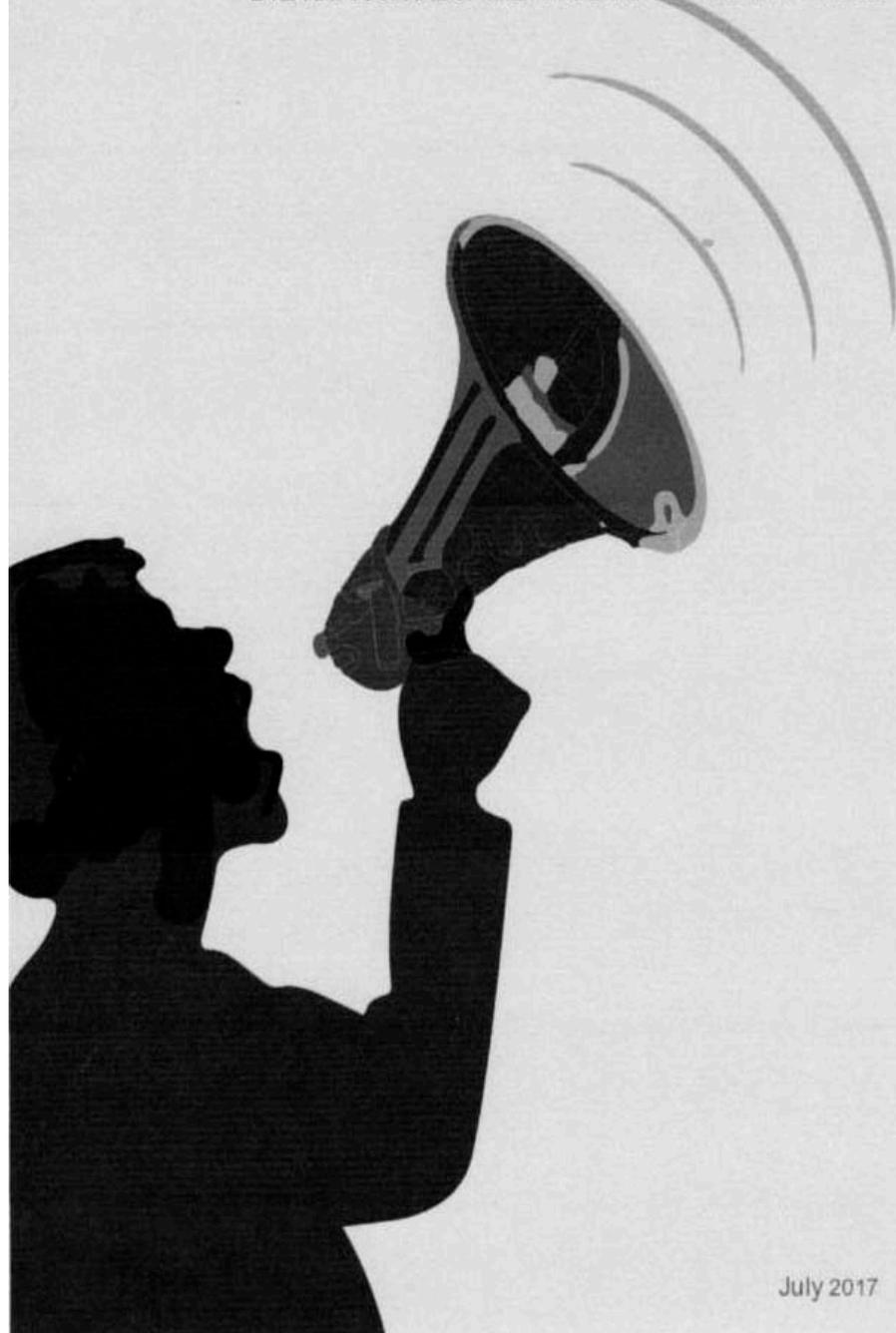


Pen-In-Hand

LITERARY JOURNAL OF THE MARYLAND WRITERS' ASSOCIATION



July 2017

PEN IN HAND

**The Biannual Literary Journal
of the Maryland Writers' Association
July 2017**

**Editor: Dr. Tapendu K. Basu
(Gandharva raja)**

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Pen in Hand [PIH] is the official literary and art publication of the Maryland Writers' Association, to be published biannually in January and July. Maryland Writers' Association is dedicated to the art, business and craft of writing. Founded in 1988, MWA is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization.

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Submission deadline for the next issue of *Pen in Hand* is December 1, 2017. This issue will have a section on the theme of "Earth and Space." MWA members and young writers are encouraged to send their best works to PIH. Send submission—poetry, sci-fi, flash fiction, short stories, drama, memoir, creative non-fiction—to peninhand@Marylandwriters.org or tkbasu@verizon.net.

Message from the Editor

Shout it out! An editorial in verse—my view on the role of writers in present day society—complex, evolving and with an exasperating share of civilization's discontent.

I chose the Trimeric as the media for my voice. The trimeric is a newer poetic form – four stanzas, first with four lines, the rest with three. The initial line of stanzas 2, 3 and 4 is a refrain of the corresponding line of the first stanza. There is no prescribed rhyme pattern.

So, here it goes, Keepers of Liberty, Equality and our Planet:

Shout it out!

The meek shall not inherit the earth!

Raise your hand, raise your voice.

Shout it out. Shout it out!

Something's amiss? Take a stand.

Raise your hand, raise your voice.

If the street corner's a whisper,
ring the bell, bell the cat.

Shout it out. Shout it out,
from Sandtown to London Bridge,
of bullets, ballots and barbarity.

Something's amiss? Take a stand.

Take politics in your hand.

Don't be Gentle – Howl!

I am indebted to those who willingly offer their help to make Pen-In-Hand a success. In particular, my many thanks to Missy Burke for

Cover Design, Barbara Morrison for assistance with editing, and Eileen McIntire for help with layout design. Foremost, I am encouraged by the enthusiasm of MWA member writers, and their submissions to PIH. In particular, the zeal shown by young writers is heartening. They will keep the lights on.

Keep it coming.

Dr. Tapendu K. Basu

It Takes a Village—President's Message

As we look at the accomplishments of the past year, we must take a moment to recognize the outstanding efforts of MWA's many volunteers who have worked diligently to provide the benefits all of us enjoy. They need your support and recognition and your participation.

We'll begin with Dr. Tapendu Basu. As editor of MWA's literary journal, *Pen in Hand*, he has brought out another excellent issue on schedule. Thanks to all who sent in submissions.

For news, articles, and tips, Barbara Morrison is doing an excellent job editing the quarterly *Newsletter* and distributing it on schedule.

Also on the literary side of activities, Michelle Butler, Programs Chair, designs and manages the annual Book Awards Contest. The 2017 innovative contest worked well and will be repeated for the 2018 contest. I'm here to say this contest works. I read the winning novel for the Historical Fiction category, *Provenance* by Donna Drew Sawyer, and it was excellent. A thought-provoking page turner. I've written a book review for this issue. Michelle also handles MWA's Speakers' Bureau.

Your chapter officers have put together informative programs in convenient meeting places almost every month, often with refreshments. Kudos to Jo Donaldson and Joelle Jarvis, Carroll County Chapter; Jenny Yacovissi, Annapolis Chapter; Amy Kaplan, Howard County Chapter; Krista Keyes, Charles County Chapter; Dr. T. K. Basu, Baltimore Chapter; Katherine Melvin, Montgomery County Chapter; and Stephanie Fowler, Lower Eastern Shore Chapter.

MWA's Board of Directors has met monthly all year to keep MWA's many activities and administrative functions on track.

Janet Ruck, Vice President, steps in whenever a need arises. Among many other activities, she writes the grant applications and reports that will net us an extra \$2,000 this year.

Chip Trimmier, Secretary, keeps the minutes, provides legal advice,

and reads our contracts.

Jess Williams, Conference Chair, produced an outstanding conference this March and is already planning the 2018 conference. Date: March, 23-24.

Flo McCahon, Membership Chair, processes memberships and handles member questions.

Mark Willen, Teen Writers' Clubs Coordinator, keeps the expanding number of teen writers' clubs on track. He has also now stepped up to become Treasurer.

Tony Russo, Eric Badertscher, and Nancy Alexander handle publicity and social media.

Larry Matthews, Member at Large, adds his wit and experience to Board decisions.

Christy Lyons is a Teen Writers' Club Coordinator and Member at Large.

Amy Kaplan has just joined the Board as Chapter Liaison.

So, it takes a village to keep MWA running. They are all volunteers and all busy people. When you see them, say thanks. And next year, when elections come around, throw your hat in the ring.

Eileen Haavik McIntire, President

A Conversation with Marc Steiner, A Baltimore Icon

Marc Steiner is an American radio talk show host. He has recently hosted The Marc Steiner Show on WEAA 88.9FM, from the grounds of Morgan State. He previously worked for WYPR (and its predecessor, WJHU) from 1993 till 2008. I have followed him on the radio since I moved to Maryland in 2001. I sat down with Marc for a chat at the office of Center for Emerging Media (CEM) on July 14, 2017.

The voice has not lost its rich timbre. “Come in my friend, I am looking forward to this.”

I noticed the life-like cutout of Marc Steiner at one corner as I entered the office of Center for Emerging Media at 3121 St. Paul St., Baltimore, one block south of Johns Hopkins Barnes and Noble.

Tapendu: I have followed you on the radio—from JHU, WYPR to WEAA at Morgan State. I am amazed at the wide range of topics you have covered.

Marc: Yes. We have covered quite a territory, from local and international politics, to Chicago music and Bail Bonds, and religion.

Tapendu: About politics. Is our democracy in crisis?

Marc: I am afraid so. We are losing our focus. We must discard the myth, weather the contradictions, and follow our deep rooted democratic principles.

Tapendu: Back to the sacred principle: All men are created equal?

Marc. Absolutely.

Tapendu: So, what is the role of the writer in this present-day turmoil?

Marc: “Don’t drive drunk; don’t write drunk.”

Tapendu: I like that. In this war of ideologies, there is no clear winner, is there? Tell me, do you have a favorite among Maryland writers?

Marc: Ta-Nehisi Coates, born in Baltimore, is a favorite. Janet Sarbanes writes well.

Tapendu: Any recent reads?

Marc: I enjoyed *Why?: What makes us Curious* by astrophysicist and author, Mario Livio. Great book!

Tapendu: In 2007 CEM won the Peabody Award. I quote, “*Just Words* speaks volumes, and it has its own spare eloquence. The series of 55 four-minute reports broadcast by WYPR gave some of that urban area’s most marginalized citizens a rare, mainstream-media opportunity to speak for themselves unfiltered.” So, What’s next for CEM?

Marc: We will conduct live interviews, do podcasts, partner in producing documentaries; there will be a lot to do.

Tapendu: Finally, what is Marc’s advice to our members and fellow writers?

Marc: Remember that the first draft is not the last draft. Second, listen with open mind and heart; search for elements of truth. Third, never cozy up to politicians in power; ask hard analytical questions.

Tapendu: And Shout It Out! I look forward to your future programs. Another Peabody Award?

MEMOIRS

Beets

by Barbara Morrison

Today I'm a successful engineer, but at 24 I was a scared young woman whose marriage had dissolved, leaving me with one baby and another on the way. I had no job, no health insurance, and no child support. Despite a college degree and prior work experience, I could not find a job that would cover the cost of childcare, let alone food, rent, clothing, and transportation. Medical care for my son and for me during my pregnancy seemed completely out of reach. Disowned by my family and abandoned by my husband, I realized that welfare was the only way for my family to survive.

My mother had always complained that we were poor, but with a big house, two cars and private schools for us kids, I knew better. Now I stepped into a life of true poverty, living in the kind of neighborhood my parents drove through with the doors locked, struggling to find ways to stretch the meager checks to cover our most basic living expenses, where buying even hand lotion was out of the question.

What I found was not at all what I expected. Unlike the neighborhood I'd grown up in, where doors were firmly shut and problems never aired, here people helped each other all the time, especially toward the end of the month when pennies and food stamps ran out. We watched each other's children; we shared cars, clothing and tools.

I kept trying to find a way out, like all the other welfare moms I got to know, but after my second son was born, the possibility of finding a job seemed further away than ever. Even with all my advantages of education, health, and work experience, I found myself slumped on the

front stoop convinced I would never get off of welfare or amount to anything.

Overcome by lethargy, I sat hunched on the hard, wooden step, elbows on my knees, chin in my hands, keeping an eye on the boys: my toddler and the two sons of my friend, Jill, who lived in the apartment upstairs. My new baby lay in the stroller, taking in the world.

Then Jill came out and sat down with me. She said that our friend Dan was renting a roto-tiller and wondered if we wanted anything dug up while he had it. She reminded me that we'd talked about putting in a garden in the empty lot on the corner where ragweed and lamb's quarters were already sprouting.

I didn't want to stand up much less tackle a garden.

All the same, fresh vegetables were an issue. They were so expensive that I usually ended up with only the cheapest, like carrots, kale, apples. Bananas were a rare and special treat. Reluctantly I agreed.

Over the next few days we cleared out trash and then watched as Dan wrestled the roto-tiller through the hard ground and weeds. After that, keeping an eye on the kids playing in the far end of the lot, Jill and I took turns with the shovel, breaking up the clods and digging in some manure.

It didn't look ready. We stood there scratching our heads, not sure what to do next.

Watching us from his front steps was the old man who lived in the grey house between the lot and our house, the one who always wore a long-sleeved shirt buttoned all the way up and a brown fedora. He got up with a dry little coughing laugh and, moving slowly, came over to join us. Gaunt, dark-skinned and tough as gristle, he stepped carefully over the rough ground.

"Putting in a garden?" He kicked one of the clods gently. His voice was low and gravelly.

"Trying to," I replied.

"I had a little truck farm down in Carolina," he said. "Back in the day." Jill and I looked at each other.

Turning to him, she asked, "Would you help us? Not to dig or any-

thing, but with advice?”

He looked at us impassively. Then a gleam started up in his eyes, and I realized he was smiling, just with his eyes. “Get a hoe,” he said and headed back to his steps.

Mr. John taught us what we needed to know. He showed us how to use the hoe and explained that we had to be out there using it every day to keep down the weeds and give the plants some air.

For ages, it seemed as though nothing was going to happen. The straggly tomato plants adapted to their new home, but the seeds wouldn't come up. I paced the dirt rows looking for any sign of green.

Then suddenly one day there were seedlings, way too many of them, jumbled against each other: beans, squash, peppers, beets, radishes, lettuce. Jill and I ran from row to row, pointing out the mess of spindly green shoots.

I measured the tiny bean and squash sprouts daily and wielded the hoe the way Mr. John had taught me. Every day I worked in the garden, thinning, weeding, watering. Instead of exhausting me, the work made me feel stronger. The day I pulled up my first beets, I cradled the sweet red bulbs in my hand and knew that I had turned a corner.

Like many first-time gardeners, we ended up with more squash, peppers and tomatoes than we could handle. We ate collards and chard until I thought we'd turn green. Jill and I gave our vegetables away to Mr. John and everyone who would take them. We planned to get others to join us the next year for a community garden.

People like to say that I pulled myself up by my bootstraps, but it wasn't true. I had a lot of help. Being on welfare taught me to look beyond the stereotypes, to accept help when it's offered, and to give with both hands.

Barbara Morrison, who writes under the name B. Morrison, is the author of a memoir, *Innocent: Confessions of a Welfare Mother* from which “Beets” is excerpted. She is also the author of two poetry collections, *Terrarium* and *Here at Least*. Barbara's award-winning work has been published in anthologies and magazines. She conducts writing workshops,

provides editing services, and (as the owner of a small press) speaks about publishing and marketing. She has maintained her Monday Morning Books blog since 2006 and tweets regularly about poetry@morri-son9. For more information, visit her website and blog at <http://www.bmorrison.com>.

We All Fall Down

by Natalie Sokoloff

Just three days before my 70th birthday, my life changed in an instant. On a cold February night, I returned home from leading a support group for mid-life women. I went to the alley to bring out papers for recycling. As I stepped into the coal dark alley, I slipped on black ice. My body flew up in the air, and I came crashing down on my left butt, unable to move. I tried turning over and standing up once, twice, and again, but I couldn't lift myself up no matter what I did. My husband was out at a meeting. I panicked. I realized I was alone. I was sitting on a slab of ice and started shivering. I kept crying out for help, but no one responded. Finally neighbors heard me and called 911. Life would never be the same.

Epidemic of Broken Bones

I was part of an epidemic of elders who fall and break major bones like their hip or pelvis; some even die from these falls. But the outcome does not have to be so negative. An elderly person can increase the chances of recovery from a major fall by first, taking full advantage of the medical resources available; second, having determination, be willing to work hard, and maintaining a positive attitude; and, third, using family and community supports. This is the story of my journey recovering from a fall. I hope it will help you or a loved one recover as well.

Elderly men and women are both victims of accidental falls, but women are more likely to experience such accidents which lead to fractures and traumatic brain injuries. According to the Center for Disease Control, I was just one of the 2.5 million people over age 65 who fall each year in the U.S. and are treated in ERs for injuries. At University of Maryland's Shock Trauma Center, where the state's severest cases are sent, falls are second only to car crashes.

The Ambulance and the ER

When I fell, neighbors across the alley finally heard my screams. Bob came to help and his presence was like a blanket of warmth. Karen called the ambulance and left a message on our answering machine for my husband, Fred, to meet me at the hospital.

I felt safe the moment the ambulance appeared in the alley. Two EMTs jumped out and knelt on the ground next to me. “Did you hit your head?” “Can you move your body at all? Where does it hurt?” The EMTs gently put me on the gurney, tied a belt around me and put me in the ambulance. Off we went with sirens blaring.

I was lying on a stretcher in the hallway of the emergency room, already filled with people on five other stretchers. Fred arrived in the ER soon after I did. It was such a relief knowing I had someone who really cared about what was happening to me. As the hours in the ER wore on, the worse my level of pain became.

The X-rays and MRIs showed I would not need surgery. I fractured my pelvis in two places and the sacrum on the left side at the end of the spine. The most common pelvic fractures—the pubic bones toward the front of the pelvis—are due to a thinning of bones from osteoporosis, and will heal on their own so long as there is no displacement.

The injuries I sustained were similar to those of many elder women—injured by accidental falls, like slipping on ice, missing the curb, unsteady gait when walking, wobbly furniture, falling down stairs. Others are injured by falls caused by leg weakness, medication or glasses that make things difficult to see, or falls caused by dizziness, clinical diseases (e.g., osteoporosis, Parkinson’s, arthritis, depression), and age-related frailty and slower protective reflexes.

The Struggle to Walk

After the diagnosis was made, I was brought upstairs to a hospital room at 1:15 a.m. From there I was scheduled to be moved to Rehab after a day or two.

The first step in recovering from a fall is a person must accept and take full advantage of the medical resources available. Soon after being

admitted to the hospital I had my first contact with an Occupational Therapist. I was lying in my hospital bed. All I could think of through my drugged haze was my unbelievably intense pain. Broken pelvis. Broken sacrum: the pain was excruciating, even with medication more powerful than morphine.

I knew I needed help. By 8:30 a.m., less than 12 hours after coming into the ER, help arrived. A very pregnant, pretty, dark-haired physical therapist appeared in my room saying,

“Good morning. My name is Brenda and I’m here to help you get walking this morning. You’ll make it to the chair across the room today.”

Not in your wildest dreams, I thought.

My heart began pounding as the fear engulfed me because the whole left side of my body from my hip down felt like sharp sledge hammers was pounding away at it.

While the calm and competent young therapist took it very slowly, she still made sure I not only sat up—which felt impossible to do when I didn’t have control over my left leg—but also walked to the chair.

I no longer remember the details of how I got to the chair. I do know she gave me a complicated set of instructions and put a walker in front of me while I was sitting on the side of the bed. At some point I pulled myself up to standing while holding on to the walker in front of me, but not so tightly that I would topple over. Despite the heavy dose of pain medication, it was pure torture.

By the time my husband and son Josh came in a little later in the morning, they were truly awestruck finding me sitting up in the chair. I was in pain, winded, exhausted—and unbelievably proud of myself to simply be sitting in that chair. I actively participated with my physicians and therapists. I wanted so badly to walk again and go back to my old life. But at that moment, I had no idea how difficult this journey would be.

My Mother, My Role Model

My mother, who survived her fall 18 years earlier, taught me the second step of recovery: you must have determination and be willing to work very hard—every day of your long recovery. In her case, she

broke her pelvis in two places, hip, and shoulder—all on the same side. She had osteoporosis, which I inherited, making us both susceptible to bone breakages.

I remember so well the struggles she went through during her recovery.

“One new thing a day,” she told me. “I will accomplish just one new thing every day.”

That was her mantra during her six weeks of rehabilitation; as long as she accomplished one new thing a day she knew she would be fine.

So when I fell, she was my inspiration, my role model. My mother recovered from her fall because she worked hard, had determination and didn't give up. I knew if she could make it, so could I. And if I can do it, so can you or your loved one.

Hard Work, Exasperation, and Hope

The third step in recovery from a fall is to utilize family, friends and community supports and maintain a positive attitude. I was lucky to have the support of my grown son and husband.

Though I was eager to go home, the thought was frightening. Could I handle the many challenges?

How will I get up and down the stairs? Can I sleep in our bed or will I have to sleep in my recliner? How long will they let me be on the morphine? What will my pain be like when I have to go off it? Will I ever be able to sit at my desk and use my computer? When will I be able to drive the car?

Before I got home, Fred and Josh made the house ready for me. They picked up all the scatter rugs, put in extra railings along the stairs from the first to second floor and in the bathroom, and set up the kitchen so I would have easy access to food and pots and pans I might need to cook a simple breakfast or lunch.

I was committed to doing what I needed to do. My focus was on getting better, getting stronger, and to get back to a more independent life, and cope with the pain.

My husband and son were devoted and supportive—even if sometimes overprotective. Working one's way back to wholeness is not easy for the recovering senior and the ones who love and take care of you. Daughters, sons, sisters, and other family, friends, community, medical and religious home visiting programs must all be included in caring for injured elders.

Lots of people helped me out during my recovery by dropping off food for dinner. Our neighbors contributed to a gift certificate at the local fancy deli. This made it possible for Fred not to have to cook every night. Friends from different communities visited me at home and made my life more socially and personally bearable.

When I was able to travel by myself and go to physical therapy, I returned to my exercise classes. I added a new one after the first month home: a pool therapy class where I learned to use my core muscles (stomach and low back) in a more disciplined way. Pool therapy is easier on one's back, hips and legs than doing these exercises in a regular gym, and it's actually more fun. For me it had the added advantage of meeting other women who've gone through many challenges similar to mine.

There Is Always Hope

One year later, I still worried about falling again, although I was almost fully recovered from the broken bones. This is a real problem since “fear of falling” among the elderly must be consciously dealt with so elders do not walk with too much hesitation or prevent themselves from participating in social activities. I know how important the latter has been for me. I am back doing my physical exercise classes 4 days a week, reading and socializing in several book and discussion groups, and staying involved in community activities.

Throughout my life I have had to deal daily with pain because I have fibromyalgia, a disorder of widespread musculoskeletal pain that amplifies painful sensations in your brain and body. The best way for me to do this is to get out into the world and be engaged both personally and intellectually—to think and act positively.

I made it through this incredibly difficult first year; and I know you or your loved one can too. In order to increase your chances of recovering from a fall, remember you must (1) take full advantage of the medical resources available, (2) have determination and be willing to work hard, (3) utilize family and community supports and (4) maintain a positive attitude.

Recovery is difficult and may seem impossible—I know it felt that way to me. I hope my story helps you or someone you know in the challenging journey of recovery from fall and broken bones.

Natalie J. Sokoloff, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York, Co-Editor, *Domestic Violence at the Margins: Race, Class, Gender & Culture*, Co-Editor, *The Criminal Justice System and Women*, 3 Ed. <http://www.nataliesokoloff.wordpress.com>

My Life in Two Acts

by Janet Ruck

When I was a younger version of myself, my 98-year old grandmother remarked that the past 50 years of her life had whizzed by. In fact, she told me, throughout her near century of living, she marveled at how the more things changed, the more they remained the same. I could not fathom what she was telling me.

My personal life drama proves her words. Much like having my own crystal ball, my future has always unveiled itself as the years quickly multiplied. Not a run-of-the-mill palm reader who blows you off with generalities like “You will meet a handsome stranger;” no, my life has revealed a new premise each decade, foreshadowing the storyline of my continuing performance. Tragedy or comedy, it’s still unfolding.

Act One

Scene One: What Does It All Mean?

Childhood might best be viewed as my blinking years. From birth through pre-teen I spent a lot of time clearing my vision trying to figure out this thing called life. The world felt like it was spinning with a dizzying array of new experiences, and I blinked at each sound, taste and smell.

Scene Two: How Do I Get Out of Here?

My teens were years of torment, and I couldn’t wait to get through them. Luckily high school track and the love of running took my mind off my woes. It’s as if I raced through my teens, not too sure where I was going, but seeking as much distance as possible from where I was. Looking back, I wonder if there was wisdom buried beneath the scurrying.

Scene Three: Am I Doing This Right?

My twenties brought grownup experiences. Fun-loving and faltering,

I tried on the costume of adulthood, dancing and singing to remain upright in a world that I still hadn't mastered. Livin' for the moment with an eye to the future. Moving forward with purpose? Perhaps.

Before my 60th birthday, as a gift to myself, I read my journals from those years. Worst gift ever. What was I thinking dating some of the trolls that lingered on my journal pages, skulking and sneering? They belonged under the bridge in "Three Billy Goats Gruff," certainly not in my memory. But I guess it was all part of the design, setting the stage for upcoming acts.

Scene Four: No Turning Back

Things got serious in my thirties. First there was marriage, and then two babies born three years apart. Juggling motherhood, personhood, marriage and a career, I tried to keep myself vertical in a world that still spun around me. My thirties are etched as my breastfeeding years, with a shaky existence embodied in the tremors of adult responsibility.

I recall the day I returned to work after maternity leave with my first son. I had painstakingly expressed milk into bottles to take to the baby sitter. No electric pumps back then, I used some contraption with a tube that glommed onto my nipple and I pumped. Sort of like what I do when my bike tire is flat, except in reverse. I think back rather morosely to that traumatic morning when I gathered my still bloated and exhausted self and a six-week old baby, precariously balancing bottles of breast milk.

As I exited the warm womb of my home, I dropped a bottle. Milk infused with salty tears spread like a tepid sticky carpet as I stood helpless and aghast. My husband, usually supportive, sputtered: "Can't you just pump some more?" Words could not express my reaction. I wonder how I refrained from acting out the murderous intent I felt? I gathered my shaky sense of self and continued my journey to the baby sitter's and then to work, a morning trek that occupied the next 10 years.

A lactation room wasn't in the vernacular then, let alone in my workplace. Throughout the day I ducked into the ladies' room with my pump in a plain brown wrapper, the results of which sat on a shelf in the

staff refrigerator next to tuna fish sandwiches. To this day, the smell of tuna makes my eyes well up in tears. No ‘splainin’ that to anyone, unless you’ve lived it.

Intermission: Regretfully, there was never a break in the action.

Only mountains of diapers, buckets of breast milk and exhaustion
with no end in sight.

Act Two

Scene Five: An End in Sight

The angst of my teens, encounters of my twenties and endurance of my thirties brought me to my knees, I mean to my forties. My identity as a person became a bit more formed. Running a meeting after expressing milk with a medieval torture device taught me that I could not just juggle my world but balance it. Life became more than performing in a circus act, with gritted teeth and clenched fists.

The forties begot a sense of relief and a cautious feeling of victory, highlighted with a splash of wrinkles and a tinge of grey hair. Errant bottles of breast milk behind me, I encountered my new role as an aging female in a world that worshipped youth. Hmm, I wondered, could that be all there is? No, I decided, it was up to me to step into the limelight as my own heroine in this performance that was not yet ready for its finale.

My wrinkles were not going to be my defeat. I hadn’t come this far to let a few facial flaws determine my character. Take that, Estee Lauder!

Scene Six: It Comes Together

Ah, my fifties. Fine years they were. They gave me time to breathe. Kids grown, career established, marriage intact, I could take a moment to figure out how to keep moving forward, erect, strong and determined.

Encore: The Fun Begins

Now in my sixties, I guess I qualify as a senior citizen. My life

stretches behind me as a prologue to what comes next. As a 60-something, sometimes I still blink, clearing my vision for the future or cataracts, I'm not sure which. I'm definitely racing. Father Time is a formidable contender and I gotta move fast to keep pace. There are yoga and Pilates to keep me in balance and maintain my uprightness in a world that still spins. Falls can be deadly, the Medicare literature reminds me.

It took me a lifetime for Grandma's words to make sense. Now I eagerly await my encore. I have a lot of living left to act out the lessons of my six decades thus far.

Confident that breastfeeding will not make a repeat performance, I take a bow.

Janet Ruck, Vice President of the Maryland Writers' Association, is a member of the Howard County chapter. Since coming of age she has ventured into writing humorous memoir. She blogs at Geezer Goddess.

SHORT STORIES

Wading in the Water

by Carol Westreich Solomon

When Elsie pulled Mo from the Potomac River, the water and muck had infiltrated Mo's jeans jacket and filled her yellow rain boots, making her much heavier than her slim 115 pounds. Elsie had never lugged anything this unwieldy, not even an overturned canoe left by a careless renter. Mo's eyes were closed, her skin beneath the mud a soft shade of violet, her lips an intense blue, her breath nonexistent.

"Come on, girl!" Elsie yelled as she scooped debris out of Mo's mouth, tore open the jacket and a flimsy blouse, and began pounding the woman's chest.

"Somebody help!" she shouted in the direction of the ferry dock, knowing full well that the ferry was way on the other side of the Potomac.

Elsie pressed her lips against Mo's blue lips and breathed all she had into the woman again and again. Hearing no response, Elsie beat her arthritic hands on the bare chest of a woman who had no right to die.

"You gotta make it, Maureen. Come on now, breathe."

When a small breath escaped followed by a gag and an expulsion of water, Elsie let out an Indian whoop. Mo's eyelids flickered open. She squinted as if she expected someone other than Elsie staring down at her.

"Shit. Where's Zoe?"

Mo closed her eyes as if willing herself back into the river. By the time she opened them again, Elsie had pulled her up to the grass field

next to the ferry store and plopped down next to the water-logged woman, panting from the exertion.

“Good thing I was at the store this morning getting ready for spring opening,” Elsie was muttering to the prone body. She paused long enough to catch her breath and added, “I looked outta my window and there you were, just beyond the shore, parading into the river like you could walk yourself the whole way from Maryland to Virginia. And I said, Elsie, something ain’t right here. But who woulda known it was Big Jim’s girl?”

“Can you be quiet? My head’s pounding.” Mo turned her head in the direction of the river.

Elsie leaned next to Mo’s mouth and took a big sniff. “Just as I thought. You’ve been drinking.”

“Shut up.”

Elsie peered up Route 107, hoping a car was headed to the ferry, even though it was mid-morning in early April, a time when few had need to cross the river. Without some help, she could never get Mo up the stairs to her apartment above the ferry store, and the woman was starting to shiver fiercely in the breeze off the river. But Route 107 was quiet.

“Put your arms around my neck,” she ordered.

Mo raised her arms limply a few inches above the grass, then dropped them as if the exertion had taken all that was left in her. Elsie crouched down and stripped Mo of her jacket and boots and soggy pants. Ignoring the pain in her cranky knee, she slung Mo over her right shoulder, balancing Mo’s head and shoulders with the lower part of her torso.

“Upsie daisy, girl. We’re taking a trip.”

There’d been enough dying in that family to last a decade—Martha about 18 months ago, then less than a year later, Big Jim. She’d be damned if she allowed another Shockley to pass away too soon. Like a mother lifting a truck that was crushing her baby, Elsie dragged Mo to the ferry store steps, rested just long enough to stop her heart from pounding out of her chest, then bounced her friends’ daughter step by step up the stairs to her apartment.

Elsie spoke softly to Doc Pike, keeping one eye on the bedroom where Mo lay propped up on two feather pillows and buried under every stale quilt and blanket Elsie could find.

“Keep filling her with warm coffee. I’ll be by to check her out soon as my schedule lets up. Unless you want to call 911 and get her taken to the hospital now,” he told her.

“No need for that. There’ll be enough gossip as it is. I think you and I can get her through this.”

A soft moan, like a baby lamb bleating, came from the bedroom.

“Gotta go, Doc. My patient calls.”

“Here I am, Maureen. Got you some nice hot coffee, same as we sell in the store,” she announced as she handed Mo a mug with a picture of old Poolesville.

“I’ve got to get across the river,” Mo said. Her hand brushed the mug aside, spilling some of the coffee on the bedspread hand-embroidered by a long-deceased aunt for a marriage that never materialized. “Oh, shit. I didn’t mean to do that.”

Elsie blotted the spill with a tea towel.

“Don’t you worry, Maureen. That quilt’s seen better days,” she said as she coaxed the fluid into Mo until her skin started to pink up and her shaking became an occasional shudder. Elsie folded her arms around Mo and rocked her like she knew Martha and Big Jim would have, humming a melody from the hymnal at St. Peters. Underneath the smell of fresh soap and shampoo, Elsie sniffed the muck of the river in Mo’s hair.

“I’ve got to get across the river. Now,” Mo announced as she untangled herself from Elsie’s arms.

“You ain’t going anywhere now, girl,” Elsie said. “Unless you want me to call 911 to get you a ride to the hospital.” She stood and marched across the bedroom, blocking the door with her wide-beamed body.

“So I’m in prison here. That’s how you want to play it. You’re going to stand there like some kind of guard keeping me from crossing the river to Zoe.”

“Exactly. Now if you’d tried using the ferry instead of wading in the water like a damn fool, I would be saying go right ahead. Go cross the river and see your daughter. But your head’s not working right. Too much alcohol and too much sadness.” Elsie pushed her dresser in front of the door to create another more stable barrier, just in case Mo’s anger gave her the strength to push Elsie aside.

“Go to Hell. After all my parents did for you. You old waddling duck. This is how you’re repaying them.”

Elsie held back. No sense fueling Mo’s anger or mixing one messed up life with another.

“Now you just rest, Maureen. Put your head back on those pillows and let all that sadness flow on out. Go ahead. No shame in crying once in a while.”

“I hate you. I hate this damn town. Everybody butts in when they should be taking care of their own affairs. Who are you to give me permission to cry?”

“I’m just saying it’s easier sometimes to just let go and clean yourself out.”

“See. That shows you how little you know. I’ve cried enough when no one was looking. When Zoe left me to live with her father. When she told me second-hand that she never wanted to see me or talk to me again. No, I’m not staying here with an old lady telling me to go ahead and cry when I should be crossing the river to see my grand.” Mo caught herself, then studied Elsie’s face.

Elsie pursed her lips, then manufactured a surprised look. “Well, congratulations. So you’ve got yourself a granddaughter.”

“See. You already knew. It only happened last night, and already the ferry store manager and probably every other person in this horrible place knows my private business.”

“Don’t you go blaming Poolesville for your sadness.” Elsie stopped because Mo knew her sins, sure as Elsie knew hers. No need for reminding.

But it was too late. Mo was flinging off the quilts and leaping from the bed. Elsie’s flannel nightgown flapped over Mo’s skinny body as she

raced toward the bedroom door and threw her weight against Elsie like she was trying to move a boulder. But Elsie, who had long ago learned how to stand her ground, wrapped her arms around the flailing woman, and pinned her against the wall, humming again the hymn they both knew so well.

Later, after Doc Pike's sedative had settled Mo down, Elsie pulled an armchair into the bedroom and propped her leg with the swollen knee on the foot of the bed. Mo was snoring like Big Jim resting in his recliner after a Sunday dinner. In the kitchen, Martha and Elsie washed the dishes together and slipped into girl talk as if Martha and Jim's marriage had never disrupted their high school friendship. Elsie couldn't figure out which one of them she loved the most and who was most to blame for turning the trio into a couple.

Mo looked so pretty now. She had Martha's turned up little nose and Martha's heart-shaped lips. Usually you couldn't see Martha in Mo because she had so much fight in her face. But looking at her now, Elsie could scarcely believe she was old enough to have a granddaughter. And Zoe was a mother herself, despite Elsie's efforts to keep her away from that married man who had no business coming on to a teenager.

Big Jim would have known what to do with this mess. He'd always kept things together. He would have just picked up the phone and called Zoe and told her, get over it, girl. Your mom has done some horrible things, kept secrets she shouldn't have. But she's always loved you and taken care of you. So just talk to her once in a while. And let her see her grandbaby. But Big Jim was gone, not long after Martha got breast cancer and died. He gave in to pneumonia almost like he wanted it to take him. Now there was no one left who had his pull over Zoe.

Maureen—such a pretty name, especially how Big Jim stretched out the “e” sound so you could feel every ounce of his love for his beautiful daughter. Almost everyone but Martha and Big Jim called the girl “Mo.” It fit her more than the delicate “Maur-eeeen.” But she was Maur-eeeen now, lying there so gentle, so pretty, filling Elsie's bedroom with life. Elsie didn't even notice the water stain on the ceiling or the wallpaper

pulling away near the closet door.

Maur-eeeen. Prettier than Martha when she disappeared in bed as Elsie fed her chicken broth and wondered if Big Jim would turn to Elsie when Martha died. She hated herself for ogling the remains of her friend's life, wondering what it would feel like if he burrowed into her when grief overtook him. He hated Martha for dying. And then she hated them both for leaving her here alone to miss them.

The thumping from the kitchen signaled that the drier had switched to the fast spin and was working extra hard to dry Mo's water-logged clothes. Mo would need something hopeful to look at when she awoke. Maybe the daffodils in the flower garden near the shed. Elsie lifted Mo's hand to test her consciousness, and when all she heard was a soft mmm, she tied Mo's hands together with the sash from a bathrobe, just in case Mo woke up with some crazy idea.

"Wh. . .?" Mo muttered, then drifted away again, her hands bound together in a prayer.

Elsie slipped the remaining sedatives into her pocket, tiptoed from the bedroom, donned her wind-breaker, and walked down to the garden. As she waddled over the uneven ground toward the canoe shed, she realized Mo was right. She did walk like a duck. Had Big Jim and Martha seen her like that? Like some pitiable creature who needed a meal every once and again. It hadn't seemed that way then. The laughter and gossip had flowed easily. But maybe it was just their Christian charity, nothing more. Or maybe the duck waddle business was just Mo being Mo. Keeping that secret about Zoe's father must have dried up her share of Christian charity.

Elsie bent over to clip the daffodils from their roots, listening for footsteps on the stairs in case her fugitive attempted another escape. The stunted daffodils looked worn out, their yellow like that of sponge cake. Some of the stems hadn't even blossomed. Had she neglected to work enough top soil around the bulbs? Had the unforgiving clay beneath the top soil restricted the bulbs? Elsie set the daffodils on the grass and dragged the bag of top soil from the shed along with a trowel. She clawed at the clay beneath the top soil to loosen it, then dumped

more rich, dark top soil on the chunks. She plunged both hands into the soil between the plants and kneaded it. Maybe it was too late to make a difference for the daffodils, but she could get the soil ready for the planting of the May annuals.

As the ferry tooted, announcing its arrival for the 5 o'clock crossing, she saw Martha and Big Jim hiding back behind the shed. She was with them. The three of them, no more than sixteen, were sharing a cigarette and a beer. Big Jim had wedged himself between the two girls, Martha's head on his right shoulder, Elsie's on his left, though he was listing slightly to the right. The smell of the forbidden beer intoxicated her, or was she light-headed because of the taste of the shared cigarette and the warmth of Jim's body beneath his baseball uniform?

"I'm taking care of Maureen for you," Elsie told them. "Don't you worry."

She plunged her hands once more into the soil. As she crushed some lingering clay clods, she heard feet clumping down the stairs and turned.

"Maureen! Where do you think you're going?"

Mo grabbed the bottom of the handrail, the sound of her name almost knocking her off her feet. Beneath her tousled hair, her frozen face made Elsie's jaw ache.

"Gotta run, Elsie. The ten-minute warning just sounded. Thanks for everything." She began sprinting across the field toward the ferry store's gravel lot.

Elsie rearranged her body so she could stand without further irritating her bum knee. Limping across the field after Mo, she called out, "Wait. You can't go. You aren't up to it. Look how your balance is all off. You've got enough drugs and drink left in you to put a horse to sleep."

But Mo wasn't listening. She had reached Big Jim's pickup and was fumbling around on the gravel, looking for something.

"See what I mean. Can't even find your keys. Come on back up, Mo. Let me feed you some dinner and then you can spend the night and finish sleeping it off. Wait for tomorrow. You're going to drive off the road

in that condition.”

“I can’t wait. Zoe needs me. She’s all alone with a baby and a clueless father. Who’s going to help her if the milk doesn’t come in right? Who’s going to show her how to soothe a crying baby? She needs her mother. Ah, there they are.” She was waving a key ring triumphantly in the air. The ferry tooted two blasts.

“Hey, Joe. Hold the ferry. I’m coming,” she shouted toward the new ferry man who had just finished loading the lone car for the river crossing.

“You tried to walk your way across the river because of your Zoe craziness and almost drowned, and now you think she’ll open the door to you. You fool.”

But Mo was in the driver’s seat. She slammed the door.

“Maureen, I promised Big Jim and Martha I’d take care of you. Don’t make me a liar!” Elsie threw herself on the hood and pounded it to get Mo’s attention over the racing engine.

The pickup zipped backward, dumping Elsie to the ground and leaving her with gravel burns on her arms and legs.

“Stop,” she called to the pickup barreling toward the dock slightly off kilter.

“Stop. Oh Jesus, stop,” she pleaded as the truck missed the dock and slid into the Potomac.

From the gravel lot, Elsie watched breathless as Joe jumped into the river, yanked the pickup door open, and pulled a woman in a jeans jacket and yellow boots onto the dock. As the pickup continued to fill with water, Joe lifted the woman and she leaned into his chest and draped her arms around his neck like an Easter tableau.

No need to call out again, Elsie thought, jutting out her jaw. No need for the stunted daffodils. Maureen has someone else to do the saving. And I’ve got bed linens to wash.

Carol Westreich Solomon has returned to her first love--fiction writing--after exploring literature and writing with high school students

in Maryland. As the lead consultant of Carol Solomon and Associates, she previously taught writing to adults in corporations and government agencies. Her YA novel *Imagining Katherine* was designated a 2016 Notable Book by the Association of Jewish Libraries. Her work has appeared in *Lilith*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Jewish Fiction.net*, *Persimmon Tree*, *Poetica*, *Seltzer*, *The Washington Post* and the English journal. Carol is a member of the Montgomery County Chapter.

Princie's Little Picnic

by Nancy Alexander

“Aw, she wants to go,” I said watching Princie wag her little tail and gaze hopefully up at us. “Why can’t we take her?” I asked.

“She’s horrible in the car,” Ann said, “She’ll be a nuisance.”

“But she really wants to go. Let’s take her just this once,” I advocated for the little dog. “You’ll be a good girl, won’t you?” I asked the dog, an 8-year-old poodle-terrier mix, whose high-strung nature usually kept her housebound.

Ann reluctantly agreed, the faintest hint of ‘you’ll see...’ in her voice.

Princess commenced whining and prancing in circles, doggie smile stretching across her scraggly face. She had the kind of fur cartoonists draw depicting someone accidentally run through a dryer cycle. It was grey and black, wiry and chaotic, poking out helter-skelter. Her fur was a bit like her personality!

The weather forecast called for clear skies and temperatures in the mid 80’s. It was a perfect day for an outing. We planned on a low stress day in the mountains with our two retrievers. We packed a red and white cooler with food and drinks and headed out to the Trooper.

The retrievers’ wild with anticipation leapt in the back of the truck pacing and panting. Princie, allowed herself to be lifted into the back along with the 3-foot cooler. Ann’s dog Duchess, an easy-going yellow Lab, settled down behind the passenger seat, nose to the window. Buck, my handsome light-blond Golden Retriever, panted and paced behind my seat. Princie sat primly between the two big dogs.

“Aren’t they darling,” I beamed proudly at our three passengers, “Princess is being such a good girl!”

We had driven about 15 minutes when Buck’s bounding and pacing began to annoy her. First, she growled at him, which he ignored, and then she snapped, which he also ignored and then she bit him. That got

his attention. He yelped and jumped out of her way.

“She bit him,” Ann exclaimed. “You bad dog” she scolded.

Undeterred, Princie kept snapping. Buck watched her face and pranced like a Lipizzaner stallion, keeping his paws away from her teeth.

I pulled off the highway. We let Princie sit up front next to Ann. Settled on the front seat, she happily looked out the window, glancing at her canine companions, a victorious grin on her wiry face!

We had driven about 10 minutes when Ann gasped. “She wet the seat!”

I pulled off the road and we let Princie out to see if she needed to “go” but of course she didn’t, because she just had.

With a ‘nothing’s going to ruin our day attitude, we got a towel, cleaned the seat and with moderately dampened spirits, continued on our way.

Minutes and miles passed, Princie seemed relaxed and we smiled, thinking our worries were over. In that moment of warmth and affection, Ann gave Princie an encouraging little hug. Princess growled and bit her hand!

“She bit me!” Ann cried staring in disbelief at her bleeding hand.

We lurched into a 7-11, bought first aide items, cleaned and bandaged Ann’s hand. It didn’t need stitches; though she might need a tetanus shot. Princie was proving to be a challenge but are capable women, we can manage this, we thought as we headed off to enjoy our stress-free day in the mountains.

“We need a crate,” I decided, “she can’t sit up front and she can’t be loose in back.” I spied a shopping center across the highway and pulled up to a Woolworth’s.

“They’ve got to carry pet supplies,” I said. Lowering the windows, we hopped out for a quick shopping trip.

We just stepped out of the store when we saw her; we screamed, dropped the box and broke into a run. Princie had wedged her body sidewise out the front window; hysterical yelps pierced the morning air. Hanging upside down, she was held by one small hip angled dangerously backward. We got there just in time to grab her, as she headed toward

the pavement headfirst.

Grim, stressed and silent, we assembled the dog crate, no small task as it was accompanied by the whining and howling of the now impatient retrievers and the incessant, high pitched yelping from Her Royal Highness.

A few broken fingernails and non-deleted expletives later, the job was done. Princess was safely ensconced in her new crate; the crate was safely ensconced in the back of the Trooper and we were once again off to enjoy our stress-free day in the mountains.

We had been driving only a few minutes when Princie, infuriated by her confinement made her feelings known. True to the terrier part of her nature, she started to dig her way out of the crate, scratching the plastic floor, unleashing a racket that threatened to break the sound barrier.

With a migraine in the offing, I pulled off the road. "Let's cover the crate," I said "maybe like a bird she'll think it's night and go to sleep." Right!

I wrapped the crate in a blanket, and climbed into the driver's seat. Ann stared blankly at the road. I may have seen a tear or two in her eye. I patted her arm.

"We'll be OK," I said as I pulled out into traffic. After a few miles of precious silence frenzied barking-scratching hysteria shattered the calm. With our jaws locked in death-mask grimaces, we plowed onward.

'West Side Story,' blasted at full volume represented our soon-to-be-defeated efforts to drown out the panting and pacing, the yelping and whining, the scratching and screaming.

With barely one intact nerve left between us, we stumbled along a mountain path. Ann was no longer speaking to me. The retrievers were joyous, running free and unbounded. Buck carried his tennis ball and Duchess carried her Frisbee. Princess carried nothing. Head held high; she pranced primly beside Ann, perfectly well-behaved.

When we came upon a stream, the big dogs swam, when we came upon some flat land, we played ball. Princie was a perfect little angel. We walked and finally talked. Here we were in the peaceful outdoors, enjoy-

ing nature with our dogs. This was more like it!

After several hours, we piled in the Trooper and drove off in search of a quiet picnic spot. When we discovered a narrow gravel lane, marked by a small hand printed sign with faded writing, we turned in and wound up in an idyllic little spot, a tiny lake surrounded by picnic tables and shade trees. We unloaded the dogs and strolled around our new-found haven.

Clusters of ferns and wild flowers grew between mountain laurels, willow trees overhung little paths; songbirds trilled and flitted about and small fish darted beneath the surface of the water.

Contentedly, we unloaded our cooler and spread food out on the table. We were just about to sit down when across the lake, we noticed a disheveled old man walking determinedly in our direction, yHHHelling something that seemed vaguely unfriendly.

We shrugged uncertainly at each other and began to fix some sandwiches.

He moved steadily toward us, his demeanor somehow hostile. The closer he drew; his anger grew more apparent.

Hummmn! Wonder what's bothering him?

Then he was yelling unintelligibly and gesturing about something. What was his problem?

We looked around and saw we were alone. Then it dawned on us, the man was yelling at us. But we had no idea why.

Then we noticed he was carrying something... we squinted. The something was long and pointed... We stared. Then he picked the thing up and held it in front of him. It was a rifle! And, he was heading right toward us! Then we heard what he was saying, "This is private property! Get the h... out of here."

We were in shock. This stranger was swearing at us, threatening us with a GUN!

My first post shock thought was get the dogs out of the way. They were friendly and if they ran to greet him, he just might shoot them. I called them and summarily locked all three dogs in the Trooper.

Now Ann, usually a calm, meditative person who rarely raised her

voice above a soft drawl, was bubbling over with the stresses of the day. She pulled herself up to her full 5'6" height and called "Listen here Buddy, don't you talk to us like that..." and she said, "You relax, Buddy, there's no reason to be rude!" And she told him "just calm down there, Buddy."

Buddy however, was not calming down! Buddy muttered about private property and what he would do if we didn't get out of here now.

Ann, oblivious to the danger, was intent on negotiating. "Now we just want to have our little picnic," she called across the lake, "then we'll leave. We didn't know it was private property," she said reasonably.

"Get the h... out of here you b....," he shrieked.

"Listen Buddy," she said, her whole body shaking with rage, "we're going to have our little picnic then we'll leave, there's no reason to be rude."

This is no time to work on Buddy's social skills, I thought!

"Let's get out of here!" I started throwing food in the cooler, not bothering to close or wrap anything. This is a matter of life and death, I thought. As I threw food in, she took food out. I reached around her, grabbed what I could and tossed the cooler, plates and napkins into the Trooper with the dogs. I shoved Princie in her carrier and shouted, "Come on before he shoots us!"

Ann refused to budge. She sat down on the bench and calmly continued assembling her sandwich. I leaped in the car, drove over, leaned over the stick shift and opened the passenger door. "Come on ..."

Nope! She was standing firm. A Texan to her core!

The man raised his gun and pointed it at us yelling about private property and his sign down by the road.

Ann, crazed beyond reason, shook her hastily made sandwich at him and told him she came here for a picnic and she was going to have her picnic!

In complete defiance of the man and his rifle, she stalked over to the nearest picnic table, tattered cold cuts dangling from a roll and sat down.

Eyes bulging, I steered the Trooper between Ann and the rifle-toting

man, clambered across the stick shift, slipped out the passenger door, yanked her backward by the back of her shirt, pulled her onto the front seat, scuttled over the stick shift and threw the car into reverse. Her open door swung wildly, bits of food went flying as she continued to yell “Listen here Buddy ...” into the passing trees.

I made a wide U-turn in the parking area, heading toward the exit when I saw the angry unshaven man, cowboy hat askew, had taken a wide-footed stance in front of us, blocking access to the only exit. His rifle, shouldered and steadily, pointing at the windshield.

I braked, threw the stick into neutral and revved the motor. He pointed his rifle at us. I pointed my Trooper at him. Minutes ticked past. The air was hot and windless. Flies buzzed. The big dogs panted, Prince whined. We were two crazed bulls, snorting and pawing the earth.

At length, I called out the window, ‘You need to move out of the way, Sir.’ He responded by spitting tobacco juice at my truck, widening his stance and staring fixedly at us.

Foot on the gas pedal, stick in neutral, I made that “RRRrrRRRrr” sound again and yelled, ‘You’re blocking my way, Mister.’

The man stood there, pointing his gun at us. “Ain’t supposed to be in here...” he spat.

At length and with some reluctance, thinking of the dogs who would be abandoned if we were shot dead in a Western Maryland Standoff, I shifted into reverse wheeled into a backward U and drove further into the idyllic private property.

Surprised by my actions, the man hollered and trudged after us, gun raised. When I had gotten some distance from him, I whirled around and straddling the edge of the pavement, barreled past him heading toward the exit.

Inside the Trooper, the air was spiced with non-deleted expletives and divergent dog sounds.

Then all was silent. We bumped along over rocks and ruts, sweating in a post panic state. We were in complete disarray. We breathed deeply, struggling to regain normal heart and pulse rates. I was merging onto the highway when Ann, hypoglycemia and starvation having descended,

decided to eat. Scrunching between the seats, she hauled the huge cooler over the back seat and onto her lap. Slathering globs of mustard on chunks of French bread, she prepared some haphazard sandwiches, avoiding the retrievers who draped their heads over the seats, tongues lolling. Princie, yelped and scratched her crate relentlessly.

Driving south on Rte. 15, I found myself balancing a dripping sandwich and sticky soda can, while steering and shifting gears, no small task because the cooler was resting on the gear shift.

We were sailing along in this haphazard, unconventional manner, when a horrible high-pitched, ear-piercing screech assailed us. We were petrified. Was that the engine? Was there an ambulance? Ann twisted around, eyes widening in terror, as she realized the horrendous sound was coming from the carrier.

'It's Princie!' she shouted, the terror in her own voice rivaling that of her little dog. 'Quick pull over! Pull over!' Wildly, I swerved across three lanes of speeding traffic, signaling and beeping, my sandwich splattered across the windshield, mustard dripping down the glass, diet Coke upturned on my lap dripping into my sandals, cooler banging up and down, bruising my hand as I downshifted. I veered off the highway, careened into a ditch and came to a crashing stop.

Quick as a flash, Ann leapt out and ran to the back of the truck. Parking and extricating my hand took a moment. "She's HUNG HERSELF," Ann screamed. "Her eyes are GREEN," she screamed. "H-e-l-p!" she screamed.

WHAT? Hung herself? How could she hang herself? Her eyes are green? How can they be green? I rushed to the back of the Trooper, my mind frantically considering this emergency. Where was the nearest vet? How do you resuscitate a dog? Oh, my God!

I found Ann huddled on the grass, crying and cradling the carrier on her lap. Princie was still uttering that ungodly sound and indeed her brown eyes had turned green! Indeed, she had hung herself, but not by her collar...aggressive little Princie had bitten the carrier door and gotten her teeth stuck in the metal grid.

She was "hung" alright. By her teeth! Her head was wedged sideways

and all four canine teeth juttred through separate squares. Stretching her mouth could break her jaw. Opening the door risked breaking her neck.

“Take the crate apart!” I ordered. Squatting in a weed-filled ditch, beside a 6-lane highway, trucks and cars whizzing by, hands shaking, blinking back tears, we disassembled the crate while Princie howled. Unbolting the frame, we eased the metal door loose and angling both dog and door, we pried her loose, one pointed saber-tooth at a time.

Falling back in the grass we allowed ourselves a brief moment of relief. We freed her!!! Thank God! Recovering quickly, Princie shook vigorously, licked Ann’s face and began to prance in circles. We sat by the side of the road waiting for our hands to stop shaking, our hearts to slow down and our adrenaline to stop overflowing.

We had rescued her but now we had another dilemma. Getting her home. If she stayed loose in the back, she’d bite Buck. If she stayed in the front, she’d bite Ann. If we put her in her crate, she might bite the door again. We couldn’t leave her by the side of the road but it was tempting!

Then we realized it was awfully quiet. Exchanging fearful glances, we approached the Trooper and stared through the window. The retrievers had taken advantage of the crisis. They had climbed over the seats and eaten the picnic! Seats, dashboard, windshield, floor and dogs were thickly smeared with mustard, mayonnaise, soda, breadcrumbs, bits of meat and cheese and strands of blonde fur. Each dog, sat calmly in a bucket seat, burping contentedly as we gawked.

The 65-mile trip back home whizzed by in total silence. Buck and Duchess slumped against each other, snoring softly. Princess, stared warily through the holes in her carrier that was strapped next to me on the passenger seat. Ann, collapsed in the back, laid next to the big dogs and I drove along in silence thinking it will take weeks to recover from Princie’s little picnic.

Nancy Alexander, a psychotherapist, began her writing career with real-life animal stories. Her works include Elizabeth Reinhardt series, Relentless, Seeing Double. A MWA Board Member, she lives in Columbia, MD... www.nancyjalexander.com

POETRY

A Flower Seeding

(meditation on Georgia O'Keefe's "Jack-in-the-Pulpit #4")

by John Bayerl

From deep, dark inside
Streams a filament of white light
Emanating from a glowing blue bulb.
Soft purple hues surround
The effusion, becoming pinkish toward the center.
The sacred dark enclosure
Is the flower's womb.
Jack streams forth his pure, pulsating illumination,
Propelling an act of creation,
The primordial seeding of
Feminine by Masculine;
Spewing a white beacon of pure light
That irrigates and nourishes
Verdant growth, rivers, landscape.

John Bayerl: I began this poem in a poetry workshop taught by Adele Steiner-Brown for the Maryland Writers Association in February 2017. I had selected a Georgia O'Keefe print from among the many Ms. Steiner-Brown had brought as possible subjects. I completed the poem after viewing the original painting in the East Building of the National Gallery of Art.

Blinding Sun

by James D. Fielder

Exposing the hidden truth
Like half-done root canal,
Pain long ignored now endured
Yet more pain to come.

We look down the road
At blinding racism in the sun,
We see history past
Yet so much still to be done.

America distracted
By past that won't just fade,
Songs sung and bridges walked
Cuts deepen as memories invade.

Blurred lines are crossed
Hateful words are launched,
As threats upon debts
To stifle forgiveness and trust.

I look out the window
 To see the promises of the morrow,
I see those facing the wrong direction
 Believing that yesterday is their tomorrow.

I see the reflection in their mirror
 On the edge of their cracked peering glass,
Their distorted view of our future
 Is but a reflection of our past.

James D. Fielder, Jr. PhD is an executive and public servant with a passion for leading change, focused on improving the economic well-being of Marylanders through educational and business opportunity. He has served four Maryland governors, lending his talents and expertise in numerous leadership capacities. He is presently Secretary of Higher Education; Secretary of Appointments for Governor Hogan; Secretary of Labor, Licensing, and Regulations; Acting Secretary for Business and Economic Development.

Dr. Fielder has served as Towson University's Vice President of Finance and Administration. He received his Ph.D. at Michigan State University in Higher Education, and his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the University of Maryland, College Park.

FROM YOUNG WRITERS

Probability

By Julia Q McCormack

Taking a risk is exciting.
A roll of the dice.
Blindly hoping for the best.
A thrill comes over you.
It doesn't take much;
A little courage,
A little faith;
Can bring your confidence a bit higher.
Chances are impulsive.
A fleeting moment of craziness.
To live is to take a chance.
Every breath is a choose-your-own-adventure story.
So, the only thing to fear is fear itself.
Bring on the wild choices and chances
Because...
Why not?

A World Without Books

By Julia Q McCormack

No pages to turn
No words to learn
A villain without a hero
'Cause the number of books is zero

A fandom disappearing
No one cheering
Doomed to live sans literature
Torture. I'm sure
Tears not shed
Nothing to read when you got to bed
At least there are no creases in the spine
In all those books that were mine
Oh! It's Fahrenheit 451
And my never ending booklist isn't done
Where have the ships gone?
I've been looking since dawn
They each contain a part
Of my bookworm heart.

The Clippings

by Julia Q. McCormack

(1994 Mermorville Earth 9)

Lenard “Lenny” Argil was not exactly a special person but he had an interesting past, meaning that he didn't really have one.

Lenny stood in the Mermorville Historical Archives and Library and stared at a picture of himself in an article from 1984. At age 23 he was an orphan with no memory of his life before the age of 13. He worked part-time at the MHAL partially for money but also to search for anything he could find out about his past. Lenny had been looking for answers for as long as he could remember, but in the Archives only within the last nine months. I've finally got something, he thought.

Hands shaking, he pulled out the flash drive that contained every piece of information about himself. Lenny inserted it into the MHAL computer and clicked into the files showing his credentials. There wasn't much. There was a certificate stating his gender, blood type, age and

the date the police found him huddled behind a dumpster. Another file showed Lenny's school history, including his diploma from Earth 9's worldly university where he had majored in computer engineering. Lenny scanned the newspaper article onto the computer system. It popped up showing a picture of himself with two people. The caption read: Geneticists Ally and Harold Hartford died in the Kurapas breakout in Kerp Labs. Their son Colin, will be sent from Earth 5 to Earth 9 where his grandfather Pete Hartford resides.

After reading this, Lenny brushed his hand across his back where a tattoo that said E5 stood out on his left shoulder blade among his many scars. He'd had many nightmares about where he received these scars. In those terrible dreams, he recalled the pain racking his body as he stumbled around amidst loud sounds and the overwhelming feeling of fear. The names of the people identified in the newspaper clippings who seemed to be his parents reverberated in his mind. Most of all, now he knew his real name: Colin Hartford. It was a good name. It felt right. But he now liked being Lenny Argil. It was the name Officer Farqual gave him when she had found him. He shuddered and looked at the sidebar to see any related articles. One popped up showing the destruction of what once was a landing pad. The few sentences below read: "Tragedy strikes again, the m-v pod (multi-verse pod) carrying Colin Hartford away from the graves of his parents crashes after a malfunction in programming causes the autopiloted pod to fail. His body has not been found amongst the wreckage. If any information can be found about him please contact Pete Hartford at 3s-8o-3m1."

Staring at the screen for what seemed like forever, Lenny was overjoyed and filled with grief at the same time. All of those hypnosis sessions could not bring back his memories but a couple of newspaper clippings gave him more than he had ever hoped for. At first Lenny felt regret at not knowing what had happened to his parents. Then he remembered what Officer Farqual said to him when Lenny hacked into the city's mainframe to locate information about his parents, "Our dreams and success happen in the future because that we can change. Just remember that most hidden pasts aren't pretty." He sighed. She

was right, but another question popped up in his mind. Why wasn't he matched with his birth records? The answer came quickly. Earth 9 was not as technologically advanced as Earths Numbers 1-5. Only information from the past nine years had been uploaded onto the city's main-frame.

Blinking tears away he pulled out his CallBox and typed in the number from the second article. After a few beeps the voice of an older man answered, "Hello?"

Lenny hesitated and then said "My name is Lenard Argil, and I have been searching for answers about my past for ten years. I have no memory of my past before the age of thirteen; I am now twenty-three. While searching I found an article that has a picture of a boy resembling me in it. Through further research I found your number. I was hoping you might be able to help me--"

Lenny was cut off by the man's crying, "Colin is that you? Please tell me it's you. I have waited so long. Do you have a tattoo of E5?"

A memory of playing Garbles with this man shot through his mind and Colin/Lenny responded his voice cracking, "Yes Petey."

"Your mother had it given to you so that you would always know where home was. Can we finish this conversation in person please? Meet me on Earth 5 at 1682 Mulberry Paveway. I love you, my boy." Pete hung up leaving Lenny relieved and nervous.

One Day Later

Pete Hartford and his grandson Lenny Argil stood at 1682 Mulberry Paveway. It was the graveyard where the Hartfords were buried. Both men stood in front of the graves. In the vast graveyard these seemed no different from the others, and yet they were special to both of them. Lenny swallowed hard as more emotion-filled memories came up to the surface of his mind.

Pete looked up at Lenny, "I came here once a year to get some peace. And also to remind myself that you were still out there."

"I'll come to live with you, Pete. But that depends on what you would like. I have found the answers I had been looking for. Now I will

take that internship at Hawthorn Industries' Cybersecurity Division. Their headquarters are on Earth 1."

"Colin, you are always welcome in my house. Now that we have reconnected you can stop searching. Leave the past behind. Forge your own future, as the engineer you have always wanted to be. Earth 1 will be so lucky to have you."

Lenny said, "Then it's decided. I will live with you until I can afford an apartment and then move to Earth 1. But first, do you have anything belonging to my parents from before the accident?"

"Yes, I have many things. I kept them as mementos and in the hope you would return. There are photo albums, school records, art work, the collar of your dog Kate, clothes, and books."

The two men hugged each other in the comfort of each other's love. It would be a bright future with a gray past they knew. They could lean on each other, for family is home.

Julia Q. McCormack, a 13-year-old student at St. John the Baptist Elementary School in Silver Spring, is an avid reader and writes flash science fiction and complex riddles. She is the author of *The Felicity Code*, a pictorial code based on numbers, which is pending copyright. Julia hopes to one day be a professor of classical literature.

I Spy

by Lilian Behan

“Something red.”

I tried to play fair and give everyone a chance to find it. But, well, we never stopped as the sign “suggested” so they never spotted it.

And onto my sister’s turn.

“I spy with my little eye.”

She “hms” and “ums” and I hold my breath while scanning the treeline and the strip mall across the street and the shirts of everyone in the car.

I strain as I peer over to my grandmother’s shoes just to be sure I wouldn’t miss a thing.

Ready to yell out all the objects of the rainbow.

“Something turquoise.”

Of course, one of the big beautiful words she loved so much of which I fumbled over.

My grandfather chimes in, “The sky?”

“Nope.”

“My socks!” I yell.

“Nope.”

My grandmother raises her hand to speak but my sister assures everyone, “Now it’s behind us! It was the door on that house.”

I feel foolish, but argue back that that wasn’t really turquoise, rather aquamarine.

I knew I didn’t know what that meant, but I imagined it was a clear water ocean, and I imagined that for once I had won.

Now I spy with my little eye and I can’t spy the miles between my sister and me, but I can still spy her favorite colors in the horizon she hides behind.

I can’t spy the pastries my grandmother packed in the cooler, but I spy her favorite foods that are now my own comforts in the grocery

store isle on a Tuesday night.

I can't spy the turquoise door, but I spy the traffic lights ahead of me as they turn from red to green, and I spy the world I'd been so taught to fall in love with, and I spy colors that don't exist in all that rises to the 6:00 sunset.

The Kind of Woman

by Lilian Behan

The kind of woman that collects antique mirrors with jagged cracks and tarnished handles of flowers spindling round and round

That never remembers to water the plants at her office except when she finds brittle cracked leaves littered on the carpet

That vacuums her couch without switching to the extension but swears it gets a better clean anyway

That comes home early from work every month when the tenth falls on a Friday

That installed the curtain rods on her own and told each and every visitor until one day they fell

So she threw them out immediately and learned to love waking up to the light

That dances in circles around her tiny living room on late December nights to the song she and her sister used to sing on car rides home from the beach those summers

The kind of woman to remember that song her first boyfriend told her he hated, so she still hates it a little for him today

That engraves her own initials near the bed of the tree with the mossy spot and still gets nervous someone will see it and know she'd been there

That thinks of her mother when she steps on the crack in the sidewalk and wishes she were a more considerate person

That cries for the hypotheticals but never fooled with theoreticals

That eats desert for dinner in front of her TV on an old beach towel
when it rains twice in one week

The kind of woman that lives for falling asleep to thunderstorms
and wishes she was as thankful as cheap Chinese carryout bags.

So Bright

by Lilian Behan

One step-two step-three step

sore step

A man limps as he wallows among the ranks of solid cold concrete and
stone tombs.

He wears a grey derby hat and a cream sweater sown in what he used to
know as warm evenings of his wife's nibble hands on a needle, feeble
hands intertwined in his own.

His slacks were washed out by yesterday's rain
and a couple of storms that came before.

Skin, the color of the winter grass
drawn out
drawn over

and strewn away in remembrance of her smile
because she took that with her.

He recalls a day like today, the day they brought their first child into the
world and he cried for beauty of the delicate innocence before him;

the day was bitter, so cold and bitter and clad in ecstasy.
He fumbles in the grass and scoffs at the height at which it towers;

his mind falls back to the time she dropped her wedding ring in the dewy

summer lawn and wept for two hours before reaching to find it because her suddenly rarefied fingers couldn't bear its bold proclamation. He narrows his eyes beyond the prying building of shops she wouldn't have liked and he reaches for a sunset

just another thing that slips away.

But he grabs onto the last tethers of light as he tried to grab onto her.

And the stars emerge before they were called to the table as they race to brush the last crumbs of a day too long out the door.

And they shine; they shine so bright, they shine like her laugh and her spirit that was every wish on a shooting star that no one thought would ever come true.

And he looks up and he whispers,

“It's a beautiful night to be in love my darling. And I dare say you've never shined so bright.”

Lillian Behan: I am currently going into my senior year at Hereford High School and have just finished my second year of creative writing courses. I would love the opportunity to expand my writing from the classroom to the real world.

CHAPTER FROM NOVEL IN PROGRESS

Soul Strings

by Jessica Williams

Slap-slosh, slap-slosh, slap-slosh. Miniature tidal waves slap my ankles as they rise above my shoes with each slam of my feet into the pavement. My soggy, weighted jeans restrict my short stride as they dance dangerously around my lower hips. The obstacle of my clothing doesn't prevent me from feeling the pull to Levi.

He is near, and he is dying.

The persistent wind whips my wet hair into my line of vision, what little line of vision I have. The thick, thundering clouds prevent the light of the moon from offering guidance, leaving me to the mercy of the bright blue warning lights of Baltimore's less than up-and-coming neighborhoods as a caution to those who don't sling guns or wear gang colors.

"What were you doing here, Levi?" We aren't city kids. It took an expensive Uber and a lot of running to get this far.

My stomach turns as the wind assails my nostrils with a putrid odor it should be a crime to share. Trash? Feces? Decay? A combination. "The trifecta." The weak windows of the battered buildings rattle as thunder rumbles, scaring every rat in a too close range. Squeaks here, tails there, a scream as one touches my foot. "Gross, gross, gross." I rub my foot into my pants, with false hope of sanitation.

The tightness around my heart weakens, my magnet to Levi. "Damn it, concentrate, Avery." Crouching by a nearby wall I place my hands over my ears, taking deep (probably toxic) breaths, and focus on our empathic bond.

Levi and I are soul mates, not in the girlish OMG D&E 4EVA way, but in the literal sense. Our births were planned, our lives mapped out,

the future of empath's a responsibility we share. A piece of his soul rests in me and vice versa. It's the bond I use now, the magnetic pull to him, the other piece of me.

The pain in his stomach forces my body in half and I clutch at my gut. He's terrified. And so scared.

"And you were worried about rats." How selfish am I?

Thunder cracks again as I launch back into the street, my muscles burn as they strain, pushing harder and faster. Sweat tangos with the warm summer rain on my skin, my side cramping as my lungs fight against my heart's desire.

"Keep... going."

I find appreciation for my child-like frame as I navigate the streets, using my heart as my GPS. He's close, but the pull weakens each second. If I don't find him he won't have enough energy for me to feel him.

I can feel his lungs struggling for air, his body shaking from the cold, his pain... his fear. Terrified each breath is last, surprised when it isn't. I stumble, crashing to my knees, gravel and broken glass burrowing into my palms.

"Avery?" I feel his question more than I hear it. The bond pulls tight for a minute, warm and strong. In the tall grass a few feet from me I can sense his presence.

"Levi!" I crawl to a motionless figure, the mud of the earth cold as I move through it.

My stomach twists when I reach him.

Sprawled and face down, his nose dangerously close to the water puddling around him. Placing a hand on his shoulder and the other on his hip I anchor my feet into the mud and push him onto his back.

Blood stains his white shirt, mixed with mud, and diluted with rain. My teeth dig into my lip and my hands hover awkwardly above his wound. Gunshot? Knife? I don't know.

"Levi..."

One side of his mouth lifts into a smile, "I'm ready for church."

I want to be irritated with him. "Really? Holy jokes now?" I fumble with his shirt buttons.

“You’re right. I can’t joke about church when you’re ripping my clothes off.”

“Hush. You need to focus. Use my strength.” I place my hands over the hole in his stomach. He places a hand on mine. Our bond enables us to share strength and energy. His pain pools in my chest, tugging my heart, taking my strength. The world spins and Levi moves his hand from mine.

“We need an ambulance.” I look into his eyes, mine saying what I can’t voice.

“Ave... just hold me.”

While we are not yet lovers, the ceremonies of our kind are complete. My body should be able to hold him over, but it can’t. His wound is fatal, nothing can be done. I lay beside him, my arm cradling his body. Rain attacking our skin.

I am his rock as he is mine. I am his anchor as he is mine. We are each the other’s universe. Tethered to one another.

“Beyond the ages of all ages,” I repeat our vows, “In your soul I find peace and in my soul you find joy. You are my freedom of life and love as I am your foundation and anchor of strength. Together we are complete for I am your soul and you are mine. I protect your soul as you protect mine. Beyond the ages of all ages.”

I press a kiss to his cheek; his chest stops moving. I feel it in my heart before I see it. His heart no longer answering the beat of mine.

The sob of pain blocks the oxygen from my lungs, my chest tightening in pain, rain mingling with the salt of my tears.

We lay here together for a moment, yet an eternity. I cannot move, cannot walk away from this life-altering moment. If I move then I move forward. I can’t move forward.

The rain stops pelting my skin and I tilt my head up, squinting. The brightness in the sky relieving the darkness of night. Did I fall asleep?

I focus my gaze, my eyes swollen with sorrow.

We are not in Baltimore anymore.

The sign next to us reads:

Welcome to the Afterlife.

Jessica Williams is the Conference Coordinator for the MWA Annual Conference. Her preferred genre in writing is YA. The theme of her upcoming novel: When a connection of their souls leads Avery and Levi to the Afterlife, not only must Avery learn to let him go, she must lead Levi to his new life without her.

Untitled

by WC Banta

Evinrude was ready for breakfast, and it hadn't yet appeared. Cats have a practical view of things so he set out to remedy the situation straightaway. Cats sort out by purpose every kind of object, animate or not, and Winnie, it turned out, was the object he required. Reliable and always beneficial, Winnie was how nourishment got accessed. The sole exception was at night, when persistence was required to get her into motion. But dawn already lit the window and the toilet would be beckoning. She always left the bedroom door ajar while she was there.

Sure enough, the bedsprings squeaked, followed with the brushing sound of Winnie's naked feet against the woolen rug. He found an unobtrusive corner of the bed and curled up his paws beneath his breast until he heard the toilet flush. He watched until she burrowed in again among the layers of her nest. Pretty soon he eased a muscle in his throat to let it purr. Quietly at first, the amplitude increased until he made it audible enough to penetrate however many covers it might be called upon to pass. He then gracefully arose, creeping softly toward the lump of blankets over Winnie's head, spilling out his gentle buzz like petals in the air.

He crept along her belly, leaving fluffy cuddles where his feet had pressed and nuzzled in his head among the covers, seeking out her face. She grimaced up her nose and pulled it further in, but this amplified the murmured purr and drew him in withal. Winnie roiled beneath the covers like Leviathan harpooned, but Evinrude held on until her struggles weakened, then surceased. Affectionate vibrations persisted on poor Winnie's back and resumed their upward course until they settled on her head.

WC Banta, a novelist, lives in Chevy Chase MD. Above is a short chapter from his forthcoming novel with a tentative title *What the Dog Brought Home*.. wcbanta@verizon.net

DRAMA

Monopoly

by Gandharva raja

Moses

Confucius

Marx

Jesus



Krishna

Muhammad

[A game table occupies the center of the den—on it a marble Monopoly board. Coins of gold, silver, copper and plastic are used for Monopoly currency.

Seated West, Jesus, his tanned brown face covered with white beard, wears a red robe flowing to his ankles. His icon is a silver fish.

Seated East, Krishna, wearing a saffron robe, holds a wooden flute in the pose of playing it, his icon a white lotus.

Muhammad occupies the South seat, wearing a white Arabian robe, his icon a sword.

Karl Marx, seated opposite Muhammad in the North position, is dressed in Stalin's military uniform. His icon is a hammer.

Moses, the banker, with his signature beard, wears a blue pin-stripe suit, faces the audience, standing behind and to the right of the table. He wears a green fedora and holds a long staff in his hand.

Confucius, the arbitrator, wears a green Hanfu. He stands behind and to the left of the table where the players are seated, He holds a large Tibetan gong in his hand.

“The sequence”: At appropriate intervals, Jesus rises and raises his right hand as if he is about to deliver a sermon. On cue Krishna plays his flute and Muhammad proclaims “Allah”. Karl Marx looks at each person in turn and then proclaims loudly, “Nyet!” Moses thumps the floor with his staff and Confucius utters, “Confucius says”. Buddha enters the stage from back door holding a cutout of Richard Gere in his left, and of Sharon Stone in his right. He bows, and then leaves abruptly. After the sequence, the rest re-assume their respective role in the game.

Seven icons: The Om, a Cross, Hammer and Sickle, Crescent Moon, Star of David, Yin-Yang and a Stupa are on a banner on the back wall. The game table and chairs are so arranged that each face or profile is optimally visible to the audience up front.

Moses thumps the ground three times with his staff and the game begins. [rolls] Players roll a pair of dice in turn and announce the square they land on. Each hands a coin to Moses as they purchase property, and move their icon accordingly.

Krishna: [Rolls the dice and moves a lotus icon to a Monopoly square] Kashmir! I see no end to trouble here. But I will keep it.

Muhammad: [rolls] Iraq! This is tricky! Damned if I do, damned if I don't. Not keeping it is bad petropolitics. Okay, I keep it. Allah is merciful.

Jesus: [rolls] Imperial Rome! Turning the scribes out of the synagogue in Jerusalem was a masterstroke. It was my ticket to Rome. [Laughs as he glances at Moses.]

Marx: Taiwan! Okay, Okay, better than Belarus.

Confucius: (strikes the gong) Confucius says, leave it alone – as permanent member of Security Council I warn that Taiwan be not touched.

Marx: Do I get another turn?

Confucius: No, you wait till 1917.

[Moses leans forward, pats Marx on the back, and places a fortune cookie on Taiwan.]

Krishna: I roll then. Here comes! Paris! Moulin Rouge! What Luck. Always fancied gay Paris!

[The sequence]

Jesus: Beware of what you wish for, Krishna. Many have fallen for the Rouge. Oh, The temptations! None have come away sane. Remember Napoleon?

Krishna: Gods are allowed a little pleasure now and then. Here Moses, here is my money.

Muhammad: Pleasure made you weak. Must confess I am now having trouble keeping my people sane. Okay. My roll. New York! Hell no. Oops! Sorry. Always a red alert there! I pass. My money is safer with Citibank in Doha.

Jesus: [rolls] Kolkata! Here I come. Theresa did a great job there. Of course, Francis Xavier is my man in India. In Cochin they name their kids Peter and Matthew and Annie. So what if they go gaga over Ganesha? Gaga! Ha! Ha!

Marx: San Francisco [Rises and salutes.] Ever since we lost a big chunky island to someone's folly [chuckles at his own joke] I have had eyes on that harbor.

Confucius: Confucius says pass on that cutie. Egg rolls! The best way to a man's wallet is through his stomach.

Marx: (jumps up) Judge! Not 1917 yet!?! [Sits down, dejected]

[The sequence]

Krishna: [rolls] Juba, South Sudan! Christ! Oops! Holy cow! I pass. Let Jesu and Mahmood settle this one.

Muhammad: Let United Nations decide. Oil interest involved there! Ha Ha! {rolls} Jerusalem! Holy Moses!

Moses: [Rising and thumping his staff.] Only the Shekel will be recognized. Do you have Shekels to spare?

Muhammad: Okay! Okay! I won't make the banker unhappy. Let the United Nations decide.

Marx: Decide what? Remember I have a veto. I will stop UN from deciding anything. They say yes, I say "NYET!". Veto is better than Lotto. [Laughs]

[The Sequence]

Jesus: [rolls] Moscow! [Hands a fistful of coins to Moses.] I will keep it.

Marx: I will rise from the dead if you do! I say Nyet!

Jesus: Been to St. Petersburg lately? Church of the Spilled Blood is back in service. Ask the author! He was there recently. Hey, Gandharva! Are you listening?

Marx: I will confer with Putin later. Workers of the World unite! A visit to the Vatican may be timely. There is more hanky-panky there than in the Kremlin. We only go after the opposition. And journalists.

Confucius: Confucius says Pope Francis good man.

[The Sequence]

Marx: Okay! Okay! I will roll again. Kabul! I was there once. Once bitten, twice shy. I pass. Judge, may I be permitted another roll?

[Confucius nods his consent. Marx rolls the dice again.]

Marx: Okay, AK! In the name of Kalashnikov! Kiev! Home at last! Home at last! Odessa File! Have you seen the movie? Ha! Ha!

Krishna: Enough! My turn. [In a Vedic chant tone] Come LA! Come LA, city by the Bay! I sent Yogi and Ravi. Dynamic duo. Sitar and yoga! Irresistible! I have you, LA, city by the bay! [Rises, dances Hare Krishna style, chanting Hare Krishna! Hare Krishna!] Hollywood here I come. [Throws a fistful of coin towards Moses]

Jesus, Marx, Muhammad, Confucius and Moses surround Krishna and shout in a chorus twice]: All is not lost. There is Bollywood left for play!

[Bollywood music: All dance around the Monopoly table.]

* The geographic locations can be changed as time passes—the theme will remain classic and yet contemporary.

Gandharva raja is the author of *August 29: How Kabir H. Jain Became a Deity; Epic Mahabharata, a Twentieth Century Retelling; Hoofbeats: A Poetic History of the United States*. His Novel, *The Nisba Trilogy*, was produced as a Bengali Movie in Tollywood, Kolkata in 2016. His books are available on Amazon.com and B&N.com. gandharvaraja.com

BOOK REVIEW

Provenance by **Donna Drew Sawyer**

Review by Eileen Havik McIntire

This novel deservedly won the 2017 Maryland Writers' Association Annual Book Award for Historical Fiction. The characters are complex and well-drawn, and the plot spins out a story of the injustice, hatred, and hazards of being African-American in the south. The hazards are even more dangerous when a black man is passing for white. I couldn't put the book down.

African American Hank Whitaker, 18 years old, breaks the law by being in town after sundown in 1909 Virginia. As he struggles against the sheriff to fight off arrest, the sheriff has an apparent heart attack and dies. Knowing that he would be lynched for causing the sheriff's death, Hank runs away and hides.

The next day, an elderly white man mistakes Hank with his fair skin, hazel eyes and sandy-colored hair, for white. The man offers Hank a ride to Richmond.

Four years later, Hank is passing for white and now owns a profitable business in Richmond. He catches the interest of one of the leading belles in town, Maggie Bennett. Maggie's mother Charlotte discourages this match from the beginning. She has bigger plans for Maggie, but Charlotte has secrets of her own and tightly controls the lives of everyone around her. Maggie's father thinks Hank is an upstanding white man and would be a good match for Maggie, but he is under Charlotte's thumb.

Maggie seduces Hank, and before long they are married. Then she becomes pregnant. Uppermost in Hank's mind is his heritage. Will the baby resemble his family or hers?

Underneath Hank's prosperity and prominence in the community with a popular socialite wife from good family, Hank feels a deep sense of disloyalty to his family and his race. This deep sadness emerges at last in his dying words which reveal his background to his wife, son, Charlotte, and to the horror of all, to the servants who will soon spread the word all through Richmond.

This is 1931 and marriage between whites and blacks is illegal. Maggie is a criminal and faces jail. Son Lance receives death threats. The family flees the United States for a new life in Paris. The saga continues as Lance now faces his own biracial heritage and what it means.

The novel is set against the rich fabric of the old South with its family loyalties and rivalries, its prejudices, and its uneasy relationships between white and black. Passing for white made life easier, ensuring a better future with jobs and opportunities forbidden to a black person, but it was a monstrous secret that ate at the soul.

Only at the end does the reader fully understand how terrible this secret could be.

Eileen Haavik McIntire is the current president of Maryland Writers' Association. She writes the 90s Club cozy mystery series featuring the 90-year-olds at Whisperwood Retirement Village.