say. Fresh-baked treats were the perfect antidote to the chilly snow visible through the steamed window.

The food on the menu varied, but my mother's song was the same. I have bittersweet memories of that song. Her presence then brought as much joy and comfort as her absence now brings heartache.

You should understand that my mother was not a singer you'd normally want to listen to. If that sounds harsh, I'd say the same thing about myself. You see, I inherited every bit of my mother's singing talent. That's a shame, because my dad was an excellent singer. He sang bass in a barbershop quartet. He tried to teach me to sing and to harmonize, but I've had better luck teaching my cats calculus.

One of the reasons I have heartfelt memories of my mother's holiday music is that she knew she couldn't sing, but she loved Christmas so much that she couldn't hold back. The joy of the season filled her, and it had to come out. It would have erupted from her in some other way if she hadn't sung, and that could have been dangerous. She might have pirouetted around the house and bowled over the Christmas tree or fallen down the stairs. No, singing was definitely the best available option.

I never heard her song anywhere else. Not then, not ever. My dad was always singing, including at Christmastime, but he stuck to the popular offerings.

My mother's song was off the beaten path, off any path at all, as far as I can tell. I imagine my mother knew it from her youth, and it comforted her to sing it. The only lyrics I remember went something like this:

"Christmas, it is Christmas,
it is Christmas everywhere.

In the mountain, in the valley ..."

I'm not clear where else the song said Christmas was. Maybe the plains, maybe the village square. I just knew it was certainly Christmas in my house.

My mother was there, my father was there, my older sisters were there. The reliable old Lionel locomotive chugged around the track, puffing white smoke from its stack. All was right in my world. That was enough for me.

A bit of the melody remains in my mind, but as I said, I can't sing. Any attempt on my part to sing, hum, or warble it would be a disaster. To me, though, it was simply lovely.

If I could, through some miracle, transport a singer who is long gone to my house, it wouldn't be Nat King Cole, or Crosby, or Sinatra. It would be my mother singing her long-lost Christmas song.

As I get older, the weak winter sun fails to chase the chill from me on December days. But when my memory transports me to those Christmas days past, the ice in my soul thaws. I'm warmed as if I were sitting once again on the hot-water radiator in our old living room, as my mother sings and my dad fastidiously places tinsel on the tree.

Returning to the original question: Was it a better place? I imagine it would be impossible for children today to hold onto believing in Santa for as long as my sisters and I did. Not only is the Internet an innocence killer, but the world is much more cynical than in my youth. The wonder of childhood has a much tougher time surviving today.

When I get sentimental about the past, I find myself wishing our modern world hadn't thrown away so many of the good things that our vanished age possessed. If I could return to that time and bring something back, it would be the gentle aspects of our society that have been replaced so often with a coarseness we would have been shocked at.

And I'd bring back my mother's song. Then it would be Christmas in the mountain, and in the valley, and in our hearts, and everywhere. ♦

WRITER'S LAMENT

© *by Carolyn Cornell Holland*

My mind is befuddled,
my fingers dyslexic.
My poetry writing
is quite anorexic.
I continue on.

My candle burns down,
my paper runs out.
My pencil lead breaks,
my mind surrenders.
I call it a day.

Red Rocks

© *by Zach Murphy*

It was seven years to the day since Rod and Miriam found out that their son, Will, had died during a hiking trip in Sedona. He'd fallen into a crevice and snapped his neck. His body was found a few weeks later.

The living room was quiet and drab. A thin ray of sunrise pierced through an opening in the curtains, illuminating a flurry of dust particles in the air. Rod was in the kitchen starting up the coffee machine.

Miriam walked into the living room and took a dust cloth to the coffee table. "I'll have mine iced today," she said. "This dry heat is enough to make a fountain feel parched."

"It's a hot one," Rod said as he opened the freezer door. He squinted at a full tray of ice cubes as the chilled air graced his pockmarked face. "I think I'll do the same."

Rod prepared the iced coffee, walked into the living room, placed the two glasses on a pair of coasters, and sat next to Miriam on the couch. He grabbed the remote and pointed it toward the TV.

"What are you doing?" Miriam asked.

"What do you mean? I'm turning on the TV."

"We agreed not to turn on the news on this day," Miriam said.

Rod dropped the remote in the crack between the couch cushions. "Oh, my gosh," he said. "How did I not realize?" He launched up from the couch, dashed to the kitchen, and traced his finger over the flower-themed calendar on the refrigerator. "August 15," he said. He turned toward Miriam. "Am I awful for forgetting?" he asked.

She shook her head. "You haven't forgotten our son," she said. "Just the date when we found out. It must have slipped your mind."

Rod walked back into the living room and sat back down on the couch. "Miriam, I have to tell you something."

"What's that?"

"A couple of autumns ago when I went golfing with Joe Tamburello," he said, "I didn't go golfing."

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"I went to Red Rock to see the spot where it happened."

Miriam set her coffee down on the table. "I knew something was peculiar that day," she said. "Whenever you go golfing, you always spend the rest of the night talking about eagles and birdies and hawks and whatever other shots you made."

She ran her hands through her wavy grey hair. "Why did you keep it a secret?"

"Because I knew it would upset you," Rod said.

"Well, that's no reason to keep a secret," Miriam said.

"I wanted to see what he saw," Rod said.

Miriam took a deep breath. "What was it like?"

"It was a beautiful view, Miriam," Rod said. "The most beautiful view."

His eyes widened. "The rock formations were like works of art. Miles and miles of them. And the shades of red were like none I've ever seen before. It was as if God himself painted them."

"Wow!"

"But what struck me the most," Rod said. "What struck me the most is how short the fall was. Maybe five, six feet. It must have happened so fast. So fast." Rod took a sip of his coffee. "He probably didn't even feel anything."

"You're right," Miriam said. "Probably didn't even feel anything."

They sat in silence and stared into the blackness of the idle TV.

"Hell of a view," Rod said. ♦



Sofia

© *by Sally Witt*

"I know what love is," she said.
Age five, of course she does.

Born in Ukraine near Russia,
she learned the languages of both.
Age three, her country was attacked.
With mommy and babushka
she left her city by darkened trains.
They sheltered till the only possibility
was far: to go to Kansas in America,
the northern central plains.

Tonight the three of them
have dinner with eight sisters.*
She presents invisible balloons,
enthalls the group with languages
—she added English easily.
When someone speaks of love
she readily announces:
"I know what love is."

She does.
And may she always.

**Religious women, in this case
Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, KS.*

CLASSIFIED SECRETS

© by Jim Busch

Like most men my age, the older I get, the better I was. I tend to exaggerate about my employment. When we meet someone, after exchanging names we usually ask, "What do you do?" I used to adopt my best Bond voice and say, "It's classified."

This illusion never lasted long, as I'm not suave, debonair, or sporting a finely tailored white tuxedo. I don't hold the missile launch codes or the position of our submarine fleet.

I'd soon reveal that I was a classified advertising manager. I worked for years in the Yellow Pages (remember them?), then PennySaver classified magazines and newspaper classifieds.

It could be mundane, but it had its moments. Sometimes a typo created an interesting situation.

For example, one of my salespeople placed an ad in the PennySaver that read, "Children for sale, many sizes available, all in nice shape." A critical word was missing from the ad: clothing. Surprisingly, the ad buyers received many calls from people wanting to adopt their children.

An ad for a pet read, "Border collie, beautiful coat, 5 years old, has shots." Unfortunately, the rep typed an *i* instead of an *o* in shots, which brought a lot of laughs and posts on social media.

As a front-line sales manager, you never want a caller to say, "This is Agent Patterson from the DEA. Is your company in the habit of selling drug paraphernalia?"

I hesitated. "No-o-o-o. Why would you think that?"

Agent Patterson said gruffly, "We got a call that you were selling hypodermic needles in the PennySaver."

Even though our reps knew they could not sell anything that required a prescription, the rep was trying to help someone dispose of their parent's diabetic needles. I assured the agent that it was against our policy, and I would reinforce the policy with a memo to the entire classified team.

One time I was called to the front desk to speak to two gentlemen who had buzz cuts, ratty trench coats, and a bulge where they holstered impressive pistols. I knew right away that they were cops. "Can I help you gentlemen?"

One Postal Inspection agent said, "We had a report of someone using your publication in the commission of a robbery. Will you share your records with us, or do I need to get a subpoena?" He showed me a housecleaning ad.

I told him our company policy was to cooperate with law enforcement. I provided the name and contact information of the person who ran the ad. They left without comment.

Two weeks later, the two officers returned and told me they wanted to run a quarter-page display ad reproducing the ad with a request that anyone who had hired this housecleaner contact the postal inspectors. The agent who did all the talking asked, "How much will the ad cost?"

"I'll authorize it for free," I said.

He said, "No, no. We've got a budget and you've been so helpful to us." He wrote a federal check for the amount.

It turned out the person who had run the ad had done more than clean customers' houses. She had cleaned out their jewelry boxes and anything else of value. Yet the criminal was foolish enough to use her real phone number and credit card.

The agents gleefully reported their ad had unearthed several crimes. One person who responded had asked an attorney if the housecleaner thief could be arrested for robbery. But the attorney said the local police would probably just file a report. The postal inspectors saw it as a serious case of mail fraud and arrested the person on charges that carried forty years in federal prison.

Sometimes we saw heart-warming situations. One of the many reasons I liked working in advertising was that we helped people. One of my reps said, "I'm not sure if this is a scam or not, but somebody's placing an ad every week for one item, like an umbrella for \$3 or a pair of gloves for \$4."

I called the advertiser on the ruse of running a quality check on my employee. He was happy to take my call, as he was very lonely since his wife had passed away. He'd been clearing out their house one piece at a time and just wanted to talk to people.

On another occasion, a woman called to sell a Hammond organ. She told my salesperson it was the last memory she had of her husband. He had scrimped and saved to buy it for her, but now she needed the money to pay her taxes.

My reps decided they'd rather help the widow keep her precious organ than get paid a commission for her ad. So they took up a collection for her. She was very appreciative, and I was very proud of my staff.

One of the strangest requests I ever received was from a woman who asked to hold her wedding in my company's parking lot. I asked why she wanted to be married at the PennySaver.

She told me, "I divorced a blankety-blank man and got custody of his pickup truck. I put an ad in the PennySaver to sell it. A fellow came to look at it and we started talking, which led to us going for coffee. Then one thing led to another, and now he gets both the truck and me."

My superior agreed we should make an event out of this. We held the wedding in our conference room.

The bride brought in the preacher. I supplied my reps with rice to throw and played the wedding march on a boombox. The happy couple celebrated their nuptials in the PennySaver. Being a clever marketing person, I took many photos and created an ad that said, “You can find anything in the PennySaver—even a spouse!”

Our company policy was that if you were selling something for \$25 or less, the ad was free. This made for a lot of great ads that inspired readership. Our most touching story started with another rep suspecting a scam. A woman had called to say she wanted to give away her house.

I spoke to her and found that it was a well-kept house in a nice neighborhood that she could have sold for tens of thousands of dollars. But she didn’t need the money, and all her children owned nicer houses than she did. Packing up for her move, she became nostalgic for the sounds of children running through the house she had shared with her late husband. She wanted to give the joy that she and her family had had in that house to a young couple just starting out.

I told her, “If we ran that ad, your phone would melt from all the responses.” We had a P.O. box where people could reply in care of the PennySaver. It was normally an expensive option, but I didn’t charge her. And I was right: We got mailbag after mailbag of responses.

She carefully read every letter. Then she interviewed the respondents who touched her heart. Finally she decided to hand the keys over to a young couple with a two-year-old child and one on the way. The generous homeowner was very happy to share the site of so many happy memories, and the young couple were ecstatic to be receiving a house they could never have afforded. I was happy we could help bring joy to two families.

Working in classified ads may not sound very exciting, but it put me in touch with people of all types, from those who tried to use our services to rob people to one who gave an entire house to strangers. That’s why I never tired of that job. ♦

WHAT’S IN YOUR . . .

© *by Nancy Clark*

A legally licensed, readily recognized credit-card corporation continues its audacious ploy and tenacious quest to find out “What’s in your wallet?” In my book, the intrusion is a major invasion of privacy.

Frankly, what’s in my wallet is none of their business, unless I make it my business to engage with their business. Nor do I care what’s in your wallet. “To each his own” is my personal motto, but cursed with a cornucopia of curiosity, I occasionally ruminate about the contents of a particular “thing” that deserves the same respect and privacy conferred on a wallet.

With absurd audacity and lacking a legal license, I ask, “What’s in your . . . junk drawer?”

’Fess up, folks. We all have at least one such catch-all in our home. It’s that handy-dandy holding tank into which we nonchalantly toss stuff awaiting an assignment—or that we simply don’t know where else to put “it.”

At the risk of tainting my dubious reputation for preaching, “There’s a place for everything, and everything has its place,” I humbly admit to being the major contributor of “its and bits” now colonizing one particular junk drawer. Redemption was mine a time or two in the last fifty-plus years when I planted my mitts on a particular “it” just in time to meet a dire need.

Now, just sign this unofficial waiver promising to never reveal its contents, and you’re welcome to sneak a peek into our kitchen junk drawer (yeah, there are others). Neb your heart out.

Let’s begin with this tattered Ziploc sandwich bag packed with twisty ties.

There are countless ways former bread-bag ties can save you woe. Our inventive son once twisted a few of them together to create a temporary shoestring.

These pushpins affix multiple appointment reminders, newspaper clippings, raffle ticket stubs, and such to our kitchen corkboard, where we expose some of our senior eccentricities.

This retired Tupperware bowl holds a plethora of small but mighty magnets that miraculously convert our blank refrigerator door into a canvas for family photos and the budding artistry of our six incredibly cute great-grandkids.

A tuna tin holds a glut of miscellaneous screws and nails—basic hardware often held between the clenched teeth of our live-in handyman. A stockpile of screwdrivers hogs at least 30% of the drawer.

Toothpicks? Beyond liberating corn kernels lodged between back teeth, these sturdy buggers are da bomb for plugging over-drilled holes.

Our aging peepers could not decipher product expiration dates—or the usage directions on laxative packaging—if not for this irreplaceable magnifying glass.

“What’s with the turkey skewers?” you ask.

“Lock busters,” we reply. Invaluable implements for rescuing a panic-stricken three-year-old who routinely locks himself in the powder room.

Arrogating real estate yet unclaimed is a sorry assortment of home-office supplies, including blunt-bladed scissors, capless ink pens and point-less pencils, a mini-stapler, rubber bands, paper clips—and (yikes!) one desiccating gum eraser.

Do ya get the picture?

In this age when bigger is better, little things still mean a lot. Look kindly upon the unheralded treasures in your junk drawers, my friends. You never know when one of those itty-bitty “its” will save your . . . posterior.

And now that I’ve shown you mine, will you show me yours? ♦

ON A LONG, ICY WINTER'S NIGHT

© by *Barbara Brooks*

I, a traveler, find myself in the canyon of loss
with only my dog as a companion.
It is strewn with boulders large and small.
I am blocked from spring's verdant valley.
I know it exists; I have seen it in my dreams.
Snow and ice blanket the canyon's stones.
I stumble along the treacherous track,
faint as moon's shadow.

The trail takes us up and down, whips
us from one direction to another. At times
I just want to lie down in the cold, go to sleep.
My dog won't let me; there is no one else
to care for him.

Soon the route becomes straighter but still rocky.
I learn to step only on flat stones, keeping
my balance. Finally, my eyes on the mouth
of the canyon, I begin to see the dewy grass
in the valley's basin. The dog and I enter,
knowing spring will soon green the valley's floor.

MABEL

© by *Joan Morrow*

It is a cold, blustery day in January. The alarm goes off at five o'clock, as it has been doing for seventy-five years. Mabel drags herself out of bed, puts on her slippers, goes into the bathroom, washes her face, puts on a tattered robe, and goes down two flights to the basement.

She opens the furnace door, pokes the smoldering fire, and puts in two shovels of coal. She then returns to the kitchen and has a cup of tea, made with a bag that has already been used four times. She finds a piece of stale toast she meant to have for breakfast yesterday.

She started this routine right after she and Edgar got married when she was nineteen and he was twenty-two. His shift at the mill started at six-thirty, so she needed time to prepare him a hearty breakfast and pack his bucket. Then she got her five kids up for breakfast, packed their lunches, and sent them off to meet the bus that took them to school.

Now there's no need for any of that. But old habits are hard to break—she still gets up at five.

She rinses out her cup, wipes the counter, fluffs up the pillows on the couch, throws last Sunday's paper (which she didn't read) in the trash, picks up an old issue of *Good Housekeeping* from one table and lays it down on another.

She picks up a dust rag and begins dusting, remembers to water the flowers, goes looking for her glasses, goes into the kitchen and wonders what she's looking for.

When her friend, Emily, brings in her meals on wheels, Mabel asks her if she knows where Edgar is, only to be reminded that he's been dead for twenty years.

Emily made Mabel the last stop on her route so she could spend some time with her.

She makes Mabel a fresh cup of tea with a fresh teabag and cuts her a piece of coffee cake she brought.

They chat a while, but this morning Mabel seems more vacant than usual. She nibbles her cake and ignores her tea.

Emily throws away some moldy bread, pours some sour milk down the drain, and picks up some dirty dish towels she will take home to launder.

Emily asks Mabel whether she has heard from any of her children, knowing the answer. She goes to the desk and finds several Christmas cards Mabel addressed to her grandchildren but did not mail.

Mabel admits that she should have followed her children's advice and closed up the upstairs. She says she will once she has time to go through things and decide what to keep and what to throw out.

She used to be meticulous in her dress, but now she is unaware of her appearance.

The children live far away. They all promised to write every week and come to visit at least twice a year, and they assured their mother that she could call them any time of the day or night if she needed something. They wondered why she never answered when they called. They didn't know the phone had been removed because she couldn't pay the bill.

Now all she has are her memories to ease her lonely nights, and these are becoming fewer. When night falls, she turns out the lights, turns the radio down low, and half slumbers until she gets up the strength and will to go upstairs to bed.

She still grieves for Edgar. She grieves for their firstborn, a lovely girl who died young tending to the sick in a hospital miles away. She grieves for her firstborn son, who was tragically killed by a runaway train. She aches for her other children, who are scattered far and wide.

They all promised to return for Christmases and Fourth of July, but she always said they had their own families to care for. Those within a day's drive came to bury their father; the others sent nice cards and had flowers sent to the funeral home.

Even phone calls over the years became rare. She understands.

For years she sent a birthday card with a dollar and a little note of encouragement to each of her grandchildren, even when dollars were scarce. With time, their acknowledgments became less frequent.

Even her own children became careless in remembering her birthday or Mother's Day. She understood. Now she is hard pressed to remember her grandchildren's names.

Mabel was a striking beauty in her day: slim, athletic, with cascading golden hair, an impish smile, and a quick wit—someone every young man wanted to know. She was head cheerleader and homecoming queen in high school, with a four-point GPA. Edgar was a tall, slim, quiet fellow with sandy hair and a face that was always smiling. He played all sports in high school and had girls swooning all over him.

Mabel and Edgar had a humble wedding conducted by their pastor before a small gathering of family and friends, followed by a simple reception in the fellowship hall with sandwiches and cookies made by their mothers and friends. They took a two-day honeymoon with a friend's fifteen-year-old Ford, whose radiator boiled over on the way.

Edgar never missed an opportunity to tell people how special Mabel was and how much he loved her. Mabel blushed whenever anyone talked about him. Edgar worked hard to care for his family and Mabel worked hard to be a good wife and mother. They were both convinced they were meant for each other.

Mabel tries to remember setting up housekeeping in a small house surrounded by parents, aunts and uncles, friends and neighbors.

She tries to recall the joy they knew at the birth of their first child, a daughter, all laces and bows, and their second child, a handsome son, his father's pride. She forces herself to recall the births of their three other children, tended by her mother and a midwife.

She tries to recall family celebrations: Christmas, Easter, birthdays, Fourth of July picnics, town celebrations and parades. But it is becoming harder and more frustrating to try.

Mabel is getting feebler and needs more help these days than she will accept. Emily tidies the house, pays the bills, sets out Mabel's pills, and makes sure she has food in the house. She arranged for home health care to visit twice a week to bathe Mabel and check her vitals. The children keep pushing Mabel to go to an assisted-living facility (whenever they bother to write), but that's the extent of their efforts. Emily has taken the liberty of writing the children about their mother's needs, but all she gets are empty promises. Even threats get no response.

One morning Emily lets herself in as usual. The house is dark and cold. The shades are drawn and the curtains closed. She goes to the kitchen, where Mabel usually waits for her, but she is not there. She calls out and looks through the house. She goes upstairs to check Mabel's bedroom and bathroom. She is not there.

Then she remembers chastening Mabel for venturing down the basement steps. She cries out when she finds Mabel collapsed near the furnace, the door open and a shovel at her feet.

She calls 911 and waits for the ambulance. She calls the one daughter she was told to contact in emergencies but gets no answer. She follows the ambulance to the hospital and sits by the bedside holding Mabel's hand.

Doctors say it's a matter of time, just twenty-four hours at most.

She tries the daughter again—this time she gets a response. The daughter comes late that evening. She says she has notified her siblings and will stay over to make arrangements for her mother's funeral.

Three days later the rest of the children arrive. They argue over arrangements but have a service for their mother in the little church where their parents had their wedding. A few people from the church attend, but all of Mabel's friends have preceded her in death.

They pay their mother's debts, thank Emily for her care of their mother, and tell her they'll return within the month to dispose of the property.

Emily grieves for her dear friend, Mabel. She counts it a blessing and a privilege to have had her friendship. She is angry that her children neglected her so.

She cannot help thinking that someday they may be in a similar situation.

What goes around comes around. ♦

That Ship Has Sailed

© by Joe Potts

"That ship has sailed," I often sigh
When chance and luck have passed me by.

I've missed so many boats, avast!
The ocean teems with sail and mast.

I must admit with little joy
I've launched more ships than Helen of Troy.

It's quite a fleet that's sailed away
While I sat on the dock of the bay.

Ships enough to be a regatta,
Ships galore, like the Spanish Armada.

The chances of my youth have faded,
My mind is old, my spirit jaded.

The saddest words are not "I've failed,"
But "I never tried, that ship has sailed."

Now I chant this wistful refrain:
Perhaps I should've taken the train.

SOLITUDE

© by Judith Gallagher

"We've added one more step," the nurse said brightly.

Caroline sighed. "I've always thought my annual physical had more than enough steps."

"Physically, you check out great for your age! But we treat the whole patient now. After you get dressed, head to Room 5." The nurse scuttled out of the exam room.

As Caroline buttoned her shirt, she contemplated just ducking out. She'd learned when Frank died that the sky wouldn't fall if she didn't do every single thing the rules required. She'd said no to the open-casket visitation. She couldn't bear to remember him in clown makeup and a suit he'd worn only once a year. There'd been some gossip, but she told herself she didn't care anymore.

Yet she headed down the hall, thinking of a Kafkaesque *Twilight Zone* episode. I'm sure I won't be facing a judge, jury, and executioner, she told herself. And the furniture won't be all dark surfaces and hard edges looming over me.

It was not. Room 5 was painted a cheerful yellow, with upholstered chairs on both sides of an oak table. A man in a white coat said, "Caroline? Come in. I'm Dr. Paulsen."

He shook her hand as she sat down. "I'm glad you came."

"The nurse insisted. I'm not sure why I'm here."

"We know you lost your husband this year," he whispered. "I'm so sorry."

"Thank you." *Lost? I know exactly where he is*, she thought.

"Research shows that living alone is bad for your health, and I wanted to talk with you about some solutions."

"Solutions? There's no problem," Caroline said firmly.

Dr. Paulsen looked at her with pity.

"Of course I miss my husband very much, but one of the few silver linings to his absence is that I love my solitude."

"Solitude is another word for loneliness," the doctor said.

"It really isn't. I love being able to read for hours without interruption or sit and watch the birds and squirrels. And have tea and toast for dinner if I feel like it."

Dr. Paulsen made a note.

"Besides, I don't live alone. I have a cat."

"That helps, but you need to be around people. Think of this as a prescription." He handed her the note with a smile that looked forced.

She read aloud in disbelief, "Talk to at least one new person a day? Remember, *people are medicine*?" She realized her voice was rising and took a breath. She looked the doctor straight in the eye. "I have friends," she said. "I socialize almost every week, and that's plenty for me."

"I'm sure it seems that way," he replied. "That's the nature of your disorder."

"Disorder! So now enjoying peace and quiet and my own company is a disorder? What is your field, Dr. Paulsen?"

"I'm a psychiatrist."

"A noble profession, but surely you don't need to drum up business among people who are fine."

Dr. Paulsen steeped his hands. "Is anyone really fine?" he mused.

Caroline growled, to her surprise. "I'm sure many people are. And they stay fine by not wallowing. Now if you'll excuse me, I have errands to do." Before I go home to my peaceful house.

"I'm afraid I can't sign off on you yet," the doctor said.

"I'm sorry you feel that way, but I'm fine. And I'm leaving." She stood up.

"But, but . . ." he sputtered. "Your insurance company won't cover this visit unless I sign off."

Caroline considered tearing his throat out. Her teeth felt longer than usual. Maybe she wasn't completely fine. "I'll have a long talk with a friend tonight," she promised.

"Good. But I think you need loosening up. People can learn to carry on a conversation by watching talk shows."

"I'm actually a pretty good conversationalist."

He smiled like a proud parent. "Glad to hear it. But humor me. Stop next door and watch a little talk TV. Then strike up a conversation with someone on your way home."

Caroline weighed her options. This guy was like a terrier with a bone, and she did not want to pay for this visit. She could mute the TV and read. Then Paulsen would sign the form and she'd be out of there. "All right."

He accompanied her into the room, grabbed the remote, and turned on some daytime palaver. "Do you like this one?" he asked.

"Sure." What did it matter? She wouldn't be listening.

"I'll be back in half an hour," the doctor said.

"Meanwhile, imagine yourself part of the conversation." He closed the door behind him.

That was when Caroline realized he'd taken the remote. And left the volume way too high. And chosen one of the most annoying talk shows. She tried to unplug the TV but couldn't get the plug out of the wall. Her purse would probably make a satisfying crash against the flat screen, but she didn't want to pay for that, either.

After twenty minutes of a Jerry Springer rerun, Caroline was pacing like a wolf. She had never felt such rage. She was seconds from smashing the screen when Dr. Paulsen walked into the room, remote in hand.

"Enjoying yourself?" he said cheerfully.

"I can't hear you over . . ." She gestured at the TV.

He lowered the volume slightly. "I think you need another half hour."

"I really don't. Please turn off the TV." She reached for the remote.

The doctor raised it above her head, just as her annoying brother had done when they were kids. A round of even louder audience heckling assaulted her senses.

Without thinking, Caroline jumped. This time her growl shook the room. Her teeth ripped into his hand.

He dropped the remote. "You bit me!" he cried.

She scooped up the remote and turned off the program. Quiet at last, except for his whimpering. "You told me people are medicine. Well, you taste like castor oil." ♦

JOHN L. NACCARATO MEMORIAL AWARD

Sponsored by Michele Jones

The LVW Student Poetry contest recognizes the best poem within each grade category. To ensure fairness across age groups, three “best of the best” awards were established—allowing younger students, such as those in fourth grade, to be evaluated separately from high schoolers. Many students who win in the younger grades continue to participate in the contest throughout their academic careers.

These awards are generously sponsored by longtime member Michele Jones in memory of her grandfather, John L. Naccarato. His passion for poetry continues to inspire a new generation of young poets across southwestern Pennsylvania.

These are the top three winners of the LVW’s 34th Annual Student Poetry Contest.

Congratulations to them and to all the winners.

The Best of the Best in Grades 4-6

Wonderful World

by Holly Deal

Eagle View Elementary School, Grade 4

All alone in this wonderful world,
on a canoe in the river.

I drift along, admiring the big blue sky
and watch a mother duck leading her four fuzzy chicks.
Little fish swim circles all around me.
Birds soar in the sky.
Butterflies flutter on the air,
otters play by the shore.

I look into the clear blue water and see my reflection.
I’m drifting away from the outside world—
drifting away from hatred and war.

I see land up ahead
with a big, beautiful willow tree
and a picnic table beckoning me.

I look all around . . .
Yes, what a wonderful world.

The Best of the Best in Grades 7-9

Concerts

by Reese Brennan

Jeannette Junior High School, Grade 9

Concert nights are the best time of the year.
They are when I know a great time is near.
These tickets we got were a nice, cheap deal.
Elation builds; the moment feels so real.
We stand in line; the excitement is high.
The clock ticks slowly, but we’re standing by.
The doors swing open, and we all impose.
The energy within us brightly glows.
The strings begin; the drums take up their beat.
Each note a tone, the sound so pure, complete.
The crowd is moved, united in the sound.
The voices soaring high, no limits bound.
As music fades, the night begins to end.
But in the heart, the songs will always blend.

The Best of the Best in Grades 10-12

Eagle Nebula

by Kasia Ewing

Derry Area Senior High School, Grade 12

If I don’t have love I am nothing
because I am nothing without love
I see the pillars of creation
A mother, her light 7,000 years delayed
Her three spires kissing stars and birthing new ones
Love in the form of creation
The way an astronomer looks out and thinks:
“There must be more. We cannot be alone.”
Love in the form of hope
And when the light reaches us from those galaxies
Will they love us back?
Their light caresses the atmosphere
the way a mother holds a crying child
They say, “I’ve been here all along.
Thank you for waiting for me.”
They meet the world with a hum,
just like the birds and grass, the wind and rivers
They all hum and pulse together,
A faint sound for those who care to listen
and they will know this is love

MEMBERSHIP INFO

Ligonier Valley Writers is an all-volunteer nonprofit that has served writers and readers throughout western Pennsylvania since 1986.

To join LVW and receive discounts on events, download a membership application from LVWonline.org and mail it to LVW, PO Box B, Ligonier, PA 15658. Dues are still only \$30 per year.

STUDENT POETRY AWARDS

Ligonier Valley Writers has sponsored the Student Poetry Contest for grades 4-12 since 1991.

The contest judges award first, second, and third cash prizes in each of nine categories. They also identify a Best of the Best poem in each grade grouping (grades 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12).

The student poets receive prizes and read their poems to an appreciative audience at an annual awards ceremony held at the Greensburg Barnes & Noble.

Photos of the students along with their poems can be viewed at both www.LVWonline.org and LVW's Facebook page.

Thanks to all of the students who entered, the contest sponsors, and the teachers who encouraged their students to participate.

FLASH FICTION CONTEST

There's still time to enter the **Flash Fiction Contest**. The deadline is August 15.

This year's topic is: *the dark side* **OR** *the light side of AI and robots*.

There's no fee to enter. LVW offers three cash prizes, three Honorable Mentions, and publication on the website. Previous winners are featured on the website.

Readings of the six winning stories will be performed shortly before Halloween.

For details on events as they become available, visit LVWonline.org. Email jgallagher@LHTOT.com to receive LVW's newsletter.

LVW Calendar 2025

AUG 15

Deadline for Flash Fiction Contest submissions.

AUG 17

Annual LVW picnic. John and Sukey Jamison have generously invited LVW to hold our annual potluck picnic and readings at their farm near Crabtree.

OCT 18

Workshop on Flexible Point of View in Fiction, led by Sue Baugh. Ligonier Valley Library.

OCT TBA

Readings of the winning Flash Fiction stories at local venues.

DEC 14

Annual LVW holiday party. Potluck and readings from guests' writing. St. Michael's of the Valley Church, Rector.

Please check www.LVWonline.org or the LVW Facebook page for the latest information about events, contests, and publications.

GET INVOLVED

Event Planning
Fundraising
Publicity

Have a skill that you're looking to share?
Contact rebed1020@gmail.com
for ways to participate!

CONTRIBUTORS



Vickie Babyak is married and has three daughters and three grandchildren. She graduated from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh with a major in visual communications. Vickie is a freelance photographer and writer from Dravosburg, PA. Some of her work can be seen in *Tube City Almanac* and *Tube City Online*.

Barbara Brooks, the author of the chapbooks *The Catbird Sang*, *A Shell to Return to the Sea*, and *Water Colors*, is a retired physical therapist. Her work has appeared in *Knee Brace Press* and *Remington Review*, among others. She lives in Hillsborough, NC, with her dog.



Marge Burke discovered her love of words and writing in elementary school and never looked back. She has had many essays and short stories published, as well as a full-length historical novel, *Letters to Mary*. She loves historic research, her children and grandchildren, and fighting allergies in her flower gardens!

Jim Busch was hospitalized after a serious car accident and dictated this story to his daughter (as he couldn't imagine not submitting a piece to an edition of the *Loyalhanna Review*). He spent his career working in advertising and as a freelance writer. He was married to the love of his life, Glenda, for 49 years. He now enjoys spending time with his family, writing, and viewing art.



Nancy Clark and hubby, Tom, are "livin' the life" as contented retirees, grateful for each new day as it unfolds, and basking in the love light of God, beloved family, and friends.

Chris Cottom lives near Macclesfield, UK. His work has appeared in *100 Word Story*, *Fictive Dream*, *Flash Frontier*, *NFFD NZ*, *NFFD UK*, *Oyster River Pages*, *The Lascaux Review*, and other fine places. In the early 1970s he lived next door to J.R.R. Tolkien. @chriscottom.bsky.social | chriscottom.wixsite.com/chriscottom



Rod Cross and his wife, Judy, live in Bear Rocks. He belongs to the New Stanton Memoir Writing Group and Ligonier Valley Writers. He is an avid fly fisher, motorcyclist, and educator/guide at Fallingwater, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Tamara DiBartola uses various art forms to bring her creativity to life. She hopes to make a positive impact through her artistry. Her pieces have appeared in the *Loyalhanna Review*, Westmoreland Art Nationals, Latrobe Art Center, Latrobe Hospital, and SAMA.



Don Ellenberger has homes in Mars and the Ligonier area. Many thanks to Ligonier Valley Writers for publishing the *Loyalhanna Review* and providing a forum for local writers and artists to share their work with the community.

Louisa Fordyce is a retired professor of English who now spends her time gardening, walking the dogs, watching birds, reading, and occasionally writing fiction, essays, and poems.





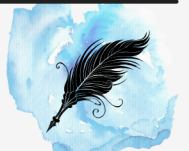
Judith Gallagher is working on the third book of a quintet called *Tales from Tír na nÓg*, reimaginings of ancient Irish myths. Books 1 and 2, *Into the Rainbow* and *Brigid's Cauldron*, are available on Amazon. Judith worked in Chicago publishing for 15 years, then moved home to the Laurel Highlands.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *New World Writing*, *City Brink* and *Tenth Muse*. His latest books, *Subject Matters*, *Between Two Fires*, and *Covert*, are available through Amazon. He has work upcoming in *Paterson Literary Review*, *Amazing Stories*, and *Cantos*.



As a writographer, **Carolyn Cornell Holland** was a freelance journalist and photographer with the *Fay-West Tribune Review* and several other newspapers. She has been published in the Westmoreland County Historical Society's magazine and other publications. She is currently writing a historical novel. She and her husband, Monte, live near the center of Ligonier.

Erin Jamieson's writing has been published in over eighty literary magazines, including two Pushcart Prize nominations. She is the author of four poetry chapbooks, including *Fairytales* (Bottle Cap Press). Her debut novel (*Sky of Ashes*, *Land of Dreams*) was published by Type Eighteen Books.



Candace Kubinec is a poet and a photographer from Greensburg, PA. Along with the *Loyalhanna Review*, she has had poetry published in various anthologies, including the Pennsylvania Poetry Society Prize Poems. Her photography has been published in *Ink in Thirds* and *Black & White* magazine.

A retired composition instructor (Penn State Fayette, California University of PA), **Tim Landy** enjoys roaming—and writing about—the northern Appalachians, where he has lived happily all of his life, escaping twice to Europe and many times to New England and the Canadian Maritimes. He is also a shameless foodie.



Janice McLaughlin is now doing layout, design, and book covers. She is also working on her tenth children's book with companion coloring/activity book. She recently published a poetry book titled *Darkness Falls* and is working on one titled *Reflections*. She loves research and believes that as long as you are learning, you are alive.

John Morrow is a retired Presbyterian pastor living in the Bear Rocks community. He is a widower with one son, Timothy, and a daughter, Kathleen Pifferetti.



Zach Keali'i Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His stories appear in *Raritan Quarterly*, *Reed Magazine*, *The MacGuffin*, *The Coachella Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Bamboo Ridge*, *FOLIO*, and more. He has published the chapbook *Tiny Universe* (Selcouth Station Press). He lives with his wonderful wife, Kelly, in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Walt Peterson is a writer and teacher from Pittsburgh. His fiction won the Westmoreland Award in the Westmoreland Arts & Heritage Festival Short Story Contest in both 2023 and 2024 and his poem "Jama Michalica" won honorable mention in 2024. He is a supporter of the *LR* and a fan of its generous support of our writing/reading community in western Pennsylvania.



Joe Potts has had humor articles in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and the *Tribune Review*. His SF-tinged fiction can be heard on the WAOB Audio Theatre (website, YouTube, podcast). He lives in Unity Township with his wife, Susan, and feline literary critic Sofia.

Susan Potts is a retired secretary who enjoys spending time with her family and friends. Her articles and photographs have been published in the *Loyalhanna Review*. Her hobbies include genealogy and photography. She lives in Unity Township with her husband, Joe, and therapy cat Sofia.





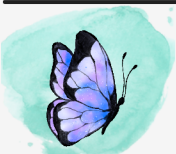
Tammy Rullo is an elementary teacher, curriculum writer, and Western Pennsylvania Writing Project fellow living in Pittsburgh. Along with having previous educational publications, she is a recently published poet. An adventurer and dreamer, she is an aspiring poet and creative writer.

Janet (Jan) R. Sady is a member of the Burlington Writers Club and the Burlington Art League. She has been published in more than three dozen anthologies, as well as magazines, newspapers, and devotionals. She has authored 16 books in many genres, including three children's books. She is a public speaker.
janfran@windstream.net.



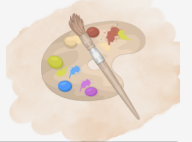
Terry Sanville lives in San Luis Obispo, CA, with his artist-poet wife and two plump cats. Over 450 journals, magazines, and anthologies have published his stories and essays. Four of his stories were nominated for Pushcart Prizes and one for inclusion in the Best of the Net anthology. "Leaving Cumbola" was previously published in the *Sante Fe Literary Review* (Winter 2024).

Carl Smith is the father of seven children and resides in Ligonier. His published works include *Textbooks and Shackles*; *The Really, Really Long Christmas List*; and *In the Land of the Ha Ha Tree*. Soon to be released: *The Legend of Mt. Davis*. He has been featured in *Reminisce* magazine.



After **Alicia Stankay** finished her ninth book (and fourth and final in a series), she decided that her next project would be gathering many of her short stories and making them into a book, possibly called *Golden Days*. She also enjoys nature photography and shows pictures of butterflies, bridges, waterfalls, and rainbows.

Louise Vrable is a retired family and consumer science teacher. She has dealt with arts all her life, sewing, quilting, and painting. Softball and bicycling have also been a big part of her life.



Sally Witt, CSJ, is a Sister of St. Joseph of Baden, PA. Her poetry chapbook, *Claiming Light and Darkness*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2024. "Sofia" appeared in *Connections*, the newsletter of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia, KS.

LOYALHANNA REVIEW STAFF

Brittany Luczki-Stultz, a Christian mother of four with a background in veterinary medicine. She owns and operates her own business, The Vet Tech Unleashed, as well as other online businesses. She also helps part-time at her children's school, The Westmoreland Christian Academy. She enjoys reading, writing, coffee, travel, studying her heritage, and Disney.



Jean Podralski, winner of the 2024 Ruth McDonald Award for Fan Favorite, is a poet living in Greensburg. Her writing has appeared in the *Loyalhanna Review* and the *MockingHeart Review*. You can also find her at jeanpodralski.substack.com.

Sara Frye is a light-seeker and a light-bearer. She believes that God is good, true love is real, and that music transcends boundaries. Her husband, David, and her soul-dog, Lady Shelby HRH, rarely find her without her nose in a book and a comfort cup of tea with honey at her elbow.



Recently retired from Westmoreland County Community College, **Rebecca E. "Rebe" Dunn** is finally returning to literary pursuits. Rebe is writing a series of "creative interpretations" of family events, and she might finish reading a book that she started in 1997. This is her first year guiding the *LR* staff.

Stevie Bonine is a graphic designer, writer, and aspiring dog trainer from Export, PA. In her free time, she enjoys crafting (which involves collecting an obscene amount yarn) and baking. Her dogs: Riley, Oliver, and Skyla Grace assisted greatly in the emotional support process of completing the design of the *LR*. She is always daydreaming about her next trip to Disney World.





SILVER BRIDGE BY ALICIA STANKAY



Louise Vrable

Summer Slices, 2025

Watercolor on Arches Paper
14 x 18 inches