

The Loyalhanna Review



Our 20th Anniversary

2011

Table of Contents

Bumblebee Bounty (art) by Alicia Stankay ... OFC	
From the Editor	IFC
Bigfoot by Ronald L. Murphy Jr.	1
Our House by Keith Neill	2-3
Hitting the Target by Michael Albright.....	3
Soufflé and The Flutist by Carolyn Cecil	3
Stealing the Moon by Steven Shilling	4
Moon over Tamarindo by Patricia Thrushart.....	4
Boxed Beach by Ann Curran	4
Ocean's Invitation by Carolyn Cornell Holland....	5
Island of Innocence by Joe F. Stierheim.....	6
When Sunset Fades by Ronald J. Shafer	7
Christine by Ronald J. Shafer	7
Who Are These Classmates? by Patricia Orendorff Smith.....	7
Tea by Joe F. Stierheim.....	7
And the Winner Is by Nancy Clark.....	8
The Rat That Stole Christmas by Rebecca Dunn.....	9-10
Ligonier by Nancy Kraemer	11
Loyalhanna Creek (art) by Patricia Thrushart .	11
Red-Eared Slider (art) by Abby Diamond.....	12
Microphone Finch (art) by Abby Diamond	13
Go Fly a Kite by Janice McLaughlin	14
Pick Your Own (art) by Louise Vrable.....	14
This Is What a Chinese Thinks of Pittsburgh by Karen S. Zhang	15-16
Mel's Market by Richard Miller	16-17
The Meetings by Sylvia Sholar	17
The Billy Ballad by Jan Kinney	18
A Poem before Breakfast by Jan Kinney	19
The Wintering of Michael Rebovich by Sharon Anderson.....	19
Sometimes by Mary Ann Back	20
The Old Red Rocking Chair by Betty Ladue ...	21
Pelican by Nancy Lee Kraemer	21
If by Marge Burke.....	22
Did I Ever Say Thank You? by Audrey Casperson	22
Benches by Marge Burke	23
Luca by Michael Albright	23
Yankees by Lou Steiner.....	23-24
LVW Calendar 2011-2012	24
Bear Rocks (art) Janice McLaughlin.....	IBC
Who Said the World Is Round? (art) by Louise Vrable.....	OBC

From the Editor

Since the last issue of *The Loyalhanna Review*, the Ligonier Valley Writers have all been busy with a number of events. Our 2010 Ligonier Valley Writers' Conference at the Ligonier Camp and Conference Center featured Iranian fiction writer Anahita Firouz; Christine O'Toole, telling us about magazine and feature writing; Jan Beatty, award-winning poet and leader of Carlow's Madwomen in the Attic; and Greg Joseph of the popular band The Clarks, who taught songwriting. Local authors presented, sold their books, and made connections at the successful Authors and Artists' Book Fair at Ligonier Valley Library in August. In September members enjoyed our picnic and readings at St. Michael's of the Valley.

October was doubly busy. LVW sponsored a workshop by San Francisco poet Maya Stein, who was spending two months on her Tour de Word trip around the country. The Flash Fiction Contest theme "Witches and Warlocks" garnered many entrants vying for cash prizes. Winners read their stories at Barnes & Noble to celebrate Halloween. Our Christmas gathering featured readings by some of our members and lots of wonderful food and conversation.

In February 2011, Barb Miller and Mary Ann Mogus taught a workshop on how to write a paranormal mystery/romance crossover novel. More than 20 writers turned out to learn their secrets and jumpstart their own novels. This year more than 350 poems were entered in the Student Poetry Contest. In April, winning students celebrated National Poetry Month by reading their poems to an audience of more than 65 people. They received cash prizes and a booklet containing all of the winning poems.

The year 2011 is our 25th Anniversary for Ligonier Valley Writers and the 20th for *The Loyalhanna Review*. Both totals are milestones for a small community-based literary arts organization. We may not have enough silver in the treasury to celebrate in grand style, but we are proud to continue the vision of our founders: to enhance the cultural life of the Ligonier Valley and beyond.

--Ruth McDonald, Editor in Chief, *Loyalhanna Review*

Special Thanks to all the dedicated, hard-working members of Ligonier Valley Writers whose continued efforts allow us to bring you this issue free of charge as a literary and cultural service to the community of southwestern Pennsylvania.

To all the talented authors and artists who sent in their work, thank you for choosing *The Loyalhanna Review*. The high quality of the submissions made selection extremely difficult.

Additional Recognition goes to J M Abstract, Linda Ciletti, Judith Gallagher, Barb Miller, Donald Miller, Ruth McDonald, Paul Nickoloff and the staff at Fotorecord Print Center, and Gabi Nastuck at the Latrobe Art Center.

Front Cover: Alicia Stankay's photo, "Bumblebee Bounty," comes from her interest in nature photography and inspiration from many hikes around state parks. A member of the Taproot Writers Workshop in Ambridge, PA, she has won short story contests and has been published in *Writer's Digest*, *Writers' Journal*, and the *Taproot Literary Review*.

Bigfoot

by Ronald L. Murphy, Jr.

You are the wild
Untamed
Uncivilized
Personified
You are a green man
With long black hair
A dancing satyr
On huge clumsy feet
Impressions
In the mud
In the mind
Smell
Seeping
Creeping through the ages
Touching
The bestial
In humanity
Jungian
You exist
In two worlds
One of trees
Tangled vegetation
One of living grey
Mired
In the mind
Traveler
Through time
And place
Haunting
The spaces
In between
Sasquatch
Skunk ape
Missing link
What do you think?

What do you think
Of this
Human race
And its trace
Etched
In your world
That we poison
And choke
Cut
And bleed
Raze the woods
To pave a road
Pull down
Mountains
With greedy
Machines
And erect
Artificial
Wal-Mart hills
A ridge of
Strip malls
Shopping carts
Herded
Like deer
In metal stalls
Your call
Silent
Laconic
Mountain giant
Watch
As we
Destroy
That which
We can
So run and

Hide
Far away
In memory
In folk tale
Carved
In totem poles
And spoken of
With indigenous tongues
But don't live
Where we can
See you
MoMo
Oh-mah
Bushman
Catch him
If you can
You are a
Scream in the
Night
Stay out of sight
Woods Devil
Prowler in the Forest
Nuk-luk
Wendigo
Where would
You go
So that we
Could not find you?
Skookum
Wookie
Big Elder Brother
Of some other mother
Run for cover
And don't
Look back.

Ron Murphy, an English alum from Pitt, has done graduate work in history at IUP. An actor, playwright, and Indiana Players board member and the father of four, he thanks his understanding wife because he writes in the wee hours. ronaldmurphyjr@yahoo.com

Our House

by Keith Neill

The big old farmhouse sat up the lane off the winding country road. It was far from modern and would never qualify for a spread in *House Beautiful*, but it was a magnet for family, neighbors, and friends. Our house was the center of the universe when I was a kid.

Sunday afternoons were lazy and seemed to be the time that everybody came to visit. Part of this was because my maternal grandmother lived with us. And did she have the connections! There were cousins, old neighbors, former classmates, former students, and often my aunt and uncle. At times there would be three conversation centers – the living room, the dining room and, in good weather, the back porch. Somehow the men always ended up on the back porch or under the large maple tree that guarded the end of the clothesline. I thought this happened in all families, but later on I figured it out that we were different. None of the neighbors had this much company.

There were older ladies with white hair and purple hair and cheeks as red as beets, their hair in a bun or braids wound and pinned close to their heads. Rimless octagonal glasses were the choice of the retired teacher. None of the women wore slacks; some wore flowered print dresses that would have made great drapes for the Holiday Inn. Others wore “house dresses,” and their shoes were black, tied oxfords with a slight heel. Even in the hottest weather none of these visitors appeared in shorts.

The men wore clean work clothes. Blue chambray shirts were most often the Sunday afternoon dress of the old guys. Either bright green or red suspenders kept their pants in suspense. All this was topped off with straw hats, often with a green plastic inset on the front of the brim.

Besides the visitors on Sundays, we always had people coming to get milk. It was self-serve. They got as many gallons as they needed and left the money in the coffee can on the shelf in the corner. Buyers could even make change if they needed to. Some of these customers eventually became part of the neighborly exchange.

Saturdays were my mother’s baking day, and she always planned extra goodies for the Sunday visitors. Beginning early in the morning there would be a profusion of aromas coming from the kitchen.

When we came in from doing our morning barn chores, there were homemade bread, thick fruit pies with juice dripping from the edge, and lemon or banana cream pies with mile-high meringue, all lined up on the counter as if they were going to be judged at the county fair. Sometimes Mom baked cinnamon rolls oozing with sticky goo, topped with smooth white glaze and sprinkled with chopped nuts. No wonder so many people liked to stop at our house.

I can remember when one of my friends came into

the kitchen and saw the bread rising in an old round aluminum roaster sitting atop the Hoosier cabinet. It had raised the lid in the process, and he called to my mother, “Ma’am, your bread is overflowing.” The bread would be formed into large loaves baked in a pie pan or a traditional loaf pan. The bread was famous and delicious, although I asked my mother to buy white “doughy” bread for my school lunch sandwiches so the kids wouldn’t tease me. None of the visitors at our house ever seemed to mind that the bread was homemade, especially when it was topped with freshly churned butter and newly cooked berry jam.

The ladies in the flowered dresses taught me how to play lots of exciting games: Monopoly, Touring, checkers, assorted card games. The battles of these games got heavy at times, and I learned about winning and losing. It was valuable training for getting along in the working world. The mustached old guys tried to teach me how to carve a bird from a piece of sweet perfumed pine, but a bloody finger made that a short-lived hobby. A fellow with a Barlow told me I’d better stick to some other pastime, like reading a book. The flying penknife of mumblety-peg was easier if the players wore shoes since the penknife that stuck in the ground closest to the foot was the winner. Ouch.

On special holidays we would set up long tables that spanned the dining room through the living room. The tables were covered with my mother’s best linen tablecloths, and out came the good china and silverware. Every mismatched chair in the house was placed around the table to accommodate all the hungry aunts, uncles, and cousins, and a special table was set up for the kids. I couldn’t wait to get to the adult table, but when I finally got there I thought, “What’s so great about this?” In later years, I volunteered to sit at the kids’ table. Adults talked too much about politics and illnesses.

*Our house was
the center of the universe.*

After the feast was over, the men sat around the table while the women began to clean up. The silverware always had to be counted when put back into the red-felt-lined wooden chest. I always wondered if Gram feared that a relative would try to take some.

We didn’t know what a family room was; our dining room table was the center of family life. It was a place to do homework, play games, and entertain. Since it connected to the living room, we could easily talk with Mom, Dad, and Gram. I can still see Nipper, the RCA Victor radio dog, on the front of the radio dial as we listened to “The Lone Ranger” and “Hopalong Cassidy” in the dining room just before supper. When I finally saw these cowboys on TV, I told my mother, “That’s not what they look like.”

Growing up in this friendly house allowed me to intimately understand the great give and take of idle conversation; we knew about everybody's comings and goings, their problems and their triumphs. I learned how to listen to everyone and to ask my own questions. I didn't always get all the nuances of the conversation because some subjects were off limits to kids my age. When I asked a question that was over the edge, the adults would tell me they didn't want to talk about it anymore. I never pushed it.

All this took place in a house that didn't have a bathroom until I was six. But that didn't keep any of the people from coming to see us. In 1929 my grandmother had been invited to this house for a community square dance. The living room and dining room, which are separated by a massive arch, are each large enough to accommodate a square. She said when she came there to dance, she never thought she would live there someday. I can visualize the fiddle, guitar, and upright bass playing music for the dance. I never realized how large the house was until I lived in an apartment in college.

Maybe the walls can still hear the strains of "Turkey in the Straw" and beckon the multitudes to stop by to share the bread and trade one more story. ♦

Keith Neill is a retired high school teacher. In 2009 when he attended LVW's Book Fair, he met the Monroeville Lifestory Writers. He now writes with them and also facilitates a Lifestory writing group in New Stanton.

Soufflé Dish

by Carolyn Cecil

Tucked in back
from wedding days
of broccoli soufflés
made for him
with cheese and eggs
on Chinquapin,
over evening news
through law school.

I won the dish,
fairly given,
unbroken,
elegant,
with pleated rim.

The other day
I baked again,
broccoli soufflé
for a new man –
not his favorite –
beaten eggs, cream.

The joy of making it,
reminiscent,
sweetened with time.
Different.
I dine on present time.

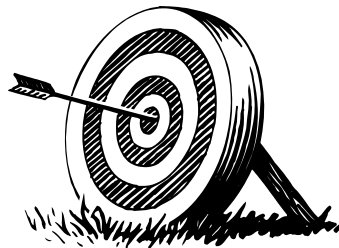
Carolyn Cecil participates in a monthly poetry critique group in Baltimore and enjoys the Ligonier Valley Writers' Conference and Delaware's Milton Poetry Fest. Her poems have been in the *Broadkill Review*, *More Stories* website, *Poet's Ink*, and *The Gunpowder Review*.

Hitting the Target

by Michael Albright

Inside these walls, all things are made possible,
desire, hope, fulfillment, despair.
The bland stone uniformity of the exterior
belies the infinitude of choice within.
It is nearly axiomatic
that you end up finding something
other than you were looking for,
or you find them both, and more.
You have forgotten the difference
between need and want, if you ever thought
there was one in the first place.
All of creation exists in here,
birth and childhood, raiment and sustenance,
work and leisure and well-being,
and then, when it is time to go,
a final reckoning, and the bill must be paid
before heading outside where the light is real,
back into a world where there are no limits
to the choices of the things we do not want.

Michael Albright is retired and has returned to his abandoned youthful avocation of writing poetry and other wordsmithery. He resides in Greensburg, PA, with his wife, Lori, and an ever-changing array of children and other animals.



Flutist

by Carolyn Cecil

Aching tones waft
over early dawn grass;
a hush is cast
while I garden.

Prayer-like entreaties
from two doors down,
invisible maker
of delicate sounds.

Softer and softer
her tune seems to be;
her notes choke,
wrenching me.

I can hardly bear
the sweet, sad song,
mingling,
with wind on the lawn.

Stealing the Moon

by Steve Shilling

This morning, on our trek
to get the newspapers,
my son pointed to the sky
and said, "Look, Daddy,
look, moon!" Perched high
in the clear blue 8 a.m. sky
was a beautiful half moon
on its way to bed and sleep.
"Daddy, can we get it?" he
asked, reaching as high
as he could. "We'll
have to get a ladder," I said.

As we made our way back
to the house, there was just
a touch of disappointment
in his voice. Yet undeterred,
"Yeah, we need a ladder," he
said, noting that it was not
the customary full moon
he had come to know. "We
need to fix it. It's broken."

Ann Curran is the author of the chapbook *Placement Test*. Her poetry has appeared recently in *Rosebud*, *Notre Dame Magazine*, *Off the Coast*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Ireland of the Welcomes*, *Third Wednesday*, *US. 1 Worksheets*, and several anthologies.

Patricia Thrushart lives in western Pennsylvania with her two children. Her liberal arts and master's degree in public management inform her writing far more than her work as an executive for a large bank. Her photo of Loyalhanna Creek is on page 11.

Steve Shilling of McMurray, PA, has poems forthcoming in *Re)verb*, *Burnt Bridge*, and *Rockhurst Review* and has been published in numerous journals, including *Crannóg*, *DASH Journal*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Reed Magazine* and *The Loyalhanna Review*.

Moon over Tamarindo

by Patricia Thrushart

Heavy she lies
and languid
above the restless palms
full with round fecundity
succor of the night

Luxuriant and glowing
in golden stolen light
preening in her passage
through clouds of silken white

Beneath her heavy body
the sea stirs and responds
earth's bulging rock strains upward
desirous and blind

Boxed Beach

by Ann Curran

The sauna is a beach without glare.
It's 180 degrees in there.
No sweat to attract wind-blown sand.
No boom boxes. No ocean grand.
No bodies prompting amazed gawks,
Just the quiet of a hot wooden box.

Wear a towel, flip-flops. Don't breathe deep.
Whatever you do, don't fall asleep.
The cedar captures, surrenders heat.
Solace for muscles, bones, if not feet.
The warmth is at least as hot as desire.
I leave when my toenails catch on fire.

The Ocean's Invitation

by Carolyn Cornell Holland

*The ocean merges with the sky on the distant horizon.
Where do they become separate?
This mystery speaks to my soul.*

~~~~~

I stand at the water's edge, waves crashing on my feet. I'm preparing my mind for an evening of bodysurfing. As I look towards the indefinable horizon, I contemplate the ocean's untamable power and hidden dangers: 23-foot-high tsunamis travel across oceans at 500 miles per hour; undertows suck people into ocean eddies; sharks maim and kill swimmers; even dead lion's mane jellyfish cause hundreds of fatal stings.

When I immerse myself in the water, my survival depends on strict attention to its every detail. I must be sensitive to the presence of sharks and jellyfish; I must know the signs of an approaching tsunami; I must be aware of the undertow. I must understand the heartbeat of the ocean, its tides and waves that have no concern for me, a mere mortal. As I play in the ocean's water I must acknowledge my lack of power over it.

I must grant the ocean its due respect, its sacredness. I must ultimately bend to its will.

~~~~~

When I first enter the water, coldness rolls over my feet and ankles. Initially I welcome this relief from the hot, humid August dog day. The relief is short-lived as the water chills my thighs and shocks my stomach. I pause for a few minutes, allowing myself to adapt to the temperature. I bend over, reaching my hands into the depths. A stray piece of seaweed wraps itself around my leg. I pick it off, feel its slippery surface, and toss it aside. I splash water over my face.

It takes courage to advance farther into the ocean's depth, but I move on until chilly water glides soothingly over my shoulders. I absorb the sacred rhythm emanating from the ocean's soul as wave after wave emerges. Cresting at varying heights, these waves race each other shoreward. As they pass over me, they cause my body to bob up and down in a curious water dance tuned in to the sacred rhythm. I am at one with the briny water as I wait for the perfect wave that will embrace me and carry me to the sandy shore.

There it is! I dive into its midst, merging into its bounding pulse, where I feel nature's strength. The ride is disappointingly brief. With sundry seaweed and seashells, I am deposited where the water meets the sand. Its power dissipated, the wave

gently folds itself under incoming waves to return to the ocean's womb.

I lie quietly on the wet sand, surrounded by frothy alabaster foam, the aftermath of waves crashing against the shore. I hear their clamoring, thundering voices. I feel the swirling, gritty sand being forced inside my bathing suit. I taste the saltiness of the waves streaming into my mouth. I inhale their fishy, seaweedy odor, typical of the New England seacoast. I see them pull at the sandy shore while giving up treasures from the briny deep. I feel the warmth of the sun on my back.

My yearning to become part of nature's primeval watery dance emboldens me to rise and venture back into the depths. This evening I will return to the depths again and again, spiritually uniting with the ocean's perfect wave offerings.

~~~~~

Once my energy is spent, I retreat to a large, flat rock high above the shore. A soft ocean breeze dries and ruffles my nearly silvery-gray hair. While shades of orange and pink replace the blue sky, memories of my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother flood into my mind. This little patch of the sea was their second home, as it is mine. They once sat on this same rock, soaking in sun rays and supervising my childhood play. They observed the same ocean activity I am watching now.

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## *The waves smoothed away my rough edges, soothing my body and soul.*

---

In the distance a wave rises from the ocean's glistening surface. It slowly gains several feet in stature, gathering momentum as it rolls toward me. It crashes against the rocky cliff on which I sit, showering me with mist. I watch it slip into the rock's minutest cracks and crevices.

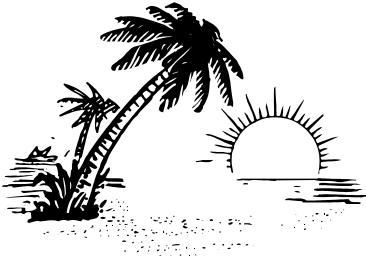
I wonder how rough the edges of this rock were eons ago, before the repetition of formidable, unyielding, ancient waves wore them smooth and round. I contemplate how this evening's waves smoothed away my rough edges, soothing my body and soul.

As the sun does its final disappearing act, I gather up my belongings and walk away from the beach. I cannot resist turning around for a final glimpse of the ocean, now reflecting a bright, shimmering moon. In spite of its dangers, the sea is passionate, sensuous, majestic. It invites me to return. I will not resist. ♦

**Carolyn Cornell Holland**, a photojournalist, lives in the *past* lane while writing a historical romance novel (1790s) and a historical paranormal short story (1673). She manages five writing blogs and facilitates the Beanery Writers Group in Latrobe, PA.

# The Island of Innocence

by Joe F. Stierheim



Mike sat on the rock and waited. It had been a long time since Pat had gone to the castle to attend the conference with the king. Those royal conferences always seemed to be interminable. He wished he could attend one just to find out what happened but he wasn't sure that he could stand a meeting of such length. He was probably better off to be of his lowly station and not have to worry about anything more than his daily existence. God knew that was enough to worry about these days.

He stared at the imposing castle across the dusty surface of the plain, its rock walls an intimidating symbol of majesty, power, and wisdom, a beacon for all of common station. Mike had intently kept his eyes on the castle's large doors for a long time after Pat had gone through them. The meeting was a very important one. Surely some great wisdom, some solution to the island's dilemma would come out of it.

He watched the castle doors, waiting impatiently for their opening to signal the meeting's end, but his attention wandered. When he looked up, Pat was coming across the field toward him. Mike hoped to get from Pat's manner of walking some clue as to the meeting's results. He couldn't. Pat's pudgy figure glistened with sweat in the sunlight, and his slow pace gave no indication of either good or bad news.

When Pat finally came within talking distance, Mike spoke. "Well, what happened?"

Pat didn't answer but sat down on a rock opposite Mike.

"What happened?" Mike asked again.

"We're to leave," Pat said.

"Leave?"

"Leave the island. Everybody."

Mike stared at Pat. "How are we to leave?"

"In canoes."

"We don't have any canoes."

"The king said we should build some."

Mike looked over the island. From where he sat, he could see practically the entire island. Now that the trees had all been cut there was nothing to obstruct the view. He shifted his gaze back to Pat. "But we don't have any wood," he reminded him.

"I know," Pat answered.

"Did you tell the king that?"

"Yes. I don't think he understood."

"Didn't understand?"

"You know he doesn't get out much—just stays in the castle where he's comfortable."

"All he has to do is look out the window, for God's sake."

Pat shrugged.

Mike looked about him. The dusty plain spoke

eloquently of the dilemma that faced his people. Once it had been covered with trees, a thick forest lush with fruits, nuts and berries and harboring birds, monkeys, pigs, and many other creatures.

"The king told us to cut the trees down," Mike said.

Pat said nothing.

"He said there would always be more," Mike said.

Pat still said nothing.

Mike thought back to the time when the trees were still standing. The king had said they were needed for all sorts of things—housing, heating and cooking, altars, ceremonial fires. The needs were endless. And there were other advantages to cutting the trees. The monkeys and pigs and birds had fewer places to hide and could be caught easily. There were many feasts on the island during those days. But all the pigs and monkeys were gone now. So were the fruits, nuts, and berries. The last wood on the island, from houses that were left and the last few altars and monuments, had been used for heat last winter.

"I don't think we should have cut down all the trees," said Mike. He turned and faced Pat so Pat would have to look into his eyes. "What's the king going to do now?" he asked.

"He's going to leave," said Pat.

"But how can he leave? After all, he can't just swim away."

"He's going to build a canoe."

"He can't build a canoe. There's no wood left on the island."

"He's going to use the castle doors."

Mike considered Pat's statement. The castle doors were the last wood on the island. They wouldn't make a large canoe, but it would be adequate for the king. He could use the doors. They were his, after all.

"I'm going home now," announced Pat. "It's been an awfully long day." He got up and with a gesture of goodbye began waddling across the plain.

Mike seated on his rock. He was depressed. He had expected much more wisdom to come from the meeting. Besides, thinking of the trees that had covered the island and the pigs and other animals they had sheltered made him feel worse. The birds had been the lucky ones. They had just flown away. But the thought of pigs made him feel bad—especially the pigs. They had tasted so good at the feasts. And he was so hungry.

Mike watched Pat, who was still visible as he made his way across the treeless plain. Pat was quite fat. He wondered how much Pat weighed. Probably more than a good-sized pig. ♦

**Joe F. Stierheim** of Ligonier is a retired architect using writing as a creative outlet. His poetry and stories appear in regional and national publications. His novel *A Matter of Time* is available at [silverbeargraphics.com](http://silverbeargraphics.com), Amazon.com, Kindle, Nook, and iPad.



# When Sunset Fades

by Ron Shafer

When sunset fades and moonlight bathes the sky,  
When nightingales announce the end of day,  
And the breeze whispers softly, like your sigh,

With hands entwined, we count the stars, and I  
Fall captive to your touch and your embrace,  
When sunset fades and moonlight bathes the sky.

But what, I wonder, if these feelings die  
Like flowers doomed to bloom, wilt, and decay?  
And the breeze whispers softly, like your sigh.

To fall in love, risk loss and hurt, is why  
I know that I should keep my heart at bay,  
When sunset fades and moonlight bathes the sky.

But in the light reflecting in your eyes,  
The love I see speaks more than words can say.  
And the breeze whispers softly, like your sigh.

As if you know my fears, your lips brush mine  
And doubts, like withered petals, whisk away,  
When sunset fades and moonlight bathes the sky,  
And the breeze whispers softly, like your sigh.

---

# Christine

by Ron Shafer

I could compare you to a summer's day,  
Tell how your smile reminds me of the sun.  
So bright and warm and beautiful, I'd say.  
That metaphor won't work. It's overdone.

An ode to you as Muse seems apropos,  
The goddess who inspires me to write.  
My very own Caliope, although  
No similes of mine would come out right.

An author may take years to write a book,  
To steal a scene from Life and create Art.  
This poet needs a lifetime just to look  
For all the words that hide inside his heart.

No words I write or lines I've ever penned  
Can tell you what it means to be your friend.

**Ron Shafer** graduated from the Writing Popular Fiction program at Seton Hill University in 2003. His fiction and nonfiction have appeared in local and regional publications. He currently lives in Greensburg, in the same neighborhood as most of his characters.

**Patricia Orendorff Smith's** work appears in more than 25 publications, including *Small Town Life*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *Mature Outlook*, *Writing Basics*, *Tribune-Review*, and *USA TODAY*. *In Their Own Words* was featured by Glenn Beck on CNN.

# Who Are These Classmates?

by Patricia Orendorff Smith

Do I look as different  
after fifty years as my  
classmates, jowls  
drooping, eyes crow-  
footed, chin pointed,  
tummy bulging, wrinkles  
engraved? Will anyone  
recognize me? Will I  
recognize them, the  
class beauty, the stellar  
athlete, the brain wizard,  
the musical wonder – or  
will we all now blend  
into a congenial picture,  
all pretense gone . . . .

---

# Tea

by Joe F. Stierheim

brewed one long winter night in the hope  
that it would bring inspiration

Tea, tea, (of what is it made,  
a plant of the sun or a plant of the shade?)  
coming to lighten and coming to brighten  
an otherwise dull, unproductive charade.

Coming to give in the depths of the night  
a glimmer of hope, a glimpse of the light;  
coming to bring a thought that will sing  
of release from the tension, the gloom of the blight.

To place in the dark recess of the mind  
the means to discover, the power to find  
the word that inspires, the phrase that conspires  
to open the vista to eyes that were blind.

A pinch of mint, a sprig of a weed,  
the potion that fills the particular need,  
to pull back the curtain from concepts uncertain,  
to clarify all with incomparable speed.

From weed and water and honey mayhap  
a brew is concocted to undo the trap  
of verbal confusion, unwritten contusion,  
with wit and alacrity fill in the gap.

And so is the hope on terrain that is free  
of flower or shoot, a garden will be,  
one that will flourish, constantly nourished  
by herb and honey, inspirational tea.

Tea, tea, (of what is it made,  
a plant of the sun or a plant of the shade?)  
coming to lighten and coming to brighten  
an otherwise dull, unproductive charade.

# And the Winner Is ...

by Nancy Clark

Lexi is her name, and basketball is her game. She proved it when, on the final day of the Penn State University Youth Basketball Camp, she walked off the court with a fistful of certificates and the Free Throw Champ Award. The latter degree netted her a special prize.

"I got to pick any ball I wanted from the rack, Grammie," my 11-year old granddaughter announced. Unadulterated pride oozed through the Nittany Lion on her screen-printed camp shirt as she handed me her selection. A silhouette of a pouncing panther and the letters P-I-T-T were stamped on the knobby surface of the blue and gray ball. A PITT basketball at a Penn State youth camp? "Well, Grammie, there weren't any Penn State balls on the rack," Lexi explained. "Besides," she added, "It's just a basketball."

But I digress.

A traveling carnival set up shop near Lexi's neighborhood during basketball camp week. The thrills and chills of amusement rides, tantalizing aromas of sausage and fries, and games of chance and skill beckoned the young and young at heart. And no one was more beckoned to than Lexi. To celebrate her athletic prowess, the champ and her parents hightailed it to the carnival, directly to the basketball free-throw arena. The object of the game: make three baskets in a row. Lexi's objective: to carry home the first prize, an item for which she simply salivated.

The crowd on that steamy June evening was sparse, and the line to the free-throw court was short. Clutching three tickets in her hand, Lexi positioned herself behind a burly sort whose orange muscle shirt barely contained his bulging *pectoralis majors*. Behind him, a tall, tobacco-chewing, jumpy twentysomething repeated, "No sweat, baby. It's a sure thing, baby. You're gonna have that prize, baby," to a sweet young spectator.

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*There was joy in Mudville  
that evening as mighty Lexi  
sauntered to the stand.*

---

Mr. Burly handed his tickets for three throws to the carney and stepped up to the foul line. He made the first toss. The audience of seven watched it circle and then fall through the net. Lexi held her breath when the second toss bounced off the backboard and dropped through the hoop. She didn't

release her breath until the third toss went over the backboard and fell into the water pistol gallery.

Mr. Hot Shot dittoed Mr. Burly's first two shots and before his final throw ordered the ticket taker, "Get that first prize off the shelf 'cause my girl there is takin' it home."

NOT!

When the third shot misfired, frustrated Hot Shot and sulking Baby pushed their way through the crowd of 11 and headed to a nearby food stand to drown their sorrows in funnel cake.

The carney snickered when Lexi approached the counter. He suggested, "Take your tickets over to the duck pond, honey." Lexi didn't budge. Eventually, he exchanged her tickets for a regulation basketball.

One basket – Bingo! The crowd of 14 gasped at her effortless toss.

Second basket – Swish! Right in! The carney sat up, and took notice when the crowd of 18 chanted, "You can do it!"

Third basket! – Field goal! Home run! Touchdown! Nothing but net! And the crowd of 22 went wild. The carney's unshaven jaw fell to his hairy chest.

There was joy in Mudville that evening as mighty Lexi sauntered to the stand to collect the coveted first prize. "Bet you didn't expect that, huh?" she said, perhaps a little too cocky.

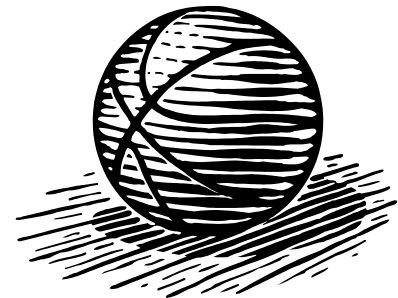
The baffled carney reached for a small pink teddy bear on the shelf behind him.

"The sign says *that's* the first prize." Lexi pointed to a one-of-a-kind, made in Taiwan article banded in a bright-blue sash that self-proclaimed FIRST PRIZE. With a mob of 26 witnesses to keep him honest, the carney handed it to Lexi.

Reliable sources say the bright lights of the carnival that night paled in comparison to the light in the eyes of a little girl who strutted through the lot hugging a bright yellow, fuzzy-skinned, happy-faced, anatomically correct, five-foot-long ...

Stuffed banana.

Not even  
a Penn State  
basketball could  
compete with  
that! ♦



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**Nancy Clark** resides with her husband in the suburbs of Export, PA, where she plays housewife, knits, reads, and occasionally turns out a down-home piece of literature.

# The Rat That Stole Christmas

by Rebecca Dunn

"That's not true!" People laugh when I tell the story of my seventh Christmas. They just don't believe me.

My family lived on the outskirts of Greensburg in a run-down farmhouse built just after the Civil War. Running water and an indoor toilet were newly added comforts when Mom and Dad moved in. The house had a simple floor plan – living room, kitchen (and bathroom) on the ground floor. Stairs that separated the two downstairs rooms accessed the three bedrooms on the second floor. At the top of these stairs was a small storage room that was off-limits due to its decrepitude. Renovations were ongoing as funds allowed, but with a dirt cellar and less-than-airtight floors and ceilings, vermin intruders were common.

In December 1965, none of that mattered to two small children in the throes of holiday happiness. School would soon be out. Christmas was just days away. But at breakfast one cold morning, Mom was not in a good mood.

"Your father's cigars are missing," Mom said with that edge to her voice.

I looked across the table at my younger brother, David. Milk dribbled down his chin as he tried to slurp Frosted Flakes with two front bottom teeth missing. He tilted his head to one side and shrugged a shoulder, not bothering to look up from the cereal bowl.

"They were the cigars your uncle gave him for his birthday," my mother continued. "The whole package is missing from the cupboard."

Her gaze landed on me. I was only seven years old, but by standing on a kitchen chair I could just reach the top shelf of the cupboard where all the forbidden items were kept. The cigars, packs of cigarettes, a bottle of whiskey, and the deck of playing cards illustrated with pictures of naked ladies were among the things on that shelf. Curiosity had driven me to make this inventory, but I never would have taken anything. I had aspirations of living to see my eighth birthday.

"Really, Mom," I said earnestly, "why would we take Dad's cigars?"

"Hmmm," she frowned. "Why, indeed. Especially with Christmas just around the corner. I guess I should have asked Santa for his report. Do you think he'd have something else to say on this subject?"

David snapped to attention. Any invocation of Santa's name and David was all ears.

"You can ask him, Mom," David chimed in. "He'll vouch for us."

We must have passed the Santa test. "If I ever find out otherwise, you know what will happen."

We really didn't know, but we could imagine enough punishment scenarios to keep our little minds

busy for a while. I wondered why Dad even kept the cigars. He rarely smoked them, preferring unfiltered Pall Malls or the hand-rolled cigarettes he and Grandpap crafted by the score every weekend.

The next day, Mom was sitting at the table when we got home from school.

"My good scissors are missing," she stated flatly.

This was more horrible than losing the cigars. No one touched Mom's good scissors without risking limb loss. She kept them extra sharp for her sewing and nearly had a stroke when she caught Dad trimming his nails with them one day.

"Ask Santa," David piped up right away. "I never touched them." He turned to me expectantly. "Did you?"

"I wouldn't dare."

She didn't buy the straightforward admission of

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*I wouldn't have taken anything. I had aspirations of seeing my eighth birthday.*

---

innocence.

"You both sit on these chairs until your father comes home," she said ominously.

Dad came home. We proclaimed our innocence once more, even under threat of a Santa-less holiday. Our parents relented to some degree, but we went to bed under a shroud of suspicion. This was not a good way to start Christmas vacation.

Over the next few days, things continued to get lost in the shuffle. A pack of cigarettes off the kitchen table, spoons from the sink, and Mom's half-eaten Mounds bar (coconut—yuck!) from the living-room end table.

Christmas morning arrived, and in spite of veiled threats to the contrary, Santa was very generous. David got an assemble-it-yourself tin barn and all the plastic creatures needed to populate the farm. He and Dad spent time fitting the pieces of tin together, lining up the tiny tabs with the proper slits, and pinching them down to secure the sides and the roof.

My favorite present was a kid-sized candy store. It was a colorful, canopied cardboard cart. Along with a toy cash register, it had paper bags and little metal scoops to serve customers from the bins full of jellybeans, hardtack, caramels, and gumdrops. I had a ready-made business. That day, I sold small bags of candy to the amusement of visiting relatives, who readily handed me nickels and pennies. I went to bed that night with plans to sell the rest of my stock.

After breakfast the next morning, I went to the living room to take inventory. I gazed in horror at empty bins. Everything was gone except the gumdrops.

"David! How could you?!" I began to rant.

Mom came into the living room. "Your brother's

*continued page 10*

still in bed. What are you carrying on about?" she asked.

I pointed to my candy store. She stiffened and her face turned a grim shade of gray.

"Danny," she bellowed, "Get down here."

My dad came flying down the steps. No one messed around when she used that tone.

"What?" Dad demanded. His gaze followed Mom's pointing finger. "Did she eat all that candy already?"

"None of us ate that candy," Mom intoned, a quiver sneaking into her voice. She gritted her teeth and spat out a bone-chilling pronouncement: "It's got to be – a rat."

In those halcyon days before well-meaning animal activists convinced everyone how benign and misunderstood these long-nosed, skin-tailed, disease-carrying beasts are, my mother was a knickers-up, broom-wielding madwoman whenever she saw any evidence of their presence in her spick-and-span home. There was nothing she feared or despised more than rodents. Mice were the spoilers of hard-earned foodstuffs. Squirrels carried rabies and befouled our attic. Rats were known to chew the fingers and toes off of babies. (Well, that's what I overheard once, and I still have to tuck in all my blankets at night so they can't get mine.) Anyway, this meant war.

Mom took my candy store outside to our garbage dump and set it on fire. I cried. Not only was my candy store gone, but so were all the potential profits. My entrepreneurial spirit was devastated. David offered to share one of his gifts so I would shut up.

Mom and Dad called it a pack rat because of the variety of things it was taking, including inedible objects. Since the rat had a sweet tooth, Dad smeared peanut butter on the spring plates of assorted traps and set them in open places around the living room. He prepared to sit up all night, armed with the good flashlight and a small spade. A whack with the spade would be far more final than a swat with the broom, he reasoned. David and I were bundled off to bed early that night and told to stay upstairs no matter what happened.

Sure.

I can't describe the noise that woke us sometime during that night. I only know that when the lights came on and we followed the last of the snarled expletives to its source, we found our father in the bathroom shining the flashlight up into a crack between the wall and the ceiling directly above a lamp that hung over the toilet.

"It was big as a cat!" he was yelling. "It jumped on the toilet, grabbed hold of the lamp cord, balanced on the lampshade, and pulled itself up through that crack!" Dad spotlighted each step with the flashlight's beam. "It must have a nest in the upstairs

cubbyhole."

"What was it?" Mom demanded.

"Well, it had to be a rat. But it's the biggest damn rat I ever saw!" Dad was shaking from the thrill of the chase. "He was fast! I got one swing at him when I first saw him on the coffee table. I think I broke something in the living room."

I wondered if Mom would burn the coffee table. I wasn't happy thinking about how the critter routinely spied on us from the crack above the toilet and danced, at will, upon the toilet seat.

Dad began poking the blade of the spade into the crack. All was silent above in that unfinished storage closet at the top of the stairs between our bedrooms.

"I'll fix his wagon," Dad said with teeth clenched tight. "We'll starve him out. I need some tin."

Dad unhinged the pieces of the toy barn in less time than it had taken to put it together. David cried. The house vibrated with the sound of tin being hammered into impregnable seams along the crack in the wall above the toilet and at the bottom of the door to the storage room.

We waited. I lay in bed at night listening in case the thing decided to chew its way into my bedroom. But no sound came from the storage room. There were no sprung traps, no missing objects. Candy left in plain view went untouched.

After two weeks, Dad decided to confront the beast head on, no matter what. While Mom clung to us downstairs, Dad ripped the tin barn roof and silo from the bottom of the storage room door. Armed with his spade and the flashlight, he trod cautiously into the cobwebby, open-beamed room and whacked at the debris he found in the floor beams. Soon a faint whistle floated down the stairwell, and we heard Dad step out onto the landing at the top of the stairs.

"I got it!" he called. "Want to see?"

He came down the steps and into the kitchen as David and I pulled away from Mom to get a look. It *was* as big as a cat. As big as a starved cat, that is. Apparently it had run out of candy.

"Get it out! Get it out of my house!" Mom screamed, shaking with disgust.

"Your scissors are up there," Dad said as he headed outside. "And a bunch of other stuff."

David and I ran to the living room window to watch Dad give the rat a "burial at sea." (He always threw the dead rats in the creek that ran behind the house.) Mom outfitted herself with Playtex gloves and Dad's old steel-toed boots and headed upstairs with an arsenal of cleaning supplies.

After all that, we never did use that cubbyhole for anything. Now the house is long gone, and people think I made up this story. (But I still have the deck of playing cards.) ♦

**Rebecca E. "Rebe" Dunn**, a member of the Greensburg and Ligonier Valley Writers, directs Ligonier Valley Writers' interactive mystery dinner theatre fundraisers. This story is the first in a series of holiday reminiscences dedicated with gratitude to the family that inspires her.



# Ligonier

by Nancy Lee Kraemer

In this place a bubbling twisting creek  
slips icy, crystal clear.  
Mud footprints hint of wildlife,  
mice, raccoon and deer.  
Fragrant musty layered leaves  
piled high for many years.  
The sun peeks through in patches,  
and the dew drips off like tears.  
In this place the mountainous terrain  
is challenging to travel  
The trails are formed of roots and stones,  
rust-colored sand and gravel.  
A majestic emerald canopy  
dapples the ground with light.  
This would trouble many plants,  
but ferns grow with delight.  
A canyon, tiny waterfall  
eroded sheets of shale.  
This place is timeless, changeless  
always sameness without fail.

(Bio on page 21.)



Photo of Loyalhanna Creek by Patricia Thrushart

(Bio on page 4.)





**Red-Eared Slider** by Abby Diamond

**Abby Diamond** is an illustrator and a fine art student in her last year at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. While much of her work focuses on subjects in the natural world, such as birds and other creatures, she loves working on all types of projects and subject matter. *Red-Eared Slider* is done in ink, watercolor, and marker.





**Microphone Finch** in India ink and watercolor by *Abby Diamond*

# Go Fly a Kite

by Janice McLaughlin

I remember the feel of the pull on the string .....

Building a kite with my dad was a day so pure and good  
Using paper from the comic strips and thin strips of balsa wood.  
Rags, not too heavy nor too light, perfect balance for the tail  
Waiting for the ideal day – a breeze, a gust, but not a gale.  
Clouds moving quickly, threatening rain, across a sky of gray  
I ran to the top of the highest hill, my hair in disarray.  
Running backwards, falling down in the tall wet grassy field  
The feeling unsurpassed, of incomparable joy unconcealed.  
I was lucky, my kite flew so high; it wheeled and dipped and soared,  
Searching for its freedom, seeming as if it implored,  
It danced a beautiful ballet, the sky and kite embraced  
Suddenly it was just a dot; in a cloud it was encased.  
I remember the feel of the pull on the string; the string was at its end.  
I took my knife and cut it free – where would it descend?  
I wondered – would someone find it, would it some day reappear?  
It's still there in my memory of childhood's stratosphere.

I remember the feel of the pull on the string .....

**Janice McLaughlin** says, "Writing is a way to occupy my mind, to forget, to relax, and to learn new things; it opens my mind to other possibilities and ideas. Rhyming poems are my favorites. While writing, I've learned a lot about myself and others."

Her photo "Bear Rocks" is on page 25.

**Louise Vrable** is a retired teacher who has explored various art forms all her life, from developing her own black-and-white photos to manipulating digital pictures to painting watercolors and more. Another of her artworks is on the back cover.



**Pick Your Own** by Louise Vrable



# This Is What a Chinese Thinks of Pittsburgh

by Karen S. Zhang

A few days ago I bought a Pittsburgh Penguins beanie, a T-shirt, and a jacket. Not only because they are among the omnipresent souvenirs in town, but also they will remind me of my *first* ice hockey team as I prepare to leave Pittsburgh after two years of study.

Coming from Guangzhou, China, I'd never considered myself a sports fan. Two years ago, holding my acceptance letter from Chatham University, I told my folks ecstatically I was going to study in Pittsburgh. Their first reaction was "Oh, Pittsburgh?! It's a heavy industrial city, isn't it?" I wasn't sure, knowing from my American professors in China only that Pittsburgh is a sports town. But I still couldn't locate the city because Pittsburgh doesn't have an NBA team. The NBA has a huge audience in China. For my generation, the frenzy started before Yao Ming joined the Houston Rockets, in the era of Michael Jordan. Naturally, I came to associate American cities and states with their respective NBA teams.

So I expected Pittsburgh to offer a sports layperson more than sports. And it does. The breathtaking view of the Golden Triangle where the three rivers join together never tires me. The mirrored fortress of PPG Place complex shimmers with the glory of modern Pittsburgh. The Carnegie Library, the Cultural District, and the Drue Heinz Lecture Series make me feel proud that I'm living in one of the top five most literate cities in America.

Yet I still felt disconnected from Pittsburghers in the first few months. While traveling in the suburbs, I saw several yellow banners that read: *You're in Steeler Country*, flapping in the wind like welcoming hands waving. I didn't understand what the Super Bowl was. What's the attraction of a sport with a score of muscular men chasing and piling together in the field? Even our Chatham University president, Dr. Esther Barazzone, called for support of the Steelers in her emails to the whole campus. Just a week before the latest Super Bowl, she encouraged us to wear Steelers jerseys or dress in black and gold. Who would expect the top leader of a Chinese university to make a similar announcement? If any campus-wide notice isn't about academic matters in China, it's usually political. Say, a delegate from the Department of Education of Guangdong province would be visiting our campus next week, please be ready and give our warmest welcome. If economic achievement is what Chinese cities nowadays are competing for, sports championships must be what American cities are vying for.

Pittsburgh, like a human being, has her own unique temperament. Only after you spend more

time with her will you understand her deeply. I've had many firsts with her: the first American city in which I have lived and consider a home away from China, where I learned to drive and bought my first car, where I published my first article in America, celebrated my first snowy winter, watched my first baseball and hockey games, sipped my first matzo ball soup (now my favorite), spent my first Fourth of July watching the spectacular fireworks with thousands of Pittsburghers, and was even moved to tears hearing "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Not until the night at the end of 2010 when I sat with a full house of Washington Capitals fans in DC's Verizon Center watching them play the Penguins did I understand how Pittsburgh's sports bring a strong cohesion to her denizens, near and far, young and old, women and men, and even outsiders like me.

Before the game started, after learning that I cheered for the Penguins, the red-clad couple next to me said, "Oh, too bad. You're rooting for a team which will lose." I grinned but felt injured. A wave of heat burned inside me. What's this? It's only a game. Why do I care so much about who wins? But looking at the signs hung up by the Capital fans who were booing the Penguins, I felt irritated. Whenever the Penguins defended a goal or scored, I stood up and clapped. The few other Penguins diehards in the crowd and I were the odd ones crying, "Go Pens!" in a sea of red jerseys rooting for the Caps. With a 3-2 victory, the Penguins didn't let us down. Overwhelmed with joy, I turned to the couple beside me, but they were long gone.

This is when I deeply feel Pittsburgh's sports unite people. This is what excites me when Penguins fever warms up my Chinese blood. This is how I find a mutual language to connect with Pittsburghers. And this is how Pittsburgh brings me a sense of home.

I assume there is no other American city like Pittsburgh, whose people are so deeply in love and actively supportive of their sports teams. Can you wear your favorite sports team's jersey on all occasions, seven days a week? Steelers fans do. Sports are in the veins of Pittsburghers. My first attendance at an American funeral also took place in Pittsburgh. Within the eulogy came tidbits about the departed's love of the Steelers, a mournful moment filled with tearful laughter.

When the Steelers lost the latest Super Bowl, the sadness that clouded the city felt no less than, perhaps greater than, the entire nation of Chinese feeling defeated when Beijing lost the bid for 2000 Summer Olympics to Sydney by two votes. Even though I know little about American football, I can

*continued page 16*

identify with that sense of belonging. Perhaps my American friends understand now why I turned down a dinner invitation on a Penguins' game night or that I'd rather go for a Pirate game than a spring trip. As I count down to the end of my

stay in Pittsburgh, I really want to say to my first teams, *Thank you, Pittsburgh, for making a lonely expatriate feel at home. This is what will draw me back to you from ten thousand miles. Go Pens! Go Bucs! Go Steelers!* ♦

**Karen S. Zhang** of Guangzhou, China, an MFA graduate of Chatham, has written about her travels in China, India, Pakistan, and Southeast Asia. A contributor to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and the *Coal Hill Review*, she writes a regular column for *Crazy English Speaker* magazine in China.

## Mel's Market

by Richard Miller

Johnnie walked down the sidewalk, carefully avoiding cracks, taking time to kick rocks and the



first fallen leaves of autumn. He went past his mother's hair salon and the newsstand where his father used to buy the paper in the morning. He saw the house his father had

grown up in with his six brothers and sisters and waved to his grandparents, promising to come back to visit later. He touched the tree that his father had carved his name into as a boy. His older brother Mike gave him a penknife for his birthday one year, and Johnnie was going to carve his name right next to his dad's, but then his dad left and it didn't feel right anymore.

He crossed the street where his uncle Charlie had been hit by a car. He swerved off the sidewalk and into the street in order to avoid the house of the mean old woman at the end of the block. She always yelled at the neighbor kids for killing her flowers, but they never touched them.

Then he saw what he had come down the street to see, Mel's Market. Its welcoming front steps led up to a glass double door. Candy and soda ads stretched along the walls like the ads at a major league baseball park. A group of kids that he knew and sometimes got along with were sitting on their bikes outside and laughing about something one of them had said. Across the street, about ten boys from his school played football in the grassy park. They beckoned to him to join in, but he said he was busy. Besides, the teams would be uneven if he joined in now. He could always play later.

Striding across the threshold, Johnnie nodded to the shopkeeper and headed for the soft drinks. He picked up a Coke and some Hostess

cupcakes—the yellow ones with chocolate icing that would taste the same decades from now. He walked toward Mel while poking his finger into the fold of the wallet in his back pocket, testing to see if he had the money to buy the goods. The crisp edge of a bill caressed his fingertip, and someplace in Johnnie's heart lit up.

He approached the counter, and his smile met Mel's kind smile. Johnnie frequented the store. On the surface it was just a convenient place for him to buy snacks, but what really attracted him to the store was Mel himself. Johnnie had always loved to hear Mel's stories about the old days and the neighborhood as it was before Johnnie was born.

"How are you, Johnnie? It's been a while since you've come around," the old man said as he totaled the items.

"Oh, you know. I was out of town for a school trip."

"How was that?" Mel asked, pausing from the calculating.

"A lot of fun. It was in New York, but it was just a week."

"Well, that's great. I've heard nothing but great things about the city."

"Yeah, I want to live there someday. Maybe play for the Yankees. I'm pretty good."

"Sure you are. Just keep working at it. Did I ever tell you about the time I pitched a no-hitter?"

"I don't think so," Johnnie lied. He had heard the story at least twice.

"Well, back when I was about thirteen, I played for the Castle Street Braves. That was in the neighborhood league. They got rid of that a while before you were born."

Johnnie nodded and shifted his weight on his feet to show that he was in rapt attention.

"So the story goes, I was a decent pitcher. Not the best, but I won a few games. One time we even won the city championship. But I'm getting sidetracked. One summer day, I was in the middle of pitching a no-hitter against our rivals, the Anderson Avenue Dodgers. Now, they had this ringer on the team who went by the name of Mickey Holland.

continued page 17

Mickey could hit, pitch, field, run. He was the real deal. And I was scared. He was good, and I wasn't too sure that I could beat him."

"What did you do, Mel? I mean, Mr. Calvin."

"Don't worry, Johnnie, your mother isn't here. Mel is just fine." He continued, "Well, everyone wanted me to hit him. He was big, so everyone assumed he could take a hit and just get over it."

"So what did you do?"

"I pitched to him," Mel replied.

"But weren't you afraid?"

"Of course. I ended up walking him in five pitches. But I realized something."

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### *Johnnie had always loved to hear Mel's stories about the old days.*

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Johnnie tilted his head. "What was that?"

"It doesn't really matter how big you are. No one likes getting hit. Whether it's because they're different or because you're afraid of them or for no reason at all, no one likes to get hit. So I wasn't about to hit him."

"Oh," Johnnie said as he tried to wrap his head around the idea. That was all he said.

"Well anyway, Johnnie, that will be two dollars and sixty-three cents."

Johnnie fished in his wallet for the money but found only one dollar. A look of desperation came over his face, and Mel simply smiled. "You're good for it. I trust you, after all." They both laughed. Johnnie stepped out of the store and waved. The football game was dying down, and the streetlights were coming to life. He jogged down the street so he could be home in time for dinner.

A couple of days later Johnnie returned to the store with two fresh one-dollar bills. It was what he owed Mel and something else called interest that he had heard about. He was not sure what interest was exactly, but he had heard that paying it was the right thing to do.

A note hung on the door.

"To the Patrons of Mel's Market:

Mel passed away on Sunday. The family asks for your prayers during this trying time.

We are sorry for any inconvenience."

Johnnie shook his head when his eyes welled with tears. His clenched fist kept the two dollars secure in his grip. Inconvenience, he thought. He didn't understand how one man's death could inconvenience another.

Johnnie walked away with his head low. The fall wind blew brown leaves into storm drains, and a musty smell filled John's nostrils. There was no football tonight and no kids on bicycles laughing with Cokes. He was alone, but he still held back his

tears. He walked down the street with his eyes on his feet, disregarding the cracks in the sidewalk. Mel had told him once that to keep your head up is dignity, and a man always needs to be dignified. But Johnnie's head stayed low. He guessed he didn't understand dignity either. ♦

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## The Meetings

by Sylvia Sholar

Do I hear a motion?

*outside the trees tremble*

*a yellow curtain of light*

First we need to discuss striking number six.

*a small gray rabbit*

*nibbling Indian corn decorations*

We can amend this.

*or maybe corn candy*

What are the extenuating circumstances?

*it's very warm outside*

*paint peels on elderly Victorian buildings*

Such as a computer crash?

*helter-skelter*

*the lawn mower blows crinkled autumn leaves*

This has to be turned around in four months.

*the pigeons on the lawn*

*do they migrate now to the South?*

I move we adjourn now.

*waning October light*

*sunset has made its decision.*

**Richard Miller** is a second-year biology major at St. John's University in Queens, New York. Aside from researching fruit-fly genetics with the biology department and writing stories, he enjoys visiting museums and sleeping on trains between New York and Greensburg.

**Sylvia Sholar** is a retired communications professor from California University of Pennsylvania. She grew up in Georgia but now lives in Charleroi, PA. Every autumn she grows pensive while thinking about the South. She has attended many Pennsylvania Universalist business meetings.

# The Billy Ballad

by Jan Kinney

Listen up, little friends, I want to tell you some stuff,  
About three white goats and their last name was Gruff.  
Those goats had a first name and it was very silly,  
'Cause all of those goats had the first name of Billy.

There was Big Billy Goat, he was wide and he was tall.  
There was Little Billy Goat, he was the smallest of them all.  
Then there was the Billy who was right there in the middle;  
He wasn't very big and he wasn't little.

Those goats loved the grass when it was sweet and it was green;  
There was grass on the next hill with a valley in between.  
A bridge spanned the valley between the two hills.  
But crossing that bridge gave those three goats little chills.

'Cause underneath the bridge there lived a great, big, ugly troll;  
The troll loved to eat. That was his one and only goal.  
He ate birds and beasts and pizza with cheese;  
He ate frogs' legs, ants' eggs, and ice cream with peas;

He ate pies and cakes and root beer floats;  
But his favorite thing of all was white Billy Goats.  
He was speckled, he was spotted and his teeth were very green.  
He was coarse and crude and nasty and very, very mean.

He had big saucer eyes and they were lemon yellow.  
He picked his nose and licked his toes, a most unpleasant fellow.  
You all know the story – how those three goats crossed the bridge.  
You know the troll was going to put them in the fridge.

Instead the Billies told him 'bout a mountain far away  
And a lady troll they saw there while traveling one fine day.  
She had hair so long and hair so wild and teeth of emerald green.  
The fingers and the toes she had numbered just thirteen.

But even more important than trollish great good looks  
Was the fact she won first prize at the school for trollish cooks.  
"Perhaps you'd like to meet her," suggested Biggest Billy.  
"I hear she makes a super bowl of red-hot beans and chili."

"Let's go," said the troll. "Why do we stand around?  
I'd like to meet this beauty queen whose cooking is renowned."  
So off went the troll with the Billies in the lead.  
Trip-trap, trip-trap, trip-trap, they went with lots of speed.  
And so at last, when the two trolls saw each other  
Ms. Troll said, "Hi there, big boy, let's go meet my mother!"  
Off they went together, with their hands tightly entwined.  
Leaving all the Billies in the shadows, far behind.

"It looks to me," said Biggest Billy, as he watched them walk away,  
"That Mr. Troll might just become the world's first troll gourmet."  
"Yes indeed," said Little Billy, his heart light with laughter.  
"According to my guess, they'll both live happy ever after."



**Jan Kinney**, Altoona native and former librarian, has always had a love affair with words. It was only natural that when poetry beckoned, she answered. Jan is a rostered artist in storytelling with the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.



# A Poem before Breakfast

by Jan Kinney

I'm fat and I'm flabby; I'm saggy and baggy.  
Age has taken its toll.  
Wispy gray hair, eyebrows aren't there;  
I may have a cancerous mole.

But I work with some folks who don't have much hope.  
To them I'm the light in their day.  
They don't see me as old. "You're beautiful" I'm told,  
And those aches and those pains melt away.

And the children who know me laugh when they see me.  
My age is a part of my schtick.  
So instead of complaining and moaning and groaning  
I laugh at the wrinkles and fat.

I wear it all proudly  
And say it quite loudly  
I DON'T GIVE A DAMN IF I'M OLD!

---

## The Wintering of Michael Rebovich

by Sharon Anderson

December 21, 1968, winter solstice  
and just below freezing.  
Pristine white snow softened the gravesite,  
appropriate weather for the wake of  
Michael Rebovich, the personification of  
*Old Man Winter* himself.

A steady wind whipped  
Black-shawled mourners as  
Grandfather's casket was lowered into the  
broken ground of St. Mary's Cemetery next to  
Grandmother's seasoned grave of fifteen years.

Winter was synonymous with Grandfather Rebovich,  
a cold-blooded reclusive man with antifreeze  
in his veins, glacier for a heart.  
His hypothermic touch numbed all who  
ventured to love him, including Mother and me.  
A sharp countenance, strong scent of  
disinfectant and arctic glare cooled others.

Jack Frost kept constant vigil, nipping warmth  
from a soul never in danger of meltdown.  
Even during dog days, he never perspired,  
always immaculate in a starched white shirt  
buttoned tight at the neck, his Adam's apple  
a bobbing cube above it.

Work was his religion.  
Grandfather pursued life like  
an act of contrition without absolution,  
his own impossible commandments  
etched in tablets of ice,  
emotions as compressed  
as the black coal he once mined.

He was predeceased long before  
physical death, before Ellis Island.  
Twenty-two years of Croatian poverty  
and an indifferent father chilled  
his youthful spirit, freezing instinct at survival.  
This mantle of wintering  
fell from father to son on passing,  
like frost on a dead cat. It ended with Michael  
Rebovich.

Departing St. Mary's Cemetery,  
I left Grandfather and my unrequited love  
to winter's final exoneration  
and the coming spring thaw.

**Sharon Anderson** is a member of the Greensburg Writers Group and the Ligonier Valley Writers. She also enjoys crocheting and knitting. She has been published in many literary journals, including *Lucidity*, *Black Moon*, *Bear Creek Haiku*, and *Darkling*.

# Sometimes

by Mary Ann Back

Effie stood tall in the common room of Tupelo's Fairmont Home for the Aged. The alarm on her wheelchair screeched like a crazed kildeer protecting its nest. Flashing the royalty wave to the other residents, she crooned the lyrics to "Stardust" loud enough to drown out the television. She yanked her skirt down to her knees, exposing a well-worn pair of cotton undies. Her smile was magnificent.

"Lawdy, Miss Effie! Let's pull your skirt back up 'fore you get us both in trouble. Look, I brought you and Miss Enid a surprise today. See?"

Nurse Genna Washington adjusted Effie's skirt and pointed to a sheet cake on the game table. Genna took two candles from the pocket of her uniform and placed them on top alongside the words Happy Birthday Enid and Effie.

---

## *Effie was a force to be reckoned with.*

---

"Ah, now, ain't that something, dear? How thoughtful," said Enid, rolling her chair up to the table for a closer look. "Don't you let old Effie throw you, child. You know she went 'round the bend, and she ain't coming back. And you, Effigenia, ought to be ashamed of yourself. No one wants to see a ninety-year-old hoo-ha anyway. You know better than that. What's a matter with you? Ain't Harvey Jamison paying you no never mind?"

Harvey, the only male in the room, had been scrutinizing the same jigsaw puzzle piece for the last twenty years, studying its shape and admiring its texture, unaware anything else existed.

Effie smiled warmly at Genna and giggled, flipping Enid the bird.

Genna snickered. "Which one of you is older?" she asked, dishing out the cake.

"I am, by about ten minutes," answered Enid.

"What was it like growing up back when you were children?"

"Oh, the things we seen, child. So many things! Some big, some small. And there was some things that was big to other people but didn't mean nothin' to us. The crash of '29? Well, honey, we was poor before that and we was poor after. But lots of folks went from havin' to havin' not. It was harder for them."

She picked at the cake with her fork, taking hummingbird-sized bites, staring at the icing, as if she were watching a distant memory unfold.

"Then there was the big one, WW II, when

all the younguns had to go off to war. Lots of them fine boys never made it back home. Thurmond Whittaker didn't. I was kind of partial to him." Her voice dropped to a whisper, and her eyes began to mist. She paused, caught up in a world gone by.

About that time, Effie flung a fork full of icing at Enid's face and began belting out the words to "Heartbreaker," by the Andrews Sisters. Enid rallied, wiped her face, and chuckled. "Yeah, you right, Effie; he sure was a heartbreaker. You know who else was a heartbreaker, Genna? Effie here. She was always the pretty one, you know."

"You're identical twins, Miss Enid. How could she be the pretty one?"

"Effie had a way about her. It was the shine in her eye, the smile perched at the corner of her mouth, ready to jump out and grab a body. She was a sight to behold – a force to be reckoned with. Filled with life. Not a man wouldn't hanker after her back in the day."

Effie, uncharacteristically quiet, stared out the window, as if held captive by her own memories.

Genna reached for her hand. "I'll bet your big sister took good care of you when you were little, didn't she?"

Effie's eyes widened, filled with a long-forgotten fear come back to haunt. "It's coming, Enid! We gotta hide!"

"Effie, that was a long time ago." Enid patted Effie's other hand. "That was in the spring of '36. A powerful twister raged all the way from Gainesville to Tupelo. A mess of people met their Maker that day. Me and Effie hid in the storm cellar, listening to the cellar doors bounce and groan, watching the lantern flail around and then blow completely out. We fell asleep in the dark, curled up together, hanging on to each other for life itself. To this day, Effie won't fall asleep with the lights out."

Effie, still tangled in the horror of that long-ago spring day, clung to Enid's hand.

"There now, I think it's time for your rest, Miss Effie. I'll take you back to your room and wrap up the rest of this cake for later."

Genna did just that, wished them happy birthday, and kissed them both, giving Enid's hand an extra squeeze.

"You take care of your baby sister. She needs you."

Enid turned the light on over Effie's bed and held her hand until she fell asleep. Sometimes they didn't need words. Sometimes they only needed each other. ♦

---

Mary Ann Back of Mason, Ohio, was awarded the 2009 Bilbo Award for creative writing by Thomas More College. Her publication credits include *Short Story America*, *Eclectic Flash*, *Flashes in the Dark*, *Flash Shot*, and *Flash Me*.

# The Old Red Rocking Chair

by Betty Ladue



My dad bought the rocking chair at an auction for four dollars circa 1950. It was about time; by then there were four children under the age of nine, and the rocking chair had already missed so many wonderful opportunities for soothing comfort!

The family, of which I was the baby, was getting ready to go to church one Sunday morning. You must accept the historical passed-down word for this, as I have no memory of the incident. We had a concrete-floored kitchen on which the rocking chair sat. I was presumably bored because they were all ignoring me in the rush of “Sunday best,” so I rocked . . . and rocked . . . and rocked so hard that I threw myself out of the chair onto the floor and knocked myself out. I must have put a quick end to Sunday church that day. I am told that my reputation as a family celebrity was made at that moment. Up until that time, not one of us kids had had the enviable distinction of being out cold. I still regret that I cannot actually remember that noteworthy occasion!

At one point, my parents were big into “antiquing,” a method of painting furniture and finishing up with a wash of dark paint rubbed on, made to look like wood grain. So the beautiful old wood chair was reborn into a dull red (albeit fake) antique and was thereafter called the Old Red Rocking Chair. My mother purchased matching material and reupholstered the cushioned seat and backrest. It was in this disguise that the rocking chair lived the next several decades of its life.

The years passed and through all the moves to other places, the rocking chair, as an honored family member, came along each time. Eventually it became my possession, I guess by default from my infamous Sunday morning debacle. I rocked my babies #1 and #2 in the old red rocking chair with its outdated upholstery and loved knowing the history that came with it! Sometime in the mid-1970s, child #3 and I spent an entire night in the chair as we gave birth to a tooth. It was a rough night for all three of us—baby Timmy, the rocking chair, and me!

As life went on, the chair was always one of the first things in the moving van. When placed in an unfamiliar room, it bestowed on the place the distinction of “home” by its very presence. Eventually I took the chair to a refinisher and had the red antiquing and old cushioning removed to rediscover the familiar smooth grain of an unknown wood that had been touched and caressed by so

many cherished hands. It spent some time cushionless and unusable.

When my youngest child married, she asked if she could have the chair when I was ready to give it up. It had played its part in my history, and I felt confident it could begin its role in her life. It has sat in her basement these last three years, unused and waiting. When she told me that she was going to be a mama, she asked that my gift to her would be refurbishing the Old Red Rocking Chair.

Currently it is with a professional who is going to breathe new life back into our old friend. He’ll respruing the seat and create a new cushion and backrest out of fabric that costs \$35 a yard. The total cost of my earlier refinishing and this current phase will be approximately \$300. High society for the four-dollar chair, but so well worth it!

I look forward to rocking my new grandchild in this chair; better yet, I look forward to standing back and watching the baby’s mother do the rocking. My wish is that the chair and its story remain in the family forever. ♦

## Pelican

by Nancy Lee Kraemer

Majestic in the air  
this oxymoron flies.  
His awkward physique masks  
skill and deftness in the skies,  
Soaring low with outstretched wings  
on breezes dips and wheels  
Closely scanning waters  
for a shimmer, glimmer meal.  
When quick enough, most times he is,  
he hits the surface fast.  
Salty spray shoots all about  
like ancient birds of past.  
But when the meal has disappeared,  
He changes form and flight  
And flips his webbed feet forward  
and softly does alight.  
Then bending up his crooked wings,  
He folds them at his side,  
And nestles on the water,  
Bobbing on each wave he rides

**Betty Ladue** has been an avid reader all of her life, but her writing was done predominantly for work. Since a company-wide downsizing, she has had time to hone her talents as a member of the newly formed New Stanton Writers’ Group.

**Nancy Lee Kraemer** has worked in the cardiac lab at St. Clair Hospital for over twenty-five years. She earned English and education degrees from Pitt and Duquesne and has taught for seven years at Keystone Oaks High School. Poetry is her passion.

# If

by Marge Burke

If we were the wind,  
I would be a tornado,  
Swirling and lifting and tossing life asunder,  
Loud and unfocused, without direction.  
You would be a gentle breeze,  
Letting the leaves dance happily,  
Quiet and with purpose, pushing sailboats,  
And kites.

If we were water,  
I would be raging floods,  
Rushing headlong, overflowing my banks,  
Deep and uncontrolled, without direction.  
You would be a gentle stream,  
Tumbling over moss-covered rocks,  
Silent and cool, always yet never  
Changing.

If we were sunshine,  
I would bake the desert dry,  
Intense and immense and burning,  
No relief, never sleeping.  
You would be a gentle warmth,  
Melting winter snows to coax new life,  
Drawing faces toward soft morning rays,  
Comforting.

If we were fire,  
I would consume whole forests,  
Blazing out of control, devouring,  
Leaving only charred mountainsides.  
You would be a gentle glow,  
Flickering, crackling shades of yellow-orange  
Warming hands and hearts and hearth,  
Contained.

If we were light,  
I would burst wildly through darkness  
Blinding the eyes who searched for me,  
Defeating my purpose by my intensity.  
You would be a gentle lamp,  
Resting on a library table, or a nightstand,  
Guiding words across a page, or lighting  
My path.

If we were words,  
I would shout and proclaim and go on;  
On and on and on and on and on,  
Demanding to be heard and understood.  
You would be a gentle phrase,  
Whispering secrets, sharing wisdom,  
Explaining patiently, speaking softly,  
Respected.

You and your gentleness  
Are teaching me  
That extremes only frighten,  
Disappoint,  
Anger,  
Hurt,  
And confuse.

From you I am learning the importance  
Of a gentle spirit, and in the quiet stillness,  
I find constraint,  
Respect,  
Patience,  
Wisdom,  
Strength,  
And comfort.

And I find you.

**Marge Burke** has worked at Smail Automotive since 1967. She loves history and historic research and has been published in local publications. Her hobbies are her flower gardens, writing, and her six delightful grandchildren.

## Did I Ever Say Thank You?

by Audrey Casperson

For the deep purple violets you picked every spring  
For tending the bird with a broken wing  
Did I ever say thank you?

For the wild strawberries you placed in my hand  
For the beautiful conch shell you found in the sand  
Did I ever say thank you?

For the colorful leaves gathered under a crisp  
autumn sky  
For a fountain of love that never ran dry  
Did I ever say thank you?

For a life filled with gladness  
And a death filled with sadness  
Did I ever say thank you?

Thank you!

**Audrey Casperson** has taught at Forbes Road Vocational School and part time at community college. Now retired, she writes poetry and stories about her childhood during the Great Depression.

# Benches

by Marge Burke

What is it about  
sitting on a park bench  
waiting in anticipation,  
fearing  
that the fairies  
have stolen the magic?

Then, in an instant,  
a flicker of light  
appears across the fields  
through the leaves  
on the distant hillside.

The earth is bathed  
in an orange glow  
as the moon climbs,  
peeking above the trees,  
winking at me  
and at the stars  
as if it knows a secret.

Even though the evening is cool,  
I feel warmed.  
The quiet peace of the heavens  
washes over me.

And I think,  
maybe it's not the moon at all,  
but the shoulder that almost touches mine  
on the bench  
next to me.

# Luca

by Michael Albright

Whenever I step out of my shower,  
Luca, with a hard C, is waiting,  
first stretching through threshold  
and onto the tiles, then to me to  
rub his back fur against my wet calves.  
It's a strange feeling, but I'm used to it,  
and have learned to delight  
in its sheer weirdness.  
Three passes, and then it's over to the shower,  
which is what he's *really* after,  
where he crouches like a stalker,  
watching, with ears pricked,  
at the remaining rivulets  
making their way to the grate.  
Then gravity continues its work,  
and the remaining water coalesces  
into something like tiny pools, big drops  
making their imperceptible  
yet inexorable journey to the drain.  
The progress is by millimeters,  
but he can see it with his superpowers.  
Now and then he reaches out tentatively  
to test one with a paw,  
but when he catches one, it disappears.  
Later, I see tiny black paw prints  
on the shower sill, but I forgive him,  
Luca, with the hard C,  
and the easy life.

(Bio on page 3.)

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# Yankees

by Lou Steiner

Several years ago when the long tenure of Joe Torre as manager of the New York Yankees ended, it was not surprising, given the well-documented past behavior of the team owners, that the matter was ineptly handled, nor was it surprising that the most graceful and sensitive account of the events surrounding the termination appeared under the byline of Roger Angell. For decades, admirers of Mr. Angell have come to expect nothing less than wise, carefully considered, elegantly phrased observations reflecting a deep affection (make that love) for the game of baseball. Those of us who share that love winced in embarrassment when faced with the clumsy attitude and actions of a Yankee ownership unable to comprehend the respect devoted fans show for the game, an attitude that may accompany, but clearly transcends, loyalty to just one team.

As early as 1937, I caught a hint of the

special excitement surrounding major league baseball during my first visit to Forbes Field with my father. That afternoon we cheered the Waner brothers, glimpsed Honus Wagner in the dugout, and watched the Pirates play the National League champion New York Giants in a doubleheader. The scorecard for the visitors listed Mel Ott, Carl Hubbell, Bill Terry, and other players I had known only from the sports page of *The Latrobe Bulletin* or the play-by-play radio broadcasts of Rosey Roswell.

My enthusiasm for baseball grew even stronger after several family visits to Cleveland. Each trip was planned to take in a night game at Municipal Stadium and a second one the following afternoon at League Park. During one of those visits, the lobby of the Hotel Cleveland became Valhalla and confirmed my growing dedication to the New York Yankees. Emerging

*continued page 24*



from the elevators or sitting in lobby chairs, gods named Rizzuto, Gordon, Keller, Crosetti, Ruffing, Chandler, and McCarthy willingly gave autographs to an awestruck ten-year-old boy. The most highly prized signature came from Bill Dickey, the quiet, dependable catcher who had played a key role in winning five world championships in the '30s. Dickey gained added distinction for having been a close friend of one of baseball's authentic heroes, Lou Gehrig.

Although Joe DiMaggio, the most glamorous of the Yankee stars, was undoubtedly in the hotel, I never saw him in the lobby – so in that summer of his magnificent hitting streak, the highest of the gods remained only a mystical presence until he appeared on the field.

The enchantment of my Yankee years has diminished, but I continue to be grateful for their role in nurturing an appreciation for baseball's subtle beauties that has endured for a lifetime. I like to think that Roger Angell would smile and give an understanding nod when I note that even though I now watch "baseball games" with the less than perfect eyesight of a man of eighty, I will always view the "game of baseball" with the 20/20 vision and excited enthusiasm of a boy of ten. ♦

**Lou Steiner** continues his retirement project of writing a series of brief personal observations on a variety of topics, including travel, art, gardening, sports, books, and music.



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## LVW Calendar 2011-2012

### 2011

**July 16, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.**

Ligonier Valley Writers' Conference  
Faculty: Scott Mastro, Peter Oresick,  
Rebecca Godfrey, and F. J. Hartland

**August 13, 2-4 p.m.**

Author & Artist Book Fair, Ligonier Valley Library  
Readings, Displays, and Refreshments

**August 14**

Deadline for the Flash Fiction Contest

**August 27, 9 a.m.-4p.m.**

Historical Writing Workshop  
Hanna's Town

**September 18, 3-5 p.m.**

Annual LVW Picnic,  
St. Michael's of the Valley Church, Rector  
Jay Speyerer on "How to Give a Reading"

**October 8, 2:00-4:00 p.m.**

Authors' and publishers' panel on e-publishing  
Greensburg Hempfield Area Library

**October 22**

Flash Fiction winners will be announced  
Author readings, Hanna's Town

**November 12 and 13**

**Saturday and Sunday**

**FUNDRAISER**

**Interactive Murder Mystery Dinner Theater**  
First United Church of Christ  
Maple & Third St., Greensburg

**December 4, 3-5 p.m.**

Annual LVW Christmas Party,  
St. Michael's of the Valley Church, Rector

### 2012

**March 9**

**Student Poetry Contest Deadline**

**April 28, 4 p.m.**

Student Poetry Awards  
Greensburg Barnes & Noble

**May 1**

*Loyalhanna Review* Submission Deadline  
Guidelines Have Changed

**May (TBA)**

**\*\*Pittsburgh Foundation/Westmoreland Giving\*\***  
Donations to LVW will be doubled.

*Check our website for more info and  
author and artist submission guidelines.*  
[www.LVWonline.org](http://www.LVWonline.org)

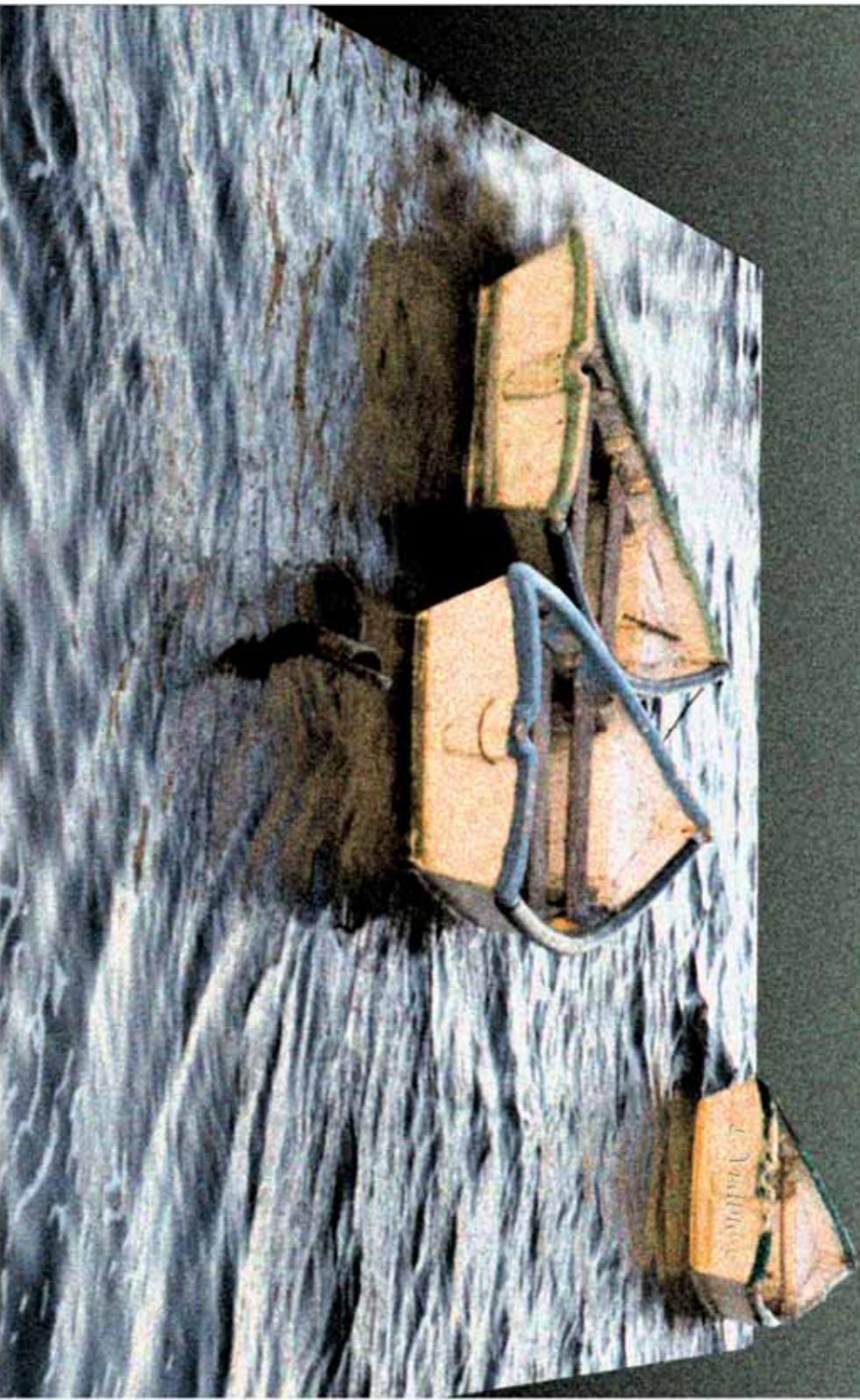




**Bear Rocks** by *Janice McLaughlin* (Bio on page 14.)



*Who said the world is round?*



*Who said the world is round?*

*Photo by Louise Vrable*