



Westland
Writes

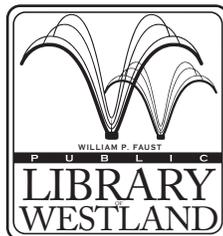
2021

Westland Writes 2021

A Collection of Local Writing

Alexis Tharp

Editor



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Poems

Helaine Binstock

Country Gal's Lament

We would carpool — best friends in school
 we always hung around;
 Laughed at my jokes — shared all my smokes
 like sisters we were bound;
 Then I met Nate — and couldn't wait
 to show him off to you;
 It only took — a single look
 he took your fancy too;
 That was the end — my dearest friend
 of our com-rod-er-ee;
 It's such a shame — that Nate McLain
 chose YOU instead of me!

So sad my buddy — sure broke my heart;
 Since Nate McLain — we're not the same;
 He tore us gals apart.
 So sad my buddy — so sad my chum
 Since Nate McLain — can't be the same
 TOO MUCH TO OVERCOME!

Signs of Christmas

Windows filled with elves and toys — are sure signs of Christmas;
Cards arrive from distant friends — saying how they miss us;
Shoppers crowding every mall — packages in hand;
Baking smells and chiming bells — tinsel'd Wonderland!
Families gather, hugs are shared; — cookies baked and food
 prepared;
Country's one big candy cane — From Frisco out to Portland, Maine
All these signs of Christmas fun — from Texas up to Michigan;
Families laughing, oh what joy — happy all together;
Warm and cozy, grandma's house — no thought about bad weather;

Joyful carols being sung — harmony in the air;
People pause and listen to — a blend uniquely rare;
Brightly decorated stores — arms filled with gifts and toys;
Fearful kids on Santa's knee — frightened girls and boys!
It's here, it's finally here — we wait for it all year;
Christmas time for everyone — beloved day draws near!

Sherrie Calhoun

By God, Trust Me

Happy is he who trusts in me.
Not your works or treasures.
Neither looking at your life's measure.

I'm the one with the plans and have the whole universe in my hands.
Put your trust in me. I created every living thing.
Don't trust in your own way.

Blessed are those who put their trust in me every day.
In whom do you trust?
Do you trust me or thee?

Neither put your trust in useless idols or common man.
Do not put your trust in a companion or futile things nor a friend.
It is I who am faithful until the very end.

My word is proven, my will be done, I surely deliver.
I give salvation and I'm the redeemer.
I give mercy, refuge and strength.

I'm absolutely good in my faithfulness
Although to me 1,000 years is a day.
I'm the truth, the life and the way.

Dancing with God

He turns my sorrows into dancing.
The Lord has me prancing.
Dancing in the wind.
In God's Holy Spirit I can feel it.

In God's glory.
Dancing with God is my story.
He dances with my soul.
I have no control.

I move like the wind.
God's moves are so strong
I want to dance with him all day long.

I dance like I'm in a whirlwind spin.
When we dance it makes me grin.
No choreography, just God moving in me.

That's right! there's no need to fight.
I just let go and let the Holy Spirit flow.
My soul takes flight, dancing in the light.

Within the spirit, God gives me all the grooves—all the moves.

Bettie Cunningham

~aka B'Syncere, Miss Spoken~

The Eyes of Racists

Blue eyes, green eyes and grey eyes
 Seeing only what's on the outside
 Acting dumb but thinking they're wise
 Brown eyes, black eyes and eyes that are red
 Hating on skin color
 Blinded by what they've been fed
 Baby blue, winter grey, some are valley green
 Visually corrupt,
 Lashing out and acting mean
 Hazel colored eyes and eyes that are honey brown
 Judging others based on race
 Always putting others down
 Eyes donning bifocals, some with designer lens
 Morally imbalanced
 Acting like they're drunk from gin
 Nearsighted eyes and those with astigmatism
 Can't really see beauty
 Vision riddled by racism
 Young eyes, old eyes and eyes in between
 Hate eating at their hearts
 Always looking but never seeing
 Big eyes, small eyes and eyes with little slits
 20/20 vision eyes
 Convinced that they're the shit
 Azure blue, deep sapphire or even ebony
 The eyes of racists
 Always looking but never seeing
 Never trust themselves enough
 To look beneath the skin
 To set aside their negative thoughts, get to know the person within

Are they afraid that people of color may be more powerful than they
And so, they choose to go on hating for just another day
Eyes that look but cannot see
That they get sick just as me
Eyes that judge all the time
While their blood runs red, the same as mine
Vision diluted; mind polluted
I pray that they are healed
Enough to understand that racism is just a fake shield
It's just a state of mind, a way of thinking
That makes them feel safe
Except when they look in the mirror, it's not me that they must face
The face that they see, the eyes that look back
Are full of hate and fear
Judgement and all of that
So, for eyes that cry tears just as I
For eyes that look but do not see
There is no superior race of people
All there is....is....YOU....AND....ME

Colorless

My soul is colorless, achromatic.
 In my mind I live in a world free of color, race...people possessing no
 hue.....
 No noticeable color difference that exists between me and you
 I dream of living in a society free from the staining agents of racism
 and colorism
 And all other "isms" that separate us
 No hatred, no racial profiling, no discrimination, none of that stuff
 I imagine that my country is the United States of Achromatic
 That I live on Colorless Avenue
 That my street name is Justice
 And my neighbors are No Hue
 I work in a place where people are Crystal Clear
 They say what they mean and mean what they say
 Where no one has a sexual orientation: No Straight, No Gay
 My reality says that love is free, the fee is No Cost
 Because when you find true love, the soul is never lost
 I dine with paupers and vagrants, those of meager means
 Break bread with presidents and priests, luncheon with kings and
 queens
 Because no one is any better than the one who stands beside them
 And no man is a disgrace and so we should not hide them
 No race is diminished, and no race is superior
 No race is above others, no race is inferior
 Nobody is perfect, we all have disabilities
 Limitations are a dime a dozen but does not mean inability
 I guess my soul is colorless, I don't see as some people do
 I guess my soul is colorless; no color exists between me and you
 I guess my soul is colorless, I don't see race I must confess
 My soul is colorless I guess.....I guess my soul is **color-----less**

Erin Knape

Madness

I reach out in a desperate attempt to stay.

My pathetic hands grasp at the thin air in front of me.

My eyes hopelessly will it not to be so.

Nothing to hold, grasp, and plant me to the ground

The force of my mind rips the soles of my shoes from the pavement.

My body twists and contorts as I struggle to get back to reality.

It is too late.

I have risen into madness.

Love in June

Why should attraction bring about so much shame?
Being authentic should be bliss.
If they discovered my feelings, they would place blame.
Everyone wants to be loved and be kissed.

Lambaste
Lambaste
Lambaste

The picture of her makes me worry and wonder
Am I doing right by my God?
If my mind is clouded with filth, what more will I discover
About myself, myself being helplessly odd.

Obscene
Obscene
Obscene

The skin-crawling feeling leaves me hopelessly depressed.
I lay awake at night, tortured by my fantasies.
Is there even a point in getting up, getting dressed
Or will everything I do spiral into travesties?

Vexation
Vexation
Vexation

In this monochrome world, can I find pride?
Millions out there march with strength.
All I want to do is hide.
In this rush towards the future, can I find my stride?

Empowered
Empowered
Empowered

Michelle LeGault

Shadows

In this post pandemic town
we walk the white hot sidewalks.
We scan the streets.
We carry memories of another life.
We keep moving.

In our past life, across the sea, we could not escape
the hum of the neighborhood hive.
But here, the silence overwhelms our ears,
and we strain to hear a single voice
above the din of the cicadas.

Green trees cast thin shadows
on the white hot sidewalks.
Shadows nip at our heels
as we pass empty green lawns
guarded by silent saints, hands pressed.

They do not ask us our names.

Cheryl Martin, M.A.

Goats in the City

The zoo isn't here, but the goats were near,
 Literally visiting the city,
 Why you ask?
 As the overgrowth by the lake is a path of twists, turns, twigs,
 With high top greenery for the brush gone wild,
 That even one goat can tiptoe up to and enjoy,
 This brown and white goat on his hooves standing straight up was a
 sight to behold,
 As he sashayed balancing on his hoofs daintily munching at the
 greenery
 He swings like a heavy chain clumsily attacking right below the
 leaves, pitching at the top,
 Goats in the city,
 Travelers show up, not even local to watch and hear the crunching,
 and feel the peace that they bring,
 Locally it was a stone's throw or a little more, as their path was closer
 to me, reminded me of a
 Reflection of mine as I
 Remembered that zoo in Massachusetts so long ago,
 Behind the fence that familiar sight of a brown and white goat, with
 two year old child in tow,
 The toddler screams, as the baby goat was a frightening sight as its
 largess meandered closer to us
 Where it expected to be fed through the wired fence,
 At that long ago time, a clunk in the machine rendered some feed, a
 delicacy for those quiet creatures
 As I tossed it for the goat to enjoy; its merriment evident while
 chewing the snack,
 Here, in the city park, none of that special treat for the two dozen
 working animals, like the long ago

goat, as the job was for them to eat, relax, gather a midnight snack,
and meander down
Where the path had plentiful trees, shrubbery and a view resplendent
of a Renoir postcard
Time travel is nothing new as it passes by in a flash, and the visitors
were done in three weeks
As the lake's full view was astounding to see, a clarity that had been
hidden by the overgrowth with
Poison ivy, a plant of allergy for me, and perhaps you.
The storytellers like me, gathering notes, photos, videos
Creating memories to cull for poems,
Short stories, novels and more,
As the animal kingdom in a flash, has that pause button, for us to
reflect
See what's there, mediate while being in that moment,
Watching, listening, smelling, engaging the senses as the fast pace of
life speeds by.
While the simpler times are a distant memory or not even if the
pasture in life
Hasn't visited someone like you to appreciate what animals do;
Even when the text message is sent
Yet taking a moment to look up and see the goat peering at you
perhaps talking,
Engaging with a human element that isn't really present to the Billy,
as the natural element is there but
No grass between the toes of the visitor,
Between the toes or the touch of a rock, quartz stone,
Or, a Petoskey stone is a foreign fossil that has no real memory to you
or someone you know, as
The next text message is on the screen, escaping the moment, wind in
one's hair, scent of the plants,
Where one could experience as others did, not always by choice but
by experience and life, or similarly
Geology and the ocean that once covered here might only be written
about in an archaic book that one
Needs to flip with one's fingers to see the smooth illustration

With the thick pulp of a century and a half before,
 Like the goat whose presence was clear as the visitors lined the park,
 sat on hard steel benches,
 Flip phones and video cameras capturing the moments, but were
 they really captured?
 Books never die, pulp continues to be made to create more even with
 the loud bleeps and tweets,
 If that memory on a drive is left there, and never viewed, that
 moment for a future glance that never
 happens, then the purpose of visiting those goats is a bygone
 memory left in the cyber roll just sitting
 There, never to be seen,
 As the focal point of this memory isn't really a full memory, as the
 experience wasn't received in that
 Moment as the viewer in the cell phone lens ignored the lesson of
 community, engaged in the moment
 Of the chewing, cooing creatures,
 Whilst studying the environment, creating a brain memory that no
 matter,
 Would be one that was quick and memorable culled at a moment's
 notice, regardless if the video
 Clip ever sees the light of day.

The Reflection of Society through the Decades and Centuries

History as its whitewashed textbooks of yesteryear and today, missed
 the stories of those who
 Mattered;
 No matter who, the shakers and those who made a difference were
 the common folk, those
 Whose hard work was the foundation of this country,
 Not some of the rich and powerful, yet they led the way for calamity
 and catastrophic happenings,

Especially relative to the Civil War and slavery, as the country's
foundation was pummeled
Into a pile of volcanic ash, the sides of hell were the ones that
prevailed, as no matter
Both were fighting to a bloody death, and the rampage and carnage
was surreal and
Hatred that we hadn't seen until now, division of passions with
altered truths instead,
False memes of the universe plastered for the world to see more than
we ever need,
Fake narratives to further harm the democracy has already been
whitewashed to some extent,
With the political base convincing and conniving to turn back the
page of our lives, values, morals,
Tossing courage and love through the fires of hell;
The flag of freedom continues even as it is destroyed by some and
reviled by others, those who serve
And served in Army green, marching with leather black in
downtown Worcester, MA;
Stands for freedom, amicable discourse, polite conversation no matter
the side, finding commonality
Whenever possible, as I believe fervently in the difference of opinion
is what makes us great thinkers
And a universe of people, who disagree, and or agree, and can form a
divergent opinion as a pause into
One's own deeply held beliefs to feel, and if not understand, but draw
a baseline again of commonality,
Which is a prudent part of society, from the days of our founding, as
well as the dark secrets and harm
Felt by many First Nations, those of color, and others who have not
felt the trueness of freedom, as
Those who trounce on anything differing wants a status quo that
never existed, nor was reality, yet
Forced on those who didn't agree and who should never have agreed,
nor felt invisible or left behind,

As those who scurried under the horse's hay in those carriages in
1855, or 1860, looking for freedom,
While fearing for their lives as well as those of the underground
railroad conductors who risked
Everything to ensure that those who deserved to be free and knew a
way to help them along the way,
Throwing away societal privilege and possibly affluence and of the
wrong shade to help a fellow human
In distress; as the mockery of the foundation of freedom for all rang
hollow in their ears and souls,
Knowing it was possible to help and save as many as possible at
death's door, as those shackles
Left scars, seen and unseen, families split apart, never being able to
see a loved one again, as
The trail to freedom meant throwing it to the wind if there was no
other escape,
As I peered through the hidden stairwell where the brave locals took
the time to carve a way to help
Hide, feed, and transport to another life, the reality of this still is
surreal as I couldn't possibly
Understand the victory of crossing the threshold and tossing the
shackles to a better life, but in some
Real way I can understand that the best of humanity can release the
worst part of that destructive force
And see and feel that those who were saved connected a real past to
today and the future, where today
We need unity to hug destruction as the warmth melts away its hate,
With love being the force of unity for all in this universe.

Sherry Nichols

Jodie

I know a place where time seems to stand still.
Where your soul remembers and can feel.
On dark evening walks up through the holler.
I remember being scared and hesitating to follow.
The wind comes down the mountain walls and onto the valley floor.
Whistling through the trees,
Swirling above and around me,
Leaving me wanting more.
Touching me and the ground.
Caressing the leaves.
And the boughs of the trees.
I feel the breeze blowing around me.
Blowing through empty space.
Touching my soul.
Feeling it on my face.
With its fingers, gently and lightly.
Floating over me like Victorian lace.
Soft and fluttery like a flight of birds.
Expressing itself with nary a word.
The leaves dance and romance the wind.
With each little movement, shake and bend.
Feel the coolness on a hot summer day.
The warmth meeting winter's way.
Along the old railroad tracks.
From house to house.
Around each bend.
The sun trailing the wind.
Bernard and Pearl sit on their front porch.
Patiently waiting for changes it may bring.
Basting in the comfort of a soft or cool breeze.
How I miss them when I visit.

Time has moved along and left me with a huge empty place.
How I long to see their faces.
In all the old familiar places.
Spinning and drifting up, around, and down through the holler.
One only needs to follow into the small town of Jodie, West Virginia.
Wrapped by the mountains with nature's grace.
It's a lovely little place.

R.J. Redline

The Sea

I am adrift and I cannot see the shore.
My limbs tread above the abyss,
and I fear whatever may swim in the trench.
A leviathan called "Fear itself."
It will swallow me whole, lest I see a savior
on the horizon.
When an angry wave assaults my shoulders
and the back of my head, I remind myself
"I must swim."
"Why?"
I cling to the reasons, for they are my savior
on the horizon that I cannot yet see.
A life that is happy and a shore that is green.

Rest Back, it's Ten AM

Roll over across the millennial mile,
 wrapped in a five hundred thread count.
 Sheets like these don't need a map.
 My minutes rolled over
 but I'm not talkin' bad about the fact
 that nobody's talkin'.
 I gave the sun a salutation
 through the architectural glass.
 It sighed, and slackened, and told me,
 "I'll be back in a flash."
 Rest back it's ten AM.
 I've sent word to the concierge,
 to push back Pilates class,
 and leave the mats.
 We can all hang together there.

Listen up.
 Before brunch, I'd like to ask you if I
 told you about that one time in Holy Hollywood,
 where I met a Broadway phantom in a tank top
 and suspended pants, singing a dazzling cover
 of "Killer Queen" ...
 ...Anyway, I guess that's how it shakes out
 in a free meet and greet.
 Ya know I could take you downstairs,
 to the gamblin' suite.
 We could hide a pair in your cocktail frock.

Rest back it's ten AM.
 I've spared us time for dancing.
 I'll highlight the revel and the staff,
 the concierge too.
 Here, we can all hang together.

Nancy Louise Spinelle

The Socks

I wanted so much to find his socks that I had given him for
Father's Day.

I was remembering how slowly he unwrapped that gift, already
his fingers frail.

Now drawn to that chest of drawers, imagining each pair assigned
to its own section of space.

Neatly rolled.
Ready to wear.

With my warm hands around the cold metal handles of his drawer,
memories rekindled.

Rekindled with the warmth of my hands around the cold of his,
both struggling to keep life from escaping.

The drawer slides open displaying the still-organized socks,
but with one exception.

The socks.
Left unfolded.
Never worn.

His soul released.
Not needing socks anymore.

Everything. All of it to the poor.

And I know he would be pleased.

Life Lessons

Dedicated to my grandkids:
Nicholas, Megan, Natalie, Mary,
Michael, and Sarah



Respond but don't react...

When you're in a difficult situation
it's always better to respond calmly than to react in anger. Fights start
wars and nobody wins in a war.

Be happy for others...

Compliments send a message of encouragement. If you can't bring
yourself to do that, then at least give happily, a nod and a smile.

Learn to listen...

You lose nothing by listening to others and may more likely gain
abundant knowledge.

Don't give up...

If you don't succeed get help, regroup, get informed, and try again.
However sometimes you must have the wisdom to move-on.com.

Never become a parasite...

In other words start learning now how to care for yourself.

Keep promises...

Follow through with your commitments but if you can't,
then, by all means, be good
enough to give a decent excuse.

Lies are excuses...

Never deny the truth especially when caught with your hand in the
cookie jar and crumbs on your lips.

Holding hands...

Holding or shaking another's hand should be a gesture, whether given or received, done effortlessly and often.

Regifting is okay...

If you can't find joy in the gifts you have received than at least take joy in regifting them to others.

Abuse is always wrong....

Don't let anybody ever abuse your body, your soul or your mind...never.

Be independent but cautious...

Always accumulate alternatives before you make a final decision.

Observe, judge, act...

Be aware that smart people learn from others' mistakes.

Choose wisely...

Before you follow in someone else's footprints know for certain where that path leads.

Beliefs...

Sometimes religious beliefs can reflect scientific theories, but try not to let God get mixed up with either.

Love Always,
Grandma Nan

Michelle L. Strickland

DAMN!

Damn! I been working since I was 16 years old

Damn! I found out there's no fairytales

Damn! It's all a lie

Damn! I been teaching 27 years

Damn! I'm 50

Damn! My marriage failed

All I can say right now is damn.

Teresa Q. Tucker

Father/Daddy: A Reflection on Connection

Haiku in Six Stanzas

In this place of old
Where newness never resides,
Change never happens.

Labyrinths are the
Universe's path to you.
Your center, your core.

The words are contact
But not a contract of love.
They are his story.

My father is a
Man of complications and
Slow simplicity.

Our childhood is a
Screen or veil that leads to now;
Never here, just now.

It says that we are
Not compatible, ever.
Should we prove it wrong?

Us: A Meditation on Love

Haiku in Eight Stanzas

Charmed to meet you, friend.
We must have met here before,
At a different time.

Trust – you ask me if
I can be trusted with your
Delicate soul songs.

I was once told that
I could befriend anyone,
Changing foes to friends.

My growth spurts have been
Steady melodic tunes of
Stretching higher still.

My young self, quiet
And self-entertaining me.
Imagination.

Skin pulled over soul
Taut and tight showing thin shell,
Teeth, marrow, blood, core.

Does this résumé
Of how I got to be here
Meet your whole request?

Does it prove that I
Am able to be part of
Your expansive love orbit?

Shari Welch

Issues

What do you do when you see me
You look away and not a smile
Talking over me and around me
Scurry away with your pent up anxiety
That's what you do when I see you

You're not comfortable with me
I can see a pool of negative energy—surrounding
Like a shark in a pool of swans
In this karma there is no kind of love
That's what I feel when I see you

There will not be a connection
No friendship to behold
You start out in enemy mode
With preconceived thoughts washed in
dried in and permanently pressed
That's what I see when you see me

Stories

Emily Ayres

The Train

We all knew about it. It wasn't something we could avoid or rush into. It was something that happened to everyone. We knew that. We knew that one day we would have to trade our toys for tickets and start packing. The thought of it excited us, to think of such independence and freedom! What else could we want? What else could be better than that?

As a kid, we're told to not make it happen before it needs to. It shouldn't trouble us. We had time until that day came. Yet there was rarely a day when we were not asked about it. Rarely did a day pass when we did not think about it. Teachers would grade us on our responses to what we wanted to become on the train. Parents would carve a path for us, marking all of our stops. Packing all our clothes. They all told us to take our time but then filled it with expectations and burdens.

Some would tell us all about the time they got on their train. They thought that if they shared their experience, it would help us board it easier. That it would allow us to understand what it meant to get on the train. Some would tell us almost nothing and leave us guessing for ourselves; either way, we found out about it. It didn't matter what people told us about it. No amount of imagining compares to when it would be our time to step onto a cart and follow it indefinitely.

We still imagined it of course. We thought of what we wanted to be. Where we wanted to be. Who we wanted to be with. We all at one point in life had a vision or two of our final stop. We visioned ourselves at our best. We painted a perfect picture of who we would be when we got off the train. We took most of our time seeing ourselves at that point, rather than thinking about the steps needed to get there. We thought so much of the final stop that we rarely thought about the stops before that. It was as if we could only imagine the best parts because that's what was given to us. Who would trouble a child with the thought of the hardest parts of the train? And even if they did, would it be enough to prepare them?

Then after years of hearing about it, it was finally our turn. It was time for us to board. We were excited, scared, our stomachs knotted up knowing that we had such an adventure ahead of us. It was nerves. We hugged our parents as they dropped us off. They told us to text them when we got there and we nodded with a smile. Some cried, some didn't. We watched as they drove away and then it was just us and the station. We followed the arrows and signs we were always destined to follow. It was just as they had said. We wanted it to be just as they had told us because the thought of it going any other way was intolerable to others and terrifying to us. The longer we followed the path to the train, the longer we thought to ourselves that maybe our experience wasn't meant to be just like theirs.

One thing for sure is that they never explained how hard it was to get on the train. How the line to get a ticket was so long that it would leave you with your worry. Most people would plan. Get up early and be at the station to avoid the traffic of people. They made their boarding seem so easy. You'd watch them get on like they had done it before. You'd affirm yourself that you can do it because they did. But the line for the tickets is getting longer and you haven't even saved yourself a spot. You spent all of your time watching other people do it, imagining that it was you. You spent your time worrying about the ride. Would it be bumpy? Smooth? Would you have to stand the entire time or would you be able to sit and rest your legs every once in a while? Would you have to give your seat up for someone who needed it more? Would you find friends on the train? Would you be happy? Would it hurt once you got off at the last stop?

You spent all that time worrying and now the train, the train you were meant to board at this time and this place, the train you were being prepared for your entire childhood, has left. Fear settles in. The luggage behind you is not where it's meant to be. The ticket you stood in line for is no longer valid. The packing and planning, all wasted. You can feel your heart race. Faces fill the windows of the train, faces of people you know. They all boarded the train and left with it. Leaving you behind.

Fear sets in, worse than before. You can't help but think that everyone on that train did exactly what they were meant to do, but you

didn't. You didn't get on the train. You couldn't. You want to do something, anything. Run after it, call them back. You want them to wait. But they can't. Instead, the station is quiet and you have no idea what to do next.

The station grows so quiet that any noise is noticeable. So noticeable that you can hear something near you. The smallest shuffle of a bag and you turn around. You look around and see you're not alone. There are people. People just like you. Their luggage accompanies behind or near them secretly wishing to be moving, but it is still. They stand with their tickets in hand just like you. Just like you, they missed the train.

Or maybe, they were early. Maybe they weren't catching that train at all and instead are waiting for the next one. Maybe they'll miss that train too and get on the next one instead. Maybe they won't take the train at all. They'll walk, or bike, or take a car. They will find a different way to reach their destination because they can. Because they don't have to board a train right now or walk, or bike, or drive. Maybe they're not ready. And when they are, they will make their own way to reach the place they wish.

Suddenly you no longer have that fear with you. You see them and you feel relieved. You know now that the train didn't leave you, it just wasn't your time. You can board later, or you can choose not to board at all. If you can find a better way, take it. When you're ready.

Larry Binstock

Street of Memories

Its official name was Roosevelt Road, but the residents of our neighborhood simply and lovingly called it 12th Street. It was a long street, running from Chicago's western suburbs all the way to Grant Park on the city's eastern edge. But, back in the 1940s, we just cared about the chunk of it that ran through our part of town. It was our Champs-Élysées, our Fifth Avenue. And it was filled with a myriad of delights to satisfy all entertainment and gastronomical desires.

One block in particular was dear to my heart. It stretched between Central Park and St. Louis avenues and featured a variety of venues that played a large role in my life. The Central Park movie theater was my most cherished edifice and I spent countless Saturday afternoons within its four walls. For one thin dime I could see two movies, a cartoon, a short subject, a news reel, and, most important, the latest chapter of whatever serial was running at the time. Sometimes I went there with friends; other times I was accompanied by my little sister.

The Central Park theater was flanked by two venerable establishments. Its contiguous neighbor to the east was a store specializing in all manner of sausages, from ordinary hot dogs to the more exotic variety. My favorite was something called Romanian sausage, and I never knew if it truly originated in Romania or if someone simply slapped that label on it. Since my father also shared my love for this type, the Binstock family did much shopping in that store.

On the west of the theater was Ye Olde Chocolate Shoppe, where you could get the nation's best malted milks. Not only did I stop there with some frequency, but when my mom and dad went out for the evening, they often brought home a malted milk from Ye Olde Chocolate Shoppe as a treat for us kids.

Next to Ye Olde Chocolate Shoppe was the holy of holies, Fluky's, serving the best hot dogs and barbeque beef sandwiches in our solar system. When my sister was my companion at the movies, we almost always stopped at Fluky's for hot dogs, which was not only a

treat for us, but saved my mother the trouble of cooking dinner. It was at Fluky's during one of those post-movie meals where my aunt Rose found us to say that we would have to spend the night at her house since my mother was in the hospital giving birth to what would be our new brother. I was eight years old; my sister was four.

Down the street from Fluky's was the Garfield Bakery, home of great cheesecake, the fluffy kind, covered with graham cracker crumbs. You could buy a multitude of pastries at Garfield's, but if you wanted doughnuts, you went to the next block where there was store that specialized in them, and offered an endless variety.

Although the Central Park was my favorite movie theater, there were a couple others I attended periodically. Directly across the street from the Central Park was the Twentieth Century, which seemed to have a lock on certain movies, including Disney films and those with Abbot and Costello. Since I really enjoyed some of those films, I sometimes would forsake Flash Gordon or Don Winslow or Nyoka of the Jungle or whatever protagonist was featured in the current serial and went across to the Twentieth Century to see films like *Fantasia* or *Abbot and Costello Meet Frankenstein*. On the next block was the Gold theater, which never showed films that could be considered for the Oscar. They were B films all the way. But the Gold gave away a set of dishes. Every Tuesday night, patrons received another piece of the set. So, for a period of time, my mother took my sister and me to the Gold on Tuesday evenings to get a dinner plate or goblet, or salad plate, or whatever piece was handed out that night. And we got to enjoy two trashy films.

There were also some shady dealings happening on 12th Street. Just a couple blocks west of Central Park Avenue was the New Lawndale Restaurant, widely known to be owned by mobsters and used as a front for gambling. Whenever I walked to the men's room, I passed a door in which a peep hole would open and an eye would peer out to see who was passing by. I once walked by when the door was open and saw a tote board giving the results of horse racing. Ironically, although the restaurant was secondary to gambling activities, word was that the food was quite good. I wouldn't know. The only reason I went to the New Lawndale was to partake of their delicious rice pudding. It was there where, as a teenager, I got hooked on that dessert,

which is still my favorite.

Yes, 12th Street played a major role in the history of my life, and it was all great. When I would go back to Chicago to visit relatives or friends, I sometimes thought of revisiting 12th Street. Perhaps standing on the pavement of that thoroughfare would reawaken the joy I felt there as a young boy and young man. I rejected that possibility immediately. Roosevelt Road or 12th Street –whatever you want to call it – is now one of the locations experiencing a plethora of street killings, which has become a tragic hallmark of Chicago. So, I know that 12th Street is quite different today, and actually being there would most likely evoke sadness rather than joy. Thus, I relegate 12th Street to my hippocampus, that portion of the brain that processes memories, and I often visit it there.

Philip Howell

Pygmalion's True Ending

Introduction

You may or may not be aware that George Bernard Shaw's original 1913 stage production of *Pygmalion* did not have a "**proper**" ending. Apparently, my astute 12th grade English teacher knew this, since we were assigned to write our own version of how the play **should have** ended. I wrote that Eliza should marry Freddy and then go into business either with a retail flower shop or doing research for Colonel Pickering in India. Which one I chose, I honestly do not remember.

However, the point of my story is not that I wrote an essay back in high school or that Mr. Shaw wanted to end the play with Eliza's future being left unresolved and, thus, letting **each member** of the audience speculate on how he or she would resolve this "problem" play. Over the years most actors, directors, and producers have altered the play so that Eliza marries Professor Henry Higgins. One of these "improvers" wrote to Mr. Shaw, "My ending makes money; you ought to be grateful." In response, Shaw testily replied, and I quote, "Your ending is **damnable**; you ought to be shot." Not the best of prose, but right on target, pun intended. Shaw even went on to formally write why Eliza should not, would not, and could not marry Higgins. Current compromises of Eliza marrying Freddy have been equally unsatisfactory, since Freddy hasn't the least concept of money and Eliza, regrettably, has no entrepreneurial expertise.

In a long-overlooked nightstand, haphazardly stored in Shaw's basement, a lost manuscript by Mr. Shaw has recently been discovered, and it provides a unique solution to this problem play in five very succinct, handwritten pages. Whether Mr. Shaw decided to create this ending for his own intellectual amusement or for future performances is unknown. But here are the five pages as they would have appeared following Act 5 as either an appendage to that act or as a completely new act for *Pygmalion*.

Previously Introduced Characters

Professor Henry Higgins: A professor of phonetics who, while lacking in the social graces, nevertheless transforms Eliza's Cockney English into the upper-class style of speech along with the necessary social graces.

Eliza Doolittle: A Cockney, streetside flower girl who Higgins is able to pass off as an aristocrat, but who now belongs to neither the world of the street nor the world of the aristocracy.

Colonel Pickering: A British officer retired from India and an expert in Sanskrit who is both Higgins' best friend and Eliza's protector.

Alfred Doolittle: Eliza's never-married father who was a simple dustman, but who, ironically, is now a richly endowed lecturer for middle-class morality.

Mrs. Pearce: Higgins' wise housekeeper and Eliza's friend.

Freddy Hill: A member of the aristocracy who lives off of a very small pension and who loves Eliza and wants to marry her.

Page 1

Picks up where the play ends in Higgins' townhouse with:

Eliza sweeps out of the room, leaving behind a befuddled Professor Henry Higgins.

House lights dim.

A prolonged pause of almost total silence.

House lights gradually come up.

It is the dawn of a new day, nine months later. Nothing has changed except there is now a young flowering bush outside of the living room window.

A metallic door knocker sounds from offstage. Mrs. Pearce departs and is lost sight of.

Mrs. Pearce: (*offstage*) Mr. Freddy, oh dearie . . .

Page 2

Higgins: What is it, who is there?

Freddy advances followed by Eliza and three strangers in turbans.

Mrs. Pearce: It is Mr. Freddy and our little Eliza come back to us.

Higgins: Eliza, how good to see you. (*Then gesturing to the three turbaned men following Eliza*) And who are these gentlemen?

Eliza: This is Mr. Gumar Khan, Assistant Secretary of English Culture to Aditya, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, serving at the pleasure of Maharaja Ananda of Kishara, along with two porters assigned to us.

Higgins: Yes, I see, good to meet you, Mr. Khan.

Ah, Eliza, please tell us what has happened since you left us to go overseas **only** saying, "to find yourself and your future calling in this wider world."

Eliza: Perhaps I should start at the beginning.

After leaving you and your household, Freddy and I investigated the possibility of opening a flower shop. Unfortunately, neither of us had any knowledge of contracts, wholesale purchasing, or maintaining plants and flowers in a fresh and appealing state. Then a note arrived from Mr. Khan requesting a meeting with us at our earliest convenience. Here I believe Mr. Khan should pick up the story.

Khan: As already stated, I am the Assistant Secretary of English Culture to the Maharaja of Kishara. As such, I was touring England and, by happenstance, I was invited to the ambassador's party where Eliza was introduced to English society. I was amazed at her poise and transformation from a flower girl to one accepted by your nobility.

That night, it hit me!

Why not use her to introduce the English language to the Maharaja's grandchildren? There are seven of them, three boys and four girls. The girls range in age from six years to thirteen. Why not use her obvious language skills to bring a similar transformation upon these girls? The more I thought on the idea, the more I liked it. Next morning, and for the next three days, I exchanged cables with Mr. Aditya, Secretary of

Foreign Affairs, and other government officials. It was agreed I should look further into this matter and, if it appeared advantageous, I should offer her a 90-day contract, a fully furnished and stocked cottage on the palace grounds with two married servants, plus first-class round-trip tickets to and from India. Eliza passed all of my checks into her character and suitable command of the English language. And now Eliza should pick up the story.

Eliza: Naturally, I was shocked and amazed. I agreed with two conditions. First that I marry Freddy before going. And second that Freddy accompanies me to India.

Khan: Naturally, I agreed. Although I entered a few conditions of my own. First, she does not in any manner try to influence the girls as related to their native culture, religion, or politics. Next, she was never to make any remarks, either verbally or in writing, on these three subjects, unless specifically requested to do so by either myself or the Maharaja in a private, personal meeting. Finally, anything Eliza observed or heard was not to be recorded or communicated to anyone.

Eliza: Naturally, I agreed to become the soul of discretion and confidentiality.

Colonel Pickering: Sounds like a good requirement for all obligations of this kind.

Higgins: I also agree, it is a **very good policy**. How has it worked out for you, Eliza?

Eliza: I would have no problem following these rules. There remained just **one** unspoken concern. . .

Page 3

Khan: Freddy.

Freddy: Yes, me. I love Eliza and would not be parted from her for all the world. But what would I do in India? How would I fill my time, alone in India, except for my dear wife? How could I help in this endeavor? I was no language teacher. I was at a loss.

Khan: So was I.

Eliza: As was I.

Freddy: To put it politely, they then proceeded to review my very being from head to toe.

Eliza: Business skills, none.

Khan: Engineering skills, none.

Eliza: Foreign languages, only limited conversational French.

Khan: Scientific knowledge, none, only an aptitude for statistics, picked up at university.

Eliza: University?

Khan: Did you matriculate? What subjects did you study?

Freddy: Yes, I graduated and I read in literature, with secondary interests in history and political science. I also picked up a smattering of statistics and logic.

Khan: What level was your score?

Freddy: 87.

Eliza: You're a blooming genius!

Khan: After a moment to digest this information, I boldly asked, "Would you consider being a purveyor of English culture to certain selected male subjects of the Maharaja, with similar conditions as Eliza's?

"While Eliza will be doing formal instruction for the four royal daughters, you will hold informal cultural conversations with the Maharaja's three sons."

Freddy: After a moment of reflection I said, "Really? Yes, I would."

Khan: Then I said, "Let me do a few more cables."

Freddy: And three days later, Mr. Khan said the Maharaja had agreed to a 30-day trial period consisting of twice-weekly private, conversational lunches with his three sons.

Within a week we were married and within two, we were on our

way to India.

Khan: Freddy admirably fulfilled his 30-day commitment and it was extended by an additional 60 days to correspond to Eliza's 90-day trial period.

Eliza has dutifully carried out her obligations. In fact, after her ninety days and ten additional days, the Maharaja was so impressed with her that he instructed me to let Eliza and Freddy move into the royal place.

Colonel Pickering: And?

Eliza: For Freddy and myself, it was wonderful.

Freddy: As for me, I had found my niche in life.

I am a productive member of society.

Khan: They both now have one-year contracts with the Maharaja and the possibility of a two-year extension, at my discretion.

Higgins: And the purpose of this visit?

Page 4

Khan: It has several purposes. First, purchasing items for Eliza and Freddy's personal use while living in India. Next, to purchase for Freddy reference books, a small library, and possible reading material for the Maharaja's three royal sons.

Eliza: Plus, I wanted to visit my father.

Khan: Ah, a very great personal honor for me. He is a most holy man.

Higgins: Holy?

Khan: Yes, he has achieved Sannyasa, or, as you English would say, sainthood. His asceticism is of such a magnitude that, as your holy book says, "Take no thought for your life" and "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them." As a test, I offered him a gold ring which he righteously declined.

Colonel Pickering: Yes, he does not like being tied down.

Higgins: A true free spirit.

Mrs. Pearce: Let's stop with all of these questions and just enjoy Eliza.

Page 5

Eliza: We did have another reason for coming here. We have presents for you.

With Eliza's slight motion to one of the porters, he obediently steps forward carrying a small chest.

Eliza: (*Opening the top of the chest*) Mrs. Pearce, I hope you will accept this ebony chest which contains a sandalwood hairbrush, a pair of matching tortoiseshell side combs, and a pearl necklace with matching earrings.

Mrs. Pearce: Oh! You needn't have. Thank you, I will always treasure these, and you.

Khan: (*After a short bow, steps forward holding a mysterious carpetbag*) Colonel Pickering, being a military man and a scholar, I thought you might appreciate an antique Indian katar, or punch dagger, that straps onto a soldier's wrist for penetrating an enemy's armor, along with a recently produced Indian monograph on translating English into Sanskrit.

Colonel Pickering: Why thank you. I am quite honored and surprised. I have never seen the like of these before.

Eliza: (*Stepping forward and motioning to the remaining porter who carries a large covered wicker basket*) Professor Higgins, here is a silver office desk set for you and three Indian kittens, two females and one male, to amuse you during your alone time. Each kitten has its own silver water bowl and a matching silver food dish, plus a bronze litter box and matching clean-up scoop.

Higgins: I don't know quite what to say. Obviously, I will enjoy the office set and the kittens will always remind me of your zest for life, Eliza.

Lights dim.

Time for, hopefully, sustained applause.

Lights come back on.

The End

Michele Matuszewski

The Trees

It's always the trees.

They stand waiting for me to put myself in their presence.

Is someone calling me?

Oh, it's not the backyard tree or the trees along those graceful boulevards. It's the trees in Grayling, or Roscommon or Higgins Lake; trees lined up so straight in their rows. The undergrowth so sparse and low to the ground, daring not to take away from the majesty of the trees. Little falls to the floor of the forest due to the tight-knit canopies overhead caused by the closeness of each tree in line with each other. And if anything were to fall, it would be needles, not leaves, and they lay heavily on each other to keep the floor of the forest that much flatter.

These trees are tall and straight. They stand erect in their even rows.

Folks have mentioned the straight lines to me without any historical knowledge of this phenomenon. Never questioning how or why, just commenting coldly. I'm amazed at their ignorance but say nothing.

How can they not know? Are they so sheltered from the world or better still, so wrapped in their own lives that outside of it is nothingness? And yet these same people use the trails in the winter and enjoy camping among them.

The trees beckon me forward.

Taking little steps to get closer, to surround myself in their splendor is a little perilous in my old age, so I pick and choose each step with extraordinary care. I don't have a walker, and my walking stick is in my other car miles away. Why do I always forget it? *Since I bought it, selecting carefully the kind and height I thought I would use, I have only opened it once.* I've never used it and here I am choosing each step forward to get a better—no, not a better view, but more of a feel, of the trees that

make up the woods bordering the house where I am staying for the weekend.

I see the men. Cold, ill equipped, hustling and huddling between plantings in the 1930s. Theirs was certainly not a glamour job—but they created a beauty that transcends what was formerly barren, hacked clear land. I can't thank them enough



all these years later; seeing them as they eventually retreated by truck back to their tents—weather be damned. This was a 12-month, around-the-seasons project.

It was the Civilian Conservation Corp. The CCC.

Roscommon to Grayling to the
Hardwick Forest to Higgins Lake.
More than 100,000 men braved the cold, damp, blustery days to plant millions of trees. Reforestation they called it. Employment for the men during the depression brought them forth. They were plucked from their homes and transported Up North, as we say in Michigan. This was an effort within the United States and it was a huge undertaking. But Michigan's "Up North" thrives today because of the beauty left behind by these stalwart young men—merely boys.

There were letters and postcards between moms and sons and girlfriends and sisters and brothers. Most are lost, but some have been saved to feed the curious as to their frame of mind ... planting, planting, planting. The museums are full of these mementos.

As I stepped even further into the trees, I knew. I knew my dad was there. These may have been some good times for him as he enjoyed the camaraderie of all the young men, drinking 3.2 beer, shooting dice, betting what few coins their meager share of weekly wages would allow. Their portion of their wages were for razors, socks and miscellaneous personal needs, but what was left over was theirs to use. The serious portion of their incomes went home to their parents. They had no choice—

the money was needed, they all understood, to help their families.

He was there, I could taste him, smell him, feel him. He was just a young man and wouldn't meet or marry my mom for a few years yet. But his spirit in the trees whisks me away to what could have been.

Trees. They have that effect on me. Those trees all standing tall and straight like soldiers guarding our history, our future, our planet Earth.

Ultimately, I could understand if it was his camaraderie in the woods that would lead him to the Police Department—where everyone worked together regardless of the weather or tasks ahead. He was only a patrolman, a little more than a year into the department—walking the beat, when he met his demise. It was swift. It was over before his life began.

But his spirit remains in me, his daughter. We never met on this earth. But the trees tell me he was here.

Epilog:

"Our greatest task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously. It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the Government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of war, but at the same time, through this employment, accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our national resources."

Franklin D. Roosevelt, 4 March 1933

R. L. McDonald

Elizabeth

Chapter I

As the sun sank through the clouds, the Queen crouched down by the window and let out a prayer of desperation. Her head fell into her hands as she drenched them with tears. She managed to peek out through the tower window one last time, and saw in the distance a slim shadow turning the corner of the main street. The forsaken lady could hear the thunder of soldiers coming up the stairs, and she knew her life would soon come to an end.

The slim shadow was Rebecca, a young girl of fifteen. She ran through the eerie quiet streets of town looking for a safe place to hide from the guards. She glanced back at the tower one more time. Then the sound of the trumpet announced that the Queen was dead. Rebecca heard it and felt hollow inside. She wanted to cry, but even at a time like this, she didn't know how, and purpose carried her forward. She had been told on several occasions that she was as fiery spirited as her bright red curly hair. However, today she did not believe it. All she wanted to do was hide. Then all of a sudden, as a blast of wind, came a wagon. A soldier in the wagon swept her off her feet and threw her into it. She thanked her Creator that the newborn baby, which she held tightly in her arms, was still sleeping.

"Come here," called a lady sitting in the corner. The lady had not a tear or worried look. To most, it would seem as if she was in denial of her surroundings, but in reality, her solemn attitude was grief. She was naturally pleasant and firm at the same time. On her lap, she had a small boy who was playing with a bright colored ball and laughing as hard as his tiny voice would allow. He had wavy light brown hair, big eyes, dimples, and a smile that on any other occasion would have lit up a room.

"Yes," said Rebecca as she slowly and tiredly went to over to sit next to the lady.

"What's your sister's name?"

"My sister?"

"Yes, the baby in your arms."

"Oh, ah..."

In a state of confusion, Rebecca's mind raced as she tried to find a suitable name for the newborn. "Umm... Elizabeth. Cristina Elizabeth." *Yes, that is a suitable name*, she thought to herself.

"Very pretty name," the lady said with a sincere and genuine tone. "This is Timmy."

"How old is he?"

"One. He doesn't have a care in the world. He laughs like everything is okay. And how old is Elizabeth?"

"Not even two hours."

"What a shame. What a day to be born on."

"Better today than tomorrow."

The two women spoke little the rest of the journey. They were transferred from the wagon onto a boat. The boat sat all night in the port waiting for the Walls of Water, surrounding the isle of Fanasy, to come down with the morning's light. The water of the ocean, which surrounds the isle of Fanasy, rose up as an impenetrable wall every night, giving protection to the isle, forming the Walls of Water. But even they could not keep the long-lasting hatred of Adventure Land from coming in. The night was long and rambunctious with soldiers running to and fro and Fansiens crying, yelling, or attempting to escape from the Adventure Land soldiers. All night long, the prisoners were taken to boats to await the morning. Many people were either killed or taken prisoner. Only a few were left behind to try to survive on their own. Fanasy had always been a small country, but now there was only a handful of people left on the isle.

At the break of dawn, the Walls of Water came down; and the boats took the slaves to their new home. On the journey there, Rebecca stayed close to Timmy's mom, Barnapa.

"I know how to make a bottle with goat's milk," offered Barnapa.

"Oh, that is very kind of you. I hope that they send us to the same home, because I have no idea how to take care of a newborn. Is Timmy hungry?" asked Rebecca, carefully reaching into her sack.

"Thanks. Are those what I think they are?" whispered Barnapa as she caught a glimpse of the Golden Scrolls.

"Maybe."

"Better keep those well-hidden."

Barnapa dropped subject. Her silence was one of offering genuine real friendship. Rebecca was thankful that the lady never asked her why she had the Golden Scrolls. Rebecca handed Timmy a cracker. At this sight of food, he dropped his ball, clapped his hands, and took the cracker with glee. Timmy carried on laughing and playing, but Barnapa and Rebecca remained in dreary silence the rest of the way.

"We have reached the capitol! You and you, follow him! You will be privileged to be taken to the royal court," the soldier said in a harsh voice as he pointed to his fellow comrade. Rebecca and Barnapa went next to the other soldier, and soon there was a line behind him. They were escorted on foot to the palace.

At the palace, a section of housing surrounding the courtyard had been prepared for the new slaves. The Superintendent over the slaves and the Captain who had brought back the slaves were in a long conversation discussing the fate of each servant.

"That short lady with the black hair, she looks like a cooking mom; send her to the kitchen," said the Captain.

"Wait a second, are those babies you brought into my palace?" barked the Superintendent. "What I am I supposed to do with two small children!"

"Two? One!" he said defiantly.

"What do you think that girl has in her blanket? ... It's a baby! We had this conversation before. I thought my instructions were clear," he said, shaking his hand at him. "The king can use only children five and up, and you brought back two underage! What I am I supposed to do with two?" He yelled at the top of his voice in the harshest and meanest tone that Rebecca had ever heard.

"She brought her baby. Make her take care of them. They will soon be useful," the Captain barked back.

At that moment, the Superintendent stomped over to Rebecca, who was standing up confidently with her head held up high. She knew no fear.

"So, you brought a baby. Let me see," he said as his rough hands pulled back the blanket from sleeping Elizabeth's head. "What is it?"

"A girl," replied Rebecca with a glaring eye.

"And does the girl have a name?" he responded sarcastically.

"Elizabeth."

"She will suit her highness well," he said with a smirk. "She will start work as soon as she can walk."

"Elizabeth?" asked Rebecca, with a defiant tone, wondering how a child so small could work before she could run.

"Yes, of course. Princess Leona is six months old, and we have not found her a suitable playmate yet. See to it that as soon as she can walk, she is brought to me to be properly introduced to Her Highness." Turning towards the Captain, the Superintendent laughed harshly and slapped him on the back. "Well, well, my friend, it looks like you didn't do such a bad job after all. His Majesty will be pleased with your new finds."

The Superintendent took the captives to their rooms, gave them each their assignments, and then left them to get accommodated in their new quarters, his harsh sounding voice still echoing the halls. *Did everyone in this castle have a harsh voice? Was everyone cruel?* Rebecca wondered. Barnapa broke the silence with, "What fortunate baby to be chosen as—"

"I'm not sure if I like the idea of Elizabeth being brought up with what is sure to be a spoiled-rotten enemy princess." Rebecca's response startled Barnapa, but Barnapa was not one to be intrusive and ask a million questions. For this, Rebecca was thankful. She couldn't stand nosey people.

Elizabeth finally woke up to the first day of her life. She had slept for long stretches and had not fussed. She already seemed well-tempered, and she had glee in her eyes. Rebecca took the bald-headed baby into her arms and spoke kindly, "Are you hungry Elizabeth?" She walked down the hall to Barnapa's room. "Knock, knock."

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Rebecca."

"Come in."

She entered with decisiveness. "I hope the offer to help is still standing."

"Oh, of course," a slight weak smile appearing. She took the child and began speaking softly to her, as the baby cooed.

Sally Pinchock

Where's the Parrot?

We got married August 3, 1968, and now it was the fall of 1969, so we decided to look for a house out in the country. The realtor told us that the house we were looking at had a lot of "potential," even though it had sat empty for a couple of years while an estate was settled. Rick had been raised on a farm, and I was raised in a fairly progressive small city. There is a saying, "You can take the boy off the farm, but you can't take the farm out of the boy." That was Rick, and he loved the location: no houses across the road, only open fields and small fields between the neighbors on our side of the road. To me, it looked pretty lonely not having neighbors close by. The house had a New Bloomington, OH, address but was actually closer to Green Camp, OH, both one-horse towns.

My father remodeled houses, so I thought that all men had the same skills, and I agreed that this old farmhouse with beautiful oak columns dividing the living room and dining room could be restored to its original splendor. It didn't matter that there was a hump in the floor caused where the north end of the house was an addition that had settled and sunk at least six inches. There really was a rat hole in the kitchen cupboard door ignored by the elderly maid that had lived there all of her life in the Patton homestead.

The bathroom was upstairs with its copper-lined oak tank and seat and the claw-foot bathtub and pedestal sink, all original. This very well could have been one of the first houses on the road with indoor plumbing and electricity. Ah yes, electricity. There was an overhead light in each room and an electric receptacle in each room all connected to the fuse box, those screwed in fuses. We learned quickly that if I were ironing and the refrigerator kicked on, a fuse would blow. So we unplugged the refrigerator and turned off most of the lights when I had to iron, which we did a lot of in those days.

Then there was the cast-iron hand-fired coal furnace that was stoked with lump coal. Yes, the "potential" was there, but not the "do

it yourself" expertise or the surplus money to realize the potential. People would sigh in admiration when we told them that we had a coal furnace, saying, "Coal is such good heat." Whatever that was supposed to mean. All I know is that there was one cast-iron grate about 24" by 24" directly over the furnace that heated the whole house, and the "good heat" came when you stood directly over the grate and the furnace had been newly stoked. By morning, the air was getting a little chilly when the coals were mostly burned down. Luckily, our bedroom was just off the living room.

In March of 1970, the weather was balmy, and we were down to a very small pile of coal that had been there for several years. At that time, coal was \$25 a ton, and a ton fit in the bed of a pickup truck, and during the winter we were going through a ton a week. (I think Rick's annual salary was about \$4800, and mine was less.) We didn't want to invest in any coal because we were going to put in electric heat that year.

One night, when the humidity outside was extremely high and the air was very heavy, the furnace didn't seem to be drafting right, so my husband Rick, who was a very calm unexcitable person, went down to check it out. There were 2 cast-iron doors on the furnace, one on the bottom for the drafting and one in the middle to stoke the furnace. Sitting at the kitchen table, I heard an explosion, and all of a sudden there was putrid smelling green gas coming up the stairs into the kitchen. I screamed and ran to see what happened. Rick came up all sooty and told me calmly to call the Green Camp Volunteer Fire Department and the number was posted right above the phone. My hands and legs were shaking so badly I couldn't dial, so he did.

Then Rick told me that when he bent over to check the draft door, the stoking door blew off. If he had been standing up, he would have been killed. Now I was really scared and started to make coffee, one pot on the stove, the other an electric pot, with visions of a fire brigade going through my head. My legs were shaking so hard you could see them moving inside the pant legs.

Then we heard sirens from all directions. Just about every farmer in the territory volunteered for the fire department, and their pickup trucks were equipped with overhead flashing lights and sirens. Pickup trucks were pulling in the driveway from every direction before the

fire trucks got there. The first man through the door started to yell, "Where's the parrot? Where's the parrot?" and I yelled back, "We don't have a parrot! We don't have a parrot!" He seemed confused, and right behind him a couple of guys came in the door, and Rick was explaining to them what had happened. They seemed to analyze the situation pretty quickly and went down to the basement and opened the outside door to the cellar to start the air circulating.

By this time, it seemed like half the town had shown up in our yard and driveway, and the volunteers were checking out any areas that could be smoldering such as rafters in the basement and around the grate in the living room. In the meantime, someone had gone back to the fire station and got a huge fan about four feet in diameter that they positioned by the outside door to suck out the putrid air.

When it was determined that there was no threat of fire, most of the guys left and few stayed, so I offered them coffee! They explained that when coal gets damp and old, it starts a chemical process to deteriorate and when it is burned, it puts off this noxious gas. The coal we were using had been in that cellar for a long time and met all of the criteria. They wanted to be sure that we were going to be all right, and the outside temperature was about 45-50 degrees, and we told them we had lots of blankets and we would be fine. Smelling a little smoky, but fine.

Then we asked them about the parrot. We didn't know that years before Miss Patton had filled out the card for the fire department that asked that if something could be saved during a fire, what was your most valuable possession. Hers was her parrot! The firemen didn't know that Miss Patton had died and that we were the new owners. We all had a good laugh!

But wait, there's more! In those days, lots of people had scanners to pick up the fire calls and whatever else scanners do, especially out in the country where word needs to get around fast—or maybe not. The next day, when Rick went to work, several people already knew about the fire, and they took up a collection to help us out. With that collection, they bought us an electric blanket! Guess they didn't know that we couldn't use it because it might blow a fuse if the refrigerator kicked on.

The Doom Mates

By Jason Rushlow

Stephen is an armadillo. He isn't any normal armadillo. Stephen is a Samurai Armadillo. He used to save the world with his brothers, but now he is alone, sitting in a restaurant eating a taco. The restaurant has heart-shaped chairs, menus, doors, and even tacos. He wears a rain poncho in hopes that no one notices he is a giant armadillo. "Hey! That guy is a giant armadillo!" a man with a long beard and a baseball cap shouts.

The man picks up a cube and says, "You must be a Box Buddy. I must add you to my collection. Go get him, Corkerspaniel." A dog comes out that appears to be made out of corks.

"What are you doing? I just want a dang taco!" the armadillo says.

"I'm Chip. I left home 25 years ago to be the Box Buddy master. I can't go home until I've accomplished that."

"I'm not one of those Box Buddies," Stephen shouts.

"It's box Buddys! With a Y," Chip states.

"There is a difference? I-E sounds are the same as Y," says the armadillo as he eats a taco.

"Oh, there is a difference! Corkerspaniel, use float." The Corkerspaniel jumps into Stephen's cup of water.

Stephen is not very happy. "I was going to drink that," he retorts.

Chip tips his hat and says, "Hey! I'm not to the cool part yet. Corkerspaniel, use cork pop!" Suddenly the water shoots out of the cup, launching Corkerspaniel into the air, and landing on Stephen. A woman with a purple ring is watching in the corner.

"I'm an armadillo! Do you really think that would hurt me? Now fear the power of the Samurai Armadillo," Stephen says as he brushes the dog of corks off. He reaches into his poncho and pulls out a spatula. He also pulls his hood down, revealing a yellow helmet.

Chip starts to smirk. "What kind of Samurai uses a spatula?"

"I had a sword, but the moms didn't like it," Stephen answers back as he begins to raise his spatula.

The woman with a purple ring begins to speak. "I know you. You're

a Samurai Armadillo. This man that commands cork dogs must be a minion of Master Fax or King Varnish."

"Violet?! What are you doing here?" Stephen asks.

Chip has a confused look on his face. "I don't know who you are or those Jax and Tarnish guys," he says.

"I'm Violet, and one is Stephen's worst enemy and the other is mine. Anyways, I wanted a taco and I got a flyer about this place," Violet says.

"That's funny, I got a flyer too," Stephen responds.

"I came here because I wanted lunch, and then I saw this Box Buddie sitting here. I'm always up for a challenge!" Chip says.

"I'm not a Box Buddie! Can you please just go away, so I can figure out what's going on with my old friend Violet?" Stephen throws a heart-shaped taco at Chip's face.

"I could help. I have more Box Buddies. I can only carry three at a time, though," Chip snaps his fingers as he speaks.

A waiter walks by. "Excuse me, but the manager would like to speak with you two."

"I'm one of the two, right?" Chip winks as he speaks.

"No, just the girl and the armadillo." The waiter rubs his neck.

Violet smirks. "You're rubbing your neck because you are wearing an itchy mask. You are actually a former assistant of Master Fax. Specifically, you are Jackal of Hearts. All the heart-shaped stuff was a dead giveaway. I was just waiting for you to actually come out. I'm still curious where this is going."

The waiter pulls off his mask and reveals that he has a jackal head. "Aw, come on! I timed out this whole cool line I was going to lead into. I was going to be like, let's have a heart to heart, then I pull off my mask, but you ruined the fun."

Stephen laughs. "Wow, Jackal, it is you! I haven't seen you in forever. I mean, I sort of miss you trying to kill me. Why don't you round us up more tacos while you tell your big villain speech?"

Violet doesn't look as happy. "So what is this plan?"

Jackal looks confused. "Well, my plan is to... I actually don't know... I mean, it's just been so lonely ever since that big battle between my master and us radioactive minions, Lord Varnish and his puppets of death, you, Violet and the rest of the Over Force, and of course Stephen

and his two brothers, my most hated enemies. Hated by Master Fax, anyways. I mean, trying to destroy a bunch of armadillos was just what I thought a giant jackal man could do. I really just want a fight for old time's sake. So, what do you say?"

"I'm Chip, and I'm always up for a Box Buddy Battle," Chip raises his box up.

Stephen looks annoyed at Chip. "Quiet, Chip, the grownups are talking."

"I'm a grownup! I have a beard," Chip says as he scratches his beard.

Violet polishes her ring. "So we just fight? There is no death trap or anything?"

Jackal shrugs. "I couldn't decide between a vat of acid or a bucket full of piranhas. Then I settled on piranhas in a vat of acid, but that didn't work."

Stephen looks disappointed. "Come on, man, you got to have something more than just this. If it wasn't for all your death traps and creations, Master Fax would be a piece of cake."

Violet scolds Steven, "He sent us here to a trap. Why are you being so nice to him?"

"In some weird way, he's one of the closest things I have left to a family." Stephen pats Jackal of Hearts on the back.

"Oh, come on! He sent us here to a trap!" Violet is still scolding.

"He's just lonely. Look at him." Stephen points at Jackal. He is making a sad puppy face.

"This is boring, I want to fight! Corkerspaniel, come back. Come out, Ultra Robo Dragon 5,000, and use Ultra Doom Beam!" A giant cyborg dragon comes out of Chip's box. It fires a giant laser beam, everyone dodges it, and it blows up a wall.

Stephen points at the wall. "What is wrong with you!"

Jackal of Hearts starts to yell, "Hey, I spent a lot of money on this fake taco place! Whatever! I guess it's time for me to reveal my minions." Jackal presses a button, and suddenly a bunch of boxy robots on wheels roll out from behind the kitchen door.

Stephen smiles. "Wow, Fax Boys. I haven't seen those hunks of junk in forever!"

Violet rolls her eyes. "You are enjoying this way too much. Let's

get this over with! Forcer purple go!" Violet transforms into a purple jumpsuit with a completely black helmet that covers her face.

Stephen flips a Fax Boy up and down on his spatula. "Fighting these guys is a piece of cake. Pancakes, that is."

Chip is having his cyborg dragon step on some of the robots. "I thought you liked tacos."

Stephen glares at Chip. "You can like more than one thing, man. I can't just eat tacos."

Violet pulls out a staff with a long chain attached to the top and a spiked ball at the end of the chain. "It's time for these robots to face my Over Mace."

Jackal scratches his head. "I never get why you call it that. It's a morning star."

Chip is being tied up by a roll of paper the Fax Boys are shooting out. "I thought it was called a flail." Violet wraps her weapon around ten robots.

Stephen is punching the robots. "Does it really matter? Just call it the giant spiky ball chain thingy."

Stephen rolls into a ball and crushes the last of the robots. "It looks like you are flat broke on robots."

Violet raises her mace. "We must celebrate by eating tacos!"

Jackal runs to the kitchen, looking very giddy for losing. "Fine, I give up, I'll make tacos. That was fun."

Chip looks confused. "Wait, so it's over? Just like that?"

Violet sits down. "Yeah, I guess so. He used to work for Master Fax. With him gone, Jackal does seem—robot army aside—pretty harmless. I mean, the robots didn't even have their drills or death lasers."

Stephen nods. "Yeah, the robots didn't have electro whips either. Also, I ate his tacos, and they are fine. I can smell poison, anyways. He's really changed since Master Fax vanished."

Jackal comes out of the kitchen, and they eat tacos. Violet has to take her helmet off to eat tacos. Is that important? I don't know. It's just worth mentioning in case you're wondering how she can eat tacos with a helmet on.

The dinner seems to go well until Jackal notices something on the floor. "Ok, you guys feel more welcome here since I didn't actually kill

you, but that doesn't mean you need to take your socks off."

Stephen looks at his bare feet. "It's not me. I don't even wear shoes."

Chip lifts up his foot. "I haven't taken my socks off since I turned ten years old."

Violet looks at the sock. "Vanish... Lord Varnish is spying on us. It's one of his sock puppet minions." The sock stands up and hisses revealing its sharp teeth.

Jackal's eyes begin to glow and he zaps the sock with a beam from his eyes. "I wondered why I kept finding socks in this place. He must have been spying on me for weeks, then. How did he know I was here?"

Violet says, "I knew you put hearts everywhere. Your ad even said armadillos eat free."

Jackal scratches his head. "Well, I guess I have to leave here. I actually lived in the attic of this place. Where will I live now?"

Stephen shrugs. "You can live with me, I guess."

Violet looks at the burnt sock. "I'll have to keep an eye on you two, since Lord Varnish is looking for you for some reason."

Chip looks around. "Can I live with you, too?"

Stephen shrugs. "Sure, yeah, fine, everyone can just live in my abandoned junkyard."

And so they all move to Stephen's junkyard. Many adventures are to come. What temperature should the room be? Should the toilet seat be up or down? And where is Lord Varnish?

Anette Wolski

Spy Dad

The dreaded day had arrived. In my seven-year-old mind, I was about to become the envy of my classmates, or a total reject. Yep! I predicted that the lie I was about to tell gave me a 50-50 chance of either making me the envy of my class or making me a fool.

The plot to hatch this lie started the week prior. Our teacher gave us the assignment of making a short presentation about what our fathers did for a living, followed by our own aspirations for adult employment. All fine and dandy. The thing was...I had no idea what my father did for a living.

So I went home that day and asked him.

Me: Hey, dad. Where do you work?

Dad: I work downtown.

Me: Yeah, but who do you work for?

Dad: (Big sigh) It's complicated. I'm an auditor for the ATF—the Alcohol, Tobacco Tax and Firearms division of the IRS...the Internal Revenue Service...

Me: (No response. Staring blankly.)

Dad: It's part of the government that is responsible for taxation... but you probably haven't studied that yet in school. You're too young... hmm, how do I explain this?

Me: (In my head.) *Did he say that he works for the government?*

Dad: I work for the alcohol taxation department. I travel a lot...

Me: (In my head.) *Did he say he worked for the government?! Like James Bond? Is my dad a SPY?!*

Dad: I go to places that manufacture alcohol and make sure that they are doing everything right...waa-waa-waa...

Me: (In my head.) *My dad's a spy! No wonder he travels so much...*

I didn't hear anything else that my dad said. I was too focused on the revelation that my dad was a spy. I couldn't wait to tell my classmates that my dad was James Bond! Wow, won't they be envious!

Me: (In my head.) But wait...if my dad is a spy...I can't reveal this...I

must keep it a secret! Spies keep secrets. I must keep my dad safe...no one must know about this...

Dad: waa-waa-waa...If anyone asks, just tell them that I work for the government.

Me: OK.

No, not OK. If anyone knows that you're a spy, they'll come after you. No, this is our secret.

The presentation was a week away. What could I tell the class? I had no idea.

I decided to wing it.

The teacher began with the first row and snaked around the room. I listened to my classmates' presentations for a clue as to what I should say. I became more nervous as it came closer to my turn to present.

And then it hit me. Pet shop owner! Yep, pet shop owner it is. It wouldn't be a total lie because when I was younger, we would always take in stray animals. I remember a time when we had both a Great Dane, a Chihuahua, and other dogs in kennels in our backyard. My mom was a sucker for stray animals...yes, it was definitely like a pet shop, because the animals would stay for a brief time, find owners, leave, and then more animals would come in. It didn't matter that this was my mom's thing...my classmates didn't have to know that.

When the teacher called on me, I stood up, took a deep breath, and then I said: My dad owns a pet shop. He has a lot of different kinds of animals, but mainly dogs. I would like to be a pet shop owner when I grow up because it's good to be kind to animals and find them homes.

Teacher: Very interesting, Anette. Thank you.

I sat back down, relieved. I saved face and protected my dad. I didn't get the reaction from my classmates that I had expected, though. I thought they would be excited and would ask me more about the pets in my dad's store.

My classmates couldn't have cared less.

A few weeks after the presentation, I was visiting my best friend. Her mother asked me what my father did for a living. *Uh-oh. Busted.*

I decided that it was OK to tell my best friend's mom that my dad was a spy...or?

I compromised.

Me: My dad works for the government.

Best Friend's Mom: (laughing) Honey, we ALL work for the government.

And that was the end of it.

Years later, I discovered why my mother collected stray animals. She had been part of an animal rescue group and our property was used as the kennel. Talk about secrets—I didn't find this out until I was 60 years old.

Imelda Zamora

Life

*"To wait an Hour – is long
If love be just beyond –
To wait Eternity – is short
If love rewards the end –"*

Emily Dickinson

I opened my eyes and the patterns on the ceiling kept repeating as I passed under them. I was lying on a gurney being wheeled along a hospital corridor. "Welcome back!" said a cheerful voice. I followed the sound with my eyes to a nurse walking alongside, pushing the gurney. Welcome back from where? My mind was foggy. Then I saw my arm hooked up to an IV. I felt pain when I moved. I didn't exactly know why, but I asked for the time. She answered, 6 p.m. Or did she say 5? It was evening? With a bright smile, she said, "We were all praying for you, dear," as she patted my hand. What was she talking about? As they swung me into the room, she bent down and whispered in my ear, "We almost lost you, you know."

Back on September of the previous year, my husband Johnny and I were on a plane coming home from Virginia after the funeral of his cousin. I was reading a magazine when suddenly, out of nowhere, something struck my olfactory nerve and ricocheted down to my stomach. The smell became stronger as the stewardess came closer. She was carrying a tray of donuts. Donuts? I could not look at them but managed a weak, No, thank you. Johnny took one and asked, "Are you sure you don't want any?" as he thrust it in front of me. I turned my head so fast, I almost had a whiplash. Better a whiplash than a vomit, I thought to myself, suddenly realizing what this could mean. I was late in my period, but then, so what? I had been late before, more times than I would like to remember—this could mean nothing. So I kept quiet. Besides, we do not need any more disappointments. After 15 years and 9 months of waiting for a baby, you would think we would

be immune to them—disappointments, I mean, not donuts.

For years we'd tried everything: different doctors, treatments, tests and the whole bit. It was pressure on top of disappointments on top of exhaustion. But there were light moments though, and funny, like the time our wooden bed broke in two beneath us—crack—interrupting our “activity” and—thud—there we were, tightly wedged in. We laughed so hard, it took us a while to get out.

After more tries, I'd become half-hearted. Half of my heart still hoped, but the other half felt it was no use. I dreaded the day when I would totally give up. In a way it did come, because one day, I said, “Why don't we adopt?”

“Okay,” he replied. And so, one fine day, we went to Catholic Services and applied to adopt a child. We filled up forms, were interviewed, and attended two meetings. Then we were told to wait. It might be a much longer wait, they said, because we were too specific for what we wanted, which was for an infant no more than 2 years old and of either Asian or Hispanic parentage. We felt this was a good decision, although I could detect some misgivings on Johnny's part. As for my part, I left it all to God. We did relax after that. There was no longer any pressure. It was very exhilarating.

So there we were, 30,000 miles high up on a plane, three months after the Catholic Services application, and my stomach was doing somersaults at the smell of fried donuts. As I said, I kept quiet, but he sensed something was wrong as he watched me press a tissue to my nose, my body leaning forward. “Are you okay?”

“I'm fine,” I said, patting him on the arm, the nauseous feeling going away. I waited two more days before telling him. Then I had a pregnancy test done. After another week, my doctor confirmed it: Positive. We were ecstatic. It opened a new world for us, hopeful and bright.

It was a beautiful spring day when we went to see the doctor for my regular checkup. The baby was due in 3 days, and we were full of joyful anticipation. After coming out of the clinic, I waited until we were walking to our car and said, “He wants me admitted right away.”

“You're having the baby now?” His face broke into a smile.

We got in the car and, taking the fear off my voice, I said, very calmly, “No. He wanted me admitted so he could monitor my elevated

blood pressure and protein." I decided that it was not the time to tell him about my mother, who had died of post-eclampsia, after giving birth to a baby boy, who also died two days later. Or that I was on the verge of pre-eclampsia myself at that moment.

On the second day at the hospital, my blood pressure came down to normal, and so did the protein in my blood. That evening, my doctor sauntered into the room and announced that everything was fine and that he would "induce" the baby the following day. About midnight, my labor pain started. By 4 a.m., they were coming at shorter intervals. They asked me what time my husband usually woke up. Since it was a working day, I said 6 a.m. "We'll let him sleep. We'll call him at 6." By the time he came, the pain had become unbearable. I would scream and simultaneously crush his hands, which I was holding between mine. When they wheeled me into the operating room, they asked if I wanted to watch the birth of my baby. I said yes. I was forty years old, and it took me forever to have this one (16 years and 5 months to be exact), so why not complete the whole experience? After more pushing, I heard someone say, "The baby is coming!" They adjusted the mirror. At first, all I could see was the white sheet covering my thighs, and then I saw a head, then a small body covered with mucous and blood. "It's a boy!" the doctor announced happily. The nurse quickly brought the crying baby briefly in front of me on my chest before whisking it away to be cleaned: this tiny living creature, this miracle of life. It was a gift from God. What else could it be? How else could it have happened?

Back in Recovery, we had the room all to ourselves. We could not get the smiles off our faces. He dangled his limp hands and claimed I broke 4 of his fingers—but neither of us was feeling any pain. Since it was only midmorning, I suggested that he could still go to work. But an hour after he left, I began to feel an excruciating pain in the lower part of my body. I called the nurse, who called another nurse, and when my doctor finally came and examined me, he said something I could not hear over my screams. I was vomiting violently and feeling faint. They immediately called Johnny back to the hospital. The nurses wheeled me back to the O.R. I heard frantic voices, "I can't get any blood, doctor."

"I don't feel a pulse."

"Doctor, her blood pressure is coming down fast."

Then I blacked out.

When I opened my eyes, I was being wheeled into the room and a nurse was saying “Welcome back.” It was explained to me that I had developed a “hematoma.” When the baby passed through, a blood vessel burst, and the blood accumulated into a clot that grew into the size of a grape and would keep growing if not incised. This was what caused the pain. I hemorrhaged and lost a lot of blood. I went into shock. They almost “lost” me.

I was not allowed to move for 3 days for fear that I might bleed again. I sensed that something else was wrong because I was now running a fever. The doctor explained that I had a “slight” reaction to the blood that was transfused into me. It took another day when, at last, my baby was deposited in my arms. It was total bliss, pure delight, what all mothers must have felt the first time they held their babies. And this I knew to be true. None would equal mine.

*“If all the griefs I am to have
 Would only come today,
 I am so happy I believe
 They’d laugh and run away.
 If all the joys I am to have
 Would only come today,
 They could not be as big as this
 That happens to me now.”*

Emily Dickinson

Epilogue:

A lady from Catholic Services did finally call us, but by that time, our baby was 6 months old. I told her this and said that we would still take the child they were offering us. “I’m sorry”, she replied, “We have a policy – we do not place an infant in a family who has another child under 2 years old. And, anyway,” she added, “you already have one, so why not have someone else who doesn’t have the child instead?” That made perfect sense. Yes, of course, absolutely!



Westland Writes began in April 2009 as a small poetry book by local authors in celebration of National Poetry Month. Since then, it has grown into an eclectic annual collection of poems and stories from in and around the community of Westland, Michigan. The William P. Faust Public Library of Westland is proud to present this twelfth installment of Westland Writes. Happy reading and writing!

