

SPRING 2026

Tales from Riderwood

— Stories by and for Riderwood Residents —

LEGACIES: BUTTONS, BOOZE AND BREAKFAST

by Bonnie Friedman

When I was young, I spent endless, happy hours at my grandmother's home, sitting on the floor at the foot of her Singer sewing machine, playing with buttons. The intricately chiseled drawers of the sewing cabinet held worlds of wonder – large buttons and small, white ones and black, blue, and red ones too. These orphaned buttons, long separated from their cast-off clothing, continued living new lives in my grandmother's sewing machine drawers and in my small hands that sifted, organized and caressed the boundless treasures.

My grandmother's home was my safe place. No one could hurt me there. My grandmother Frieda provided unconditional love. I offered trusting affection in return. Her home seemed uncomplicated when seen through my young, innocent eyes. But, in fact, it was a complex place.

Like many immigrants, my grandparents lived above their business – a bar and restaurant in the West End of Pittsburgh. My mother Marie and her older brother Everette grew up in that home. Their sister Beatrice, whom we all called Bebe, lived there too. But she did not grow up. Bebe may have suffered from polio, multiple strokes, or some neurological disease. She lived the life of an invalid for more than 40 years – a large child with a sweet smile and no teeth who said, “mama,” but nothing more. My grandmother died of a heart attack lifting

Bebe to change her soiled bed clothes. I was just ten years old and overnight lost the only grandparent I had ever really known.

My grandfather Max was a shadowy figure who died of cancer when I was five. He was ill as long as I could remember, quietly shuffling from one room to another. To my young mind, he was gone well before his death. I came to know him only through the family stories that were shared. Max had moxie and thrived in his younger days. As an adolescent, he deserted the Russian Tsar's army and found his way to the United States. We were told his last name had been Fives, but that didn't sound Russian or Jewish, and until recently, we had no records of his ancestry. We now know his surname was Fajvush, and it's a short leap to see how that became Fives.



When Max reached the United States, he took his uncle's last name, Green, leaving behind his family name, his misfortunes, and his deserter status. With his freshly-minted identity, he started a new life in Pittsburgh. He met and married my grandmother Frieda, and they bought an historic inn, the Old Stone Tavern, that dated back to the Revolutionary Era.

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LEGACIES *continued from page 1*



The Old Stone Tavern in better days.

My mother and her brother helped in the tavern which catered to blue-collar workers in the neighborhood. My grandmother made hams that she never tasted because they weren't Kosher and lemon meringue pies that were the talk of the town. Then came Prohibition. My grandfather was resourceful and redesignated the business as a "confectionary" with a speakeasy in the basement. Years later my mother showed me where her father hid the liquor when federal agents were expected to raid the tavern. At some point my grandfather also came face to face with the "mob" which was active in the Pittsburgh area. As his business grew, he installed pinball machines in the bar, not knowing he was stepping on some very big toes. Soon men in dark suits with dark hats showed up, explaining to my grandfather that he was operating in their territory and needed to pay protection money. Max had a family living above the business and did what he needed to do. Every week the men in dark suits showed up, and every week he made his protection payment.

Then came the Klan. My grandfather's business was in a part of Pittsburgh populated mostly by Italians, Blacks, and a few Jews. The Ku Klux Klan started burning crosses in front of their homes and businesses. But my grandfather had protection; he had been paying the mob regularly to provide that. And they did. The Old Stone Tavern, along with Max and his family, was spared.

Today, the Old Stone Tavern seems a sad relic of its once vibrant past. Years ago, it fell into disrepair and was condemned as unsafe. The owner planned to tear it down. But local residents rallied and had the building declared an historic site. It could not be razed. A new owner is now working to restore the building and return the tavern to an eating and drinking venue in Pittsburgh's West End.

The buttons in my grandmother's Singer sewing machine drawers have their own legacy too. The actual buttons disappeared years ago. But I am working with a small group in my synagogue, making unique button jewelry that we sell to raise funds for a breakfast program for children in Kenya who walk miles to school on empty stomachs. Without their morning porridge, they would have nothing to eat all day. The buttons that help feed the children warm my heart and take me back to my days on the floor of my grandmother's home, whiling away the hours at the foot of her Singer sewing machine. ■

More about the Old Stone Tavern:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Stone_Tavern_\(Pittsburgh\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Stone_Tavern_(Pittsburgh))

<https://www.pittsburghmagazine.com/reviving-history-the-fight-for-the-old-stone-tavern>

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THE HEART OF A WRITER

by Bonnie Friedman

My heart is the heart of a writer.
My soul is the soul of a writer.
And my brain, it too is the brain of a writer.
But my fingers? They are something else.
Once they clutched a pen or pencil,
Marking a page with scribbles and squiggles
Conveying connotations and denotations
Of some significance or another.
Now my fingers dance and tap
Across a board with its own scribbles and
squiggles
That convey markings to a screen
That looks like a piece of paper.

But it is a figment of my imagination –
A virtual representation of a page
On which a writer might write
Were he or she or they
To clutch a pen or pencil in hand
And share the words that come
From the heart, the soul, the brain.
Now the thoughts pass through fingertips by
way
Of arteries coursing with blood
Rich in capillaries and printers' ink that flows
From my heart, my soul, my brain,
Sparking scribbles and squiggles
That bring this writer's words to life. ■



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SOMEWHERE

by AJK

sailing off
somewhere
never nowhere
I wonder where
somewhere is
fields of milkweed sending
clouds of puffs like dust into the wind

I wonder where
leaves that fall from you
in bits and pieces
of times and places
memories and faces go
trailing off behind you
growing small and finally lost to view

in the autumn wind
as I hold your hand
let me not despair
you grow more transparent day by day
fragments that reflect the light
somehow lose their gravity
flung away as the leaves blow by

and my tears fall away from me
drop by drop
though I've heard each one
is captured in a bottle
I know not where
But when at last I find them
I know that I will find you there ■

ALPENGLOW AT RIDERWOOD

by Bob Kuhns



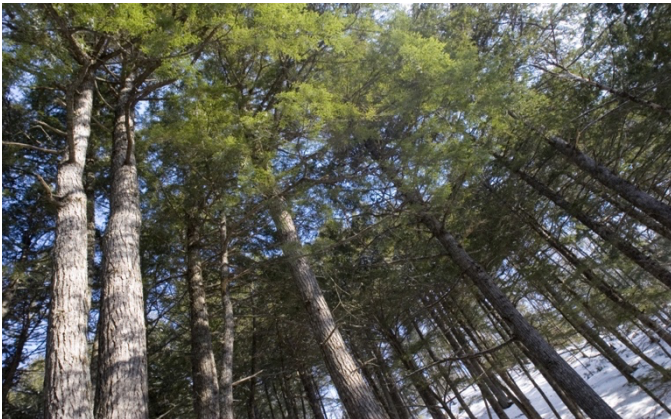
The view from my ground-floor living room window faces northwest. Tall apartment buildings mostly surround the grassy courtyard outside. The autumn setting sun is not in my line of sight as it was in the summer when it temporarily blinded me if I peeked right at it. But a south-facing six-story building across the courtyard catches the sunlight of the evening setting sun making the bricks shine with an orange glow as if it is backlit. The scattering of trees in the courtyard are a mix of species so that the tallest one has bright yellow individual leaves. Another is shining red, no, it is crimson. Shadowed by the building, one is muted orange. There is a purple-leaved tree and of course two or three trees are still green even as the calendar is ready to switch to December.

All of the trees celebrate Fall in their chosen regalia. ■

MYSTICAL LIMBERLOST

by Bob Kuhns

Shenandoah National Park first captivated my heart in the nineteen-fifties. Sufficient nagging of my parents that, “Other families take summer vacation trips.” had finally convinced them to book a room at Big Meadows Lodge. Dad had been an Army officer assigned to a couple of Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) camps in the thirties and thought it would be nice to see what the CCC boys had done here. Mom wanted to hike the “Limberlost,” a storied stroll through a hemlock forest.



We took that walk through the hemlocks soaring on thick trunks far above us to a canopy of needles so thick that only the hemlocks knew for sure that the sun was there. The wide space between the trunks was devoid of the usual thick understory vegetation of an eastern USA forest.

The hemlocks used up most of the sunlight’s energy in the high ceiling of this natural cathedral. The roots of the hemlocks took the moisture and nutrients from the soil. Not many plants could live on the wide-open ground between the soaring pillars. The daytime sunlight was so suppressed from us—

pilgrims on our journey through this place of reverence – that we looked for stained-glass windows to open to allow in more light. But of course, there were no windows; it was a forest.

It was not so dark that we could not see. But we would wonder, “What troll or fairy or other mystical wisp might be just behind that great thick tree trunk twenty yards away?” And there were no mystical beings, just a mystical feeling in The Limberlost.

The Limberlost became a must do walk on future trips, and I continued the trips with my own wife and children. We found one of those hemlock trunks that we all hugged together, linking hands with each other forming a human measuring tape. It took five of us to reach all the way around. We looked for trolls.

In the late nineties, I had the opportunity to bring my mother, then ninety years old, back to The Limberlost. The trail had been improved to be a handicapped accessible trail. That meant that my mother could sit on one of the frequently spaced benches whenever she needed to rest. She claims that she sat on every bench. I just claim that my mother hiked The Limberlost Trail at ninety years young.

The mystical feeling was still there in The Limberlost, but something was different. We knew about the hemlock woolly adelgid, a tiny insect that was slowly killing hemlocks elsewhere, and we were worried about them coming here.

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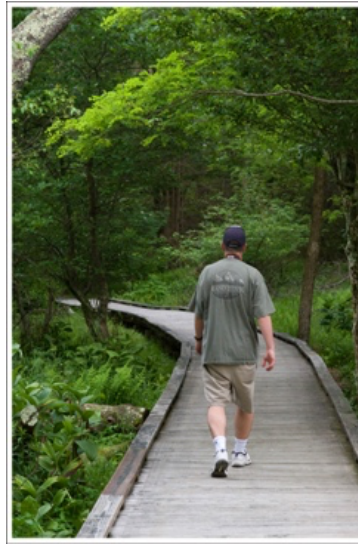
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MYSTICAL LIMBERLOST

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Now, six years later, the deed has been done. The hemlocks in The Limberlost have died. The trail became a potentially dangerous place. If a dead tree decided to fall and someone using the trail was handicapped, or ninety, or could not run fast enough, then disaster could happen. So, the Park Service did what they had to do if they wanted to keep The Limberlost Trail open. They reluctantly cut down the hemlocks that could fall now or fall later onto the trail.

I walked the Limberlost Trail today and the sky above it was visible. It was as if there never had been stained glass windows of a cathedral. Instead, the great pillars were down on the ground like the ruins of an ancient Greek temple. I found a cut off stump by the trail and counted the growth rings at two-hundred and ninety-six. This temple was indeed ancient.

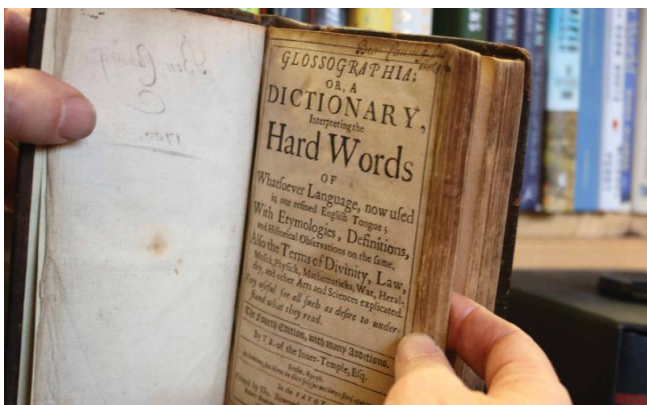


Nature means change, evolution, variation, erosion ... and new growth. There will be new plants establishing themselves in open spaces where they could not grow before. And someday, in another era, new hemlocks or trees like them will slowly claim The Limberlost to be their own and close out the sunlight to the less lofty plants below. The trolls and fairies and other mystical beings will return.

It will take centuries to happen, but it will again seem mystical to the people who venture into The Limberlost. ■

AN ESSAY ABOUT WHAT IS MINE

by Charles Robinson



I was caught off guard and thoroughly captured by the seagulls in Disney's "Finding Nemo." You remember. A pelican befriends Nemo's dad and attempts to keep

him away from the flock of hungry gulls, each one calling out "Mine! Mine! Mine!" in hilarious chorus. I still cannot help but chuckle at the scene and to find such a simple thing so very creative. Then, last year doing a Bible study with some folks here at Riderwood, our conversation turned to the idea of ownership versus stewardship of the earth by human beings. What is actually mine? Which in turn triggered an entire series of thoughts in my head about

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AN ESSAY ABOUT WHAT IS MINE

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the little word “*my*.” *My* is called a possessive adjective, because it modifies a noun showing ownership. All well and good. I can easily speak of *my* car, *my* house, or *my* phone. However, problem #1. Unless I want to go back to the dark ages, can I really speak of *my* wife? Or how about *my* children? Or *my* mother or father? Surely I do not now mean some kind of ownership? I could get tarred and feathered by all the women reading this!

And then there is Problem #2. How can I say an even bigger *my* as in *my* community, or *my* state, etc.? Even though in some political and or patriotic senses a person may indeed want to claim ownership and expect that the citizenry acknowledge his/her claim to do whatever they please with all that is theirs.

And then problem #3. What if I mention *my* shoulder? Or *my* heart? Or *my* any body part? Can the brain say to the rest of the body that it is the “owner” because without it none of the other body functions can, well, function? There would definitely be competition from the heart, without whose action of blood pumping, everything dies? Where is the ownership or the one in charge or the one to whom all others are subordinate?

My and *mine* has become for me not a simple definition of an adjective but a word that describes an existential principle. Instead of the basic “who am I” question of existence, I have been thinking about “what is actually *mine*” and what does it mean. Is anything really *mine*? I can fool myself into thinking this is so, but we all know that such claim of ownership of anything is extremely transitory and temporary at best. And in regard to other people, it is maybe true that we are more owned by and dependent upon others than the other way around.

There is a mutuality of “*mineness*” in our relationships with others. If I can re-interpret the words of Solomon from the Song of Songs, “I am my beloved’s and he is *mine*.” No matter how we understand a healthy relationship with others, there will always be a mutuality of giving and receiving. And really the same thing applies to *my* connection with the earth. It doesn’t belong to me; I belong to it. That concept, which I heard long ago from an original American in New Mexico, is a vital principle we all need to live by.

It would help if we people could hear these words from the earth: “You humans belong to me.” This is not some pantheistic religious notion, but an acknowledgment that, in this cosmic sense, *my* goes both ways. Any time I am paying attention and hear the little words *my* or *mine*,” I am reminded that they express a far deeper reality than a simple possessive adjective. But that is just *my* opinion. ■

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DARKNESS AND SILENCE

by Charles Robinson

**I am darkness.
Feared by all who enter my realm.
The unseen, the unknown,
Over which we have no control.**

Bring the light. Make it bright. Shine in all the corners of darkness

And still the darkness prevails.

Why would the creator, He who is “Light of Light,”
Leave us with darkness?

I AM SILENCE.
FEARED BY ALL WHO NEED TO KNOW,
LONGING, LISTENING,
STRAINING NOT TO BE ALONE.

Speak. Sing. Make noise. Let me hear.

BUT ALL REMAINS STILL.

Why would He who spoke all to be
Not speak to me?

Yet.....

In the darkness,
In the stillness,
With only my heartbeat and my breath for company,
There comes a presence,
Not of menace but of ceasing,
Of timeless life that spans eternity.

And in the darkness and in the silence I begin to “see” and “hear”
The beauty and the peace
Which links my soul with that
Which brightness and sound sometimes obscures.

Darkness and silence —
Like a womb, out of which a deeper reality emerges.
A new conception occurs,
And I am reduced to spirit —
And one with God. ■

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A CHEMICAL-PHYSICAL ENTITY

by Harvey Simsohn

I am a chemical-physical entity,
I am also me.
inside me, there are many other mes:

there is the heart disease me,
treated with a stent
for stability, you see.

next there's cancer me,
rituxan made me free
shrank the tumors ninety percent
it felt heaven-sent.



next there is bi-polar me,
ups and downs that shouldn't be
lithium plus more has made me free.

finally there is the kidney me,
my kidneys are weak and so i seek
through shots and pills and food
to elude what might come to be.

the me is still emerging,
creative juices are still surging.
the me that you have known,
is still me.
i'm still me. ■

BIPOLAR BARE

by Harvey Simsohn

I vacillate between up and down poles,
two separate souls,
half wholes.

down pole feels like being in a shrouded tear
packed full of fear,
where I'm directed neither far nor near,
nothing clear.

I yearn for hope,
but always get "nope".
a suicidal slide that fills my cup,
I keep tied up.

up pole is like a carnival of joy,
where all around me i deploy
my creativity and wit.
i feel alive and fit,
something grand
is always at hand.

oscillating between these poles takes its toll.
endless strife uses up a good part of my life.
■

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A COLD FEBRUARY DAY *by David Lassiter*

Get out, get out, get out
I tell myself everyday
To keep from going stir crazy
And escape that stagnant winter day.

Most of the time I do, when the weather allows
Though January and February rarely comply.
All I want to do is stay inside, be warm
But not today, though snow cloaks the ground and sky.

Grabbing my bag off to DC I go
To the monuments of which I'm so fond
To see what I can see that I haven't seen before
Around that beloved Tidal Basin pond

Traffic is light, the road unencumbered,
Pedestrians are scarce, barely numbered.
"What gives?"; I ask myself,
It's the middle of winter, idiot! All is slumbered

At an intersection near the Lincoln Memorial
A form appears, a face familiar.
One of the homeless men I've seen before
Who lives 'neath the overpass nearby.



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A COLD FEBRUARY DAY

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I should ask him his name, I think
Next time I will.
But now I offer him a sweater from my back seat
That's been waiting to find a needy human to keep warm and still.

Smiling, he says "thanks man", god bless you".
Got to admit not a lot of people tell me that.
Why is it the homeless, the less fortunate
Seem more grateful than those who have plenty?
Go figure

I park along the Potomac's banks.
Clothed warmly and geared up
I step from the car.
Everything is silent, almost.

A solitary sound drifts across the great, cold river.
Vaguely familiar, a muted boom.
There it is again and again,
I count six, seven and suddenly know
A cannon salute.
Across the water Arlington lies
A soldier has died.



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Tales from Riderwood

A COLD FEBRUARY DAY

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A now quiet soul is laid to rest,
Another proud veteran to be sure.
Perhaps a hero with a chest of medals
From courage and valor pure.

Gazing across to that somber hill
I nod and offer my thanks for the contribution given.
May you rest in peace on this great river's banks.
Your memory now is written

Turning, I walk toward my destination.
Snow here is mostly melted, the earth soggy.
The sun is high and bright, the breeze steady and light,
Trees bare, sturdy, silently waiting.

The thump, thump sound of approaching helicopters
Flying low over the river
Interrupts my brief reverie.
The background music of DC.

Time slows down, all is still
Around the Basin's circular path I walk
With its dreaming cherry trees
And echoing voices of great men's talk.

The sun shimmers on the tiny waves
The absence of man seems to make the place mine,
Except for a workman having his lunch on a bench
And feeding the seagulls.

Washington is such a beautiful city,
Paris on the Potomac they say.
People come from the world over to
see it and play
But today it belongs to me. ■



Tales from Riderwood

BULL'S EYE *by Jim Huitema*



I grew up no stranger to firearms. On the farm they were “just around,” like plows and tools. They were used mainly for hunting, pest control and, occasionally, ending the suffering of an injured or ill animal. The mainstays were shotguns and rifles, and Dad had one of each. He taught me how to use firearms safely, just as he had my older brothers, using his old, beat-up single-shot .22 rifle. I was soon shooting his old .22 so often that, in effect, it became my rifle.

In a few years I was into magazines like *Field & Stream* and *Rod & Gun*. I devoured their stories about big-game hunting. All those great hunters had scopes on their high-powered rifles. As intended, these stories made me yearn for more than I had. A high-powered rifle was out of the question for me, I knew, but how about a .22 with a scope? For the first time, I began earnestly to build up my savings.

The day finally arrived when I could buy the rifle and scope of my dreams. The scope had to be mounted on the rifle, so Mom and I took them to a gunsmith. He had a backlog, he said; it would be about a week.

After the longest week I had yet experienced, the call came: your rifle is ready. This time Dad was free to drive me over. Eager to get my hands on my rifle, I asked Dad to let me out as soon we entered the gunsmith’s parking lot, so that I could run in while he was parking the car.

The gunsmith was standing behind a counter on the right, and my rifle with its newly mounted scope lay on the counter before him. “Would you like to sight it in?” he asked, gesturing at a small table and chair along the back wall. “Sure,” I said, “that would be great.” He walked over and slid open a small wooden panel just above the table, uncovering a porthole-sized opening in the wall. Through the opening I could see a target twenty yards or so out. I took my position at the table. The gunsmith slipped a few cartridges into the magazine and handed me the rifle.

I eagerly chambered a cartridge, closed the bolt, and looked through the scope on my new rifle for the very first time. Wow, scope and rifle were a perfect match. The target ballooned under the scope’s

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BULL'S EYE

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magnification; and no longer did aiming require visual alignment of the target with the little blade-like projection on the end of the barrel and the v-shaped groove at the rear of the barrel. Just position the crosshairs on the target, hold steady, and squeeze slowly. Wow! How could I miss? No varmint would be safe anywhere on Willow Bend Farm. I steadied myself, carefully brought the crosshair over the bull's-eye, and began to squeeze the trigger, ever so slowly, for my very first shot.

* * * * *

My father entered the shop a few moments later. He was a keen observer, so he must have quickly taken in the scene: the gunsmith standing quietly behind the counter; the table, the opening in the rear wall, the target beyond, all clearly intended for use sighting in firearms; and the rifle lying on the table, bolt open, cartridge on the table, visual confirmation of what his ears already knew, that the rifle had not been fired. And surely he must have noticed his son slumped in the chair: how unsteadily he stood up and turned around, quiet and with eyes downcast, and how pale he was--all so different from when he had excitedly jumped from the car just minutes before. How much did my father infer? Did he suspect what his son had seen as he steadied his aim on the target's bulls-eye and slowly squeezed the trigger: a target that was suddenly eclipsed by a hazy and indistinct blue blob that spread

from right to left, rapidly filling the scope's entire field of vision, and then, just as quickly passing out of view on the left as the target reappeared in the crosshairs?

Shortly we left the shop, taking with us a new rifle that, strangely, had not been sighted in, had not been fired. My father had parked the car in a shady corner of the lot and had not seen me enter the gunsmith's shop. Given the location of the car, I could see where he might have taken a wrong turn and followed the narrow path behind the shop.

I have no recollection of ever talking with my father about what happened in the gunsmith's shop, strange as that may seem, but I have no doubt that he knew. There was a lesson there for me, and I learned it: a firearm can never be completely safe. Once the trigger releases the firing pin in a loaded gun, there is no 'undo' function that may be invoked to save one from the consequences that follow. Until I went off to college, I used that rifle often to keep in check the population of English sparrows, pigeons, starlings and rodents on our farm, but always with a heightened awareness of the risks that firearms bring. And beyond that, every so often, I think about how radically different life might have been if I had squeezed the trigger just a little faster, or if my father had walked just a little slower. ■

Tales from Riderwood

A FANTASY *by Jane Perkins*

It's January 20, 2026 at 2 PM.

This is the moment of the first covert political action to take place at RWV. Our rules prohibit overt political talk.

But there's no talk now, on this day. The Political Act is, simply, getting up from your class, your personal training session, your pool game, your exercise class, your swim, your art project, your late lunch, and WALKING OUT. For ten seconds if that is what you can manage. Or just step away in your mind. That's ok too.



Does not matter where you go, just walk out of the current THING in an act of silent resistance – an act of walking away from fascism, from authoritarianism, from the murder of and disappearing of our humans and history, the murder of citizens in other countries. We are saying no to the dark, dark motivations of some elected leaders.

Residents are invited to walk out and gather around Gazebo Pond, if you are inclined, and can do so.

No signs.

No hats.

No t-shirts.

No pamphlets.

No chants.

Just us in our winter coats and boots observing the brown trees, the brown grass and the brown geese on a gray January day.

We are amazed as our neighbors silently join each other as we circle the frigid water.

We meet each other's eyes. Friends converse. We all know, but we are obeying the rules set down in our community before such political and military mayhem has been exhibited by our country.

We obey.

We speak no politics.

We speak emotion.

We speak resistance.

We silently say: we've had enough of this.

We are the light on this day. ■

Tales from Riderwood

CONSCIOUSNESS

by Michael J Brennan



In the 1600's

Rene Decartes wrote about the Mind Body Problem

It was about human consciousness

Or what he called the human soul

Before that, Plato had a thought experiment about consciousness

In Plato's Cave, humans were born and lived their life in a dark cave

One day, one of them escaped the cave and ran into the daylight

They saw mountains and lakes and trees and predators, they were conscious

For a long time humans have wondered about consciousness

They have known that something exists besides the physical brain

That the brain neural circuits and human receptors like vision are needed

But something else is necessary for complete perception

This has been called the hard problem

Scientists are trying to define consciousness, what is the cause of awareness

Although the brain is necessary

What else has evolved in the human so that we can experience consciousness?

And is it only in humans or is it found in other living creatures

Did it evolve to help us sense predators or to help us survive better during child-bearing age

It is like the old saying, does a tree make a crash in the forest if there is no human there to hear it?

Some scientists believe that to see the full spectrum of color we need consciousness

Others, that if we look away from a particular object it no longer is there

Still others that consciousness helps us act like a computer

Perhaps the most intriguing concept about consciousness is that

Humans do not recognize themselves in a mirror until they are about 24 months old, suggesting that they first have to learn how to perceive. ■

Tales from Riderwood

SPROUTS

by Michael Jordan

SHOP HEALTHY MEALS, NO PREP REQUIRED!



After moving to Maryland several years ago, we discovered a grocery store new to us. We enjoy shopping at Sprouts where fresh, organic fruits and vegetables and favorable prices on the store brand make grocery shopping less of a chore. We even have a modest claim on a family connection to the company since my daughter was once seated next to a Sprouts regional manager on an airplane where they discussed her Sprouts shopping experiences in Arizona.

This past week, we once again toured the store, checking items off our lists and indulging in a few nonessential selections. As we lined up to check out, I noticed the checker and the packer in our aisle. Each young man appeared to be extremely handsome. Since I only enter the outside world about once every 10 days, I enjoy observing younger humans. The two clerks were engaged in a heated discussion about places where they would like to travel or possibly relocate. As they talked, I observed their fresh, unlined faces and their energetic, if somewhat naive, concept of the virtues of living somewhere else. (I have lived in many locations in the US including D.C., Michigan, Texas, Colorado, Maine, Washington State and, finally, Maryland.)

Inwardly, I enjoyed the youthful vigor of their exchange and, again, admired those handsome, youthful faces.

Then I noticed that every other word of their lengthy exchange was the word “like.” Most comments were expressed in brief phrases with emphasis on nouns and verbs without connecting words or punctuation. Having been a high school English teacher, I found this unacceptable. Their progress through our groceries waiting patiently on the conveyer belt to be priced with a beep was remarkably slow, at least partially due to the grand gestures of the checker as he expressed his dreams of travel to exotic places like the mountains in Colorado. (I had lived in the foothills outside of Denver for 10 years.) The Packer occasionally placed a can or box into one of our bags between adjusting his hairstyle. Finally, the grand total of our purchases was revealed, card inserted and goodbyes pronounced. The young men were very gracious in thanking us for shopping at Sprouts. As I glanced back to participate in the leave-taking, I couldn’t help noticing that the checker’s pants were precariously

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SPROUTS

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positioned in back below his buttocks. They were the most daringly hung outer garment I have ever observed. I forbade my eyes to wander around to the front of his pants fearful of what might be on display.

If any readers are, at this point, angrily thinking that I am indulging in gender discrimination and that I think only young men dress daringly, I can briefly share a summary of experiences from my professional life. I was a school principal and frequently had to respond to young men and women who pushed the bounds of public decency. I have had more than my share of calling defensive parents who greet my explanation of the outfit their daughter has worn to school with, "But she didn't look like that when I dropped her off this morning." More than one competent and experienced male teacher landed in my

office commenting on the challenges of teaching when young women sit down in his classroom and plop their nearly bare breasts on the table.

So, as I pushed the cart out of the Sprouts store this week where everything is fresh just as in a farmers' market, I pondered the pleasures of living in a senior community with my age peers. My neighbors converse in complete sentences with appropriately limited use of the word, "like." Their faces are marked with the mottled skin and wrinkles of decades of living. The ravages of age compel us to cover ourselves with attractive and comfortable clothing. And the men understand the virtue of a waistband positioned near their waist. We are not as fresh, but we are refined. ■

EVERYBODY IS SOMEBODY

by Jim David

My wife and I live in an amazing retirement village. It is amazing for many reasons. For one, it is the largest Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) in the U.S. For another the grounds are immaculately manicured. Also, most importantly, the management and staff work collaboratively and respectfully with the 2400 residents in independent living.

But the most pivotal issue is the quality of the people who decide to retire here. Located in the Washington D.C. area, many residents come from academia, federal jobs, the military, the law, and science. Even though many residents are high achievers, they are mostly unassuming and unpretentious.

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EVERYBODY IS SOMEBODY

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Some examples of resident achievement are a three-star Navy admiral, the deputy commander of the National Security Agency (NSA), and a lawyer litigating court cases for the Department of Agriculture for 35 years. A friend told me that he recently attended a meeting where 13 of the 14 in attendance were Ph.D.'s.

Everybody

There are three levels to “Everybody is Somebody.” The first level we have already addressed to some degree. We, as a societal value, tend to respect high achievers; particularly so when they acknowledge that they were fortunate in integrating their inherent gifts with diligent self-discipline and help from others.

The second level is the most important level. This embodies treating every person with dignity and respect. In our retirement village with 1300 employees from countless other countries, we have ample opportunities to practice treating others as we would like to be treated. From high school students who serve us our meals to those who pick up our trash, repair our air conditioning, and meet our every need, we practice Diversity, Equity, and Inclusiveness (DEI).

A Third Level

Irving Polster (1922-2024), a pioneering Gestalt Psychotherapist, wrote, *Every*

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EVERYBODY IS SOMEBODY

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Person's Life is Worth a Novel. He believed that every person is uniquely interesting and important. He guided his patients in discovering hidden meaning in their lives, enriching their self-valuing in surfacing themes, patterns and significances. He combined the skills and creativity of a novelist with the human understanding of a psychologist. I like to say that every person's life is a novel.

Fresh Eyes

Marcel Proust, the French philosopher and novelist said, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes." But how do we develop new eyes or fresh eyes? And how do we know if the lenses we now have are healthy or toxic?

Healthy Eyes

Acquiring healthy eyes takes time and intentional grooming. But, interestingly, acquiring healthy eyes effortlessly arrives as a byproduct of staying centered, staying connected to the center of your being. Intrinsic to this connectedness is experiencing yourself as totally okay just as you are. So, your total okayness is being rooted in your essential goodness where you are pure love. This may sound like an unattainable fairy tale, and it is only in achieving it does it become completely believable.

Healthy eyes are fresh eyes where we see with the eyes of love. We see joy and probably excitement in each item we focus on. The sky, trees, plants, people, animals,

insects. Everything brings joy. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the legendary Jesuit priest paleontologist famously said, "The surest sign of the presence of God is joy."

Joy arrives as the love within sparks acceptance of all people. Total self-acceptance and being at peace with everyone and everything are the operational platforms to begin living in love and acceptance.

Toxic Eyes

Toxic eyes live in blame. Scapegoating is so rewarding because in blaming, ridiculing and judging others as impaired in some way, we, the scapegoaters automatically become elevated to a higher, loftier, plane of perfection. People love to hate because it is so uplifting, i.e. "I am fine, but the other is so despicable in every way."

New Eyes

New eyes arrive in monitoring ourselves to live in acceptance of ourselves and all others. This requires intense self-awareness, self-discipline, and self-responsibility. We know we are on the healthy eye path as we live in the warmth and security of acceptance, overcoming our tendency to judge others negatively. ■



MY MYSTERIOUS GRANDMOTHER

by Ed Vilade

As I came to awareness, I accepted my circumstances without question, as children will. I lived where I lived, my father was my father, my mother my mother, and my siblings who they were. That was just the way things were.

My grandparents were my grandparents, and that was all they were. My grandfather was a lively, humorous presence, telling me jokes and stories and playing games with me...until a stroke when I was seven years old robbed him of vitality, mobility and articulate speech. I still spent a lot of time with him, straining to understand his words, but it was never the same.

I loved to spend time at my grandparents' house — impossibly spacious compared to the tiny Veterans' housing pre-fab I shared with my parents and three siblings. I visited and stayed over at every possible opportunity, much more than my brothers and sister. I was the oldest, and best able to help out with yard work and chores after my grandfather fell ill. My grandmother ran the household — shopped, cooked, supervised housecleaning and chores, and handled the finances.

I was oblivious to all that. She was simply my grandmother — as grandmotherly as any on television. She was a tall, slender woman, with an erect carriage, iron-gray hair and wearing what the '60s generation would come to call granny glasses. She wore flower-printed granny dresses;

thick, opaque stockings and boxy-toed lace-up shoes.

All I needed to know of her as a small child was that she loved me unconditionally and spoiled me to the best of her ability.

My grandfather told me fascinating tales about his family — he had been born on a farm in Paterson, New Jersey — a wonder to me since even in my childhood, Paterson was a crumbling industrial town. His grandfather had come to the U.S from France, and on his grandmother's side the Dutch and English lineage traced back to New Amsterdam and nearly to the Mayflower.

Of my grandmother's heritage, I knew nothing. She never mentioned it. She insisted that we attend Episcopal services at an impressive stone edifice called Trinity Church. As far as I could tell, the service in English was identical to the Catholic masses my Irish mother snuck me to, with the tacit understanding that I would not mention it to my grandmother.

My grandmother did not speak of politics, but once when I was eight years old she took me to a local Republican fundraiser where Sen. Clifford Case, a very respected figure, spoke to her deferentially and shook my hand.

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MY MYSTERIOUS GRANDMOTHER

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On several occasions, my grandparents were visited by a jovial, portly gentleman in a vested suit with a thick, gold watch chain. He smoked big cigars and actually wore a derby hat. He was introduced as my great-uncle Charlie Rooney from Jersey City, but his relationship to my grandparents was never clarified.

I never asked, but I wish I had. And I never asked why, when my father drove us to my grandparents' for Thanksgiving, or to Christmas dinner, my mother always had something else to do.

My grandfather died when I was 17, and my grandmother four years later, while I was in college. Helping to clean out the house after her death, I began to get some answers. Among her papers was a birth certificate, listing her birthplace as Mott Street, New York City. Her parents were James and Anne Ryan. He was listed as a printer, she as a housewife. Anne Ryan's maiden name was Rooney. They were each 21 years old. There was the Rooney connection.

Questioning my father, I learned what he knew. My grandmother had been orphaned as an infant when her parents died in an influenza epidemic. He also knew that she had an elder brother who had drowned at age 14. Both had been raised in the Rooney household.

My father also knew that his great-grandfather, also James Ryan, had come over from Ireland in about 1848, and had

been an educated man -- a professor of Latin at Dublin University.

Her papers contained none of that family history, but did contain a photograph I had never seen -- of my grandmother as a young woman. Strong face, clear eye, and although it was in black-and-white, a mass of what was clearly flaming red hair piled on top of her head.

Following up on the Rooneys, I found that Uncle Charlie was a political power in Jersey City -- corporation counsel to the storied Boss Hague.

I also found that my grandfather's lineage earned the family invitations to join the Social Register, which were accepted at my grandmother's instigation. Many years later, a woman named Rice called me out of the blue to invite my wife and me to dinner. She was an old friend of my father and recounted at some detail his pre-war exploits — and of the society ladies with whom my grandmother tried to match him. Naturally, she said, my grandmother was most unhappy when he came home from the war with an unpedigreed Irish-Catholic wife and a small child.

This partly explained why two strong-willed Irish redheads could never stand to be in the same room together. But many more questions remain about the journey of my mysterious grandmother from orphaned Irish girl to Protestant Republican clubwoman. I wish I had asked. ■

Tales from Riderwood

OH, DANNY BOY *by Ed Vilade*

Ireland in 1976 still contained areas that hadn't changed much since the Potato Famine.

Our party of nine American tourists found ourselves in such a timeless place one fine Irish day.

One of our number traced his roots to a little town in north County Cork called Ballyhooly. The population, 475 in 2016, was even smaller 40 years earlier, and it was reachable only by rudimentary roads better suited for donkey carts than our modern bus.

We found our comrade's ancestors in the local churchyard and then looked for a place to have lunch. The town center consisted of a petrol station, a post office — and two pubs. We chose a thatch-roofed establishment called “The Roundy House.” It was, indeed, round. The proprietress, a sign announced, was Mrs. O'Connor.

Mrs. O'Connor, an Irishwoman of a certain age and girth, greeted this bumptious group with surprise as we burst through her door. A couple of local day-drinkers shared her astonishment

“Shure, I haven't seen a Yank since 1926,” she exclaimed.

We called for pints and pub grub, which she graciously delivered.

Our friend with local roots had heard of an old Irish temperance song called “The Ballyhooly Blue Ribbon Army.” Did she know it?

Mrs. O'Connor fixed us with a suspicious stare. She wasn't going to let a bunch of smartass Yanks have her on.

“I know the song,” she said. “Oi'll sing it if one of yez will sing one first.”

Smartass me piped up, “I'll sing Danny Boy.”

She brightened “Ah, shure, that's me favorite American song.”

As I started to sing, the tableau was completed. A huge man with a bushy black beard put down his pool cue, doffed his conical deerskin hat and placed it over his heart. The few other locals paid similar attention.

I sang, then she favored us with the local song, and we all settled in for a grand afternoon, happy that the bus driver knew the way back to our hotel. ■



PERMEABLE NOW
by Sandra Myles

I am becoming strangely porous,
apertures regulating the flow of information
have relaxed letting thoughts slip through
like molecules through a worn-out membrane.

Alone in an empty room I hear sounds
of conversation and laughter
or is it the chatter of helicopter blades?
Landscapes of stark beauty appear to me unbidden.

Fragile, translucent skin covers my hands,
hands that once soothed fevered brows,
soaped little bodies slippery as fish,
hands that ruffled hair and patted shoulders
now tremble and ache, clutching each other for comfort.

The tissue separating today from tomorrow is permeable now,
a drop of moisture, a speck of eternity,
slides back and forth from one side to the other
and hesitates in front of me,
fluorescing like a firefly,
inviting me along.



Tales from Riderwood

SEVEN HAIKU *by Allen Minton*

Haiku creation
is like solving a puzzle,
a Cracker Jack prize.

Random thoughts at night,
rattling around my brain
While I wait for sleep.

Reading newspapers
Not good for my health these days...
Raises blood pressure

Outside by the pond,
sitting in the gazebo.
No geese here today.

Structure of a tree:
leaves, twigs, branches, trunk and roots.
Evolution's gift.

Bought some spicy snacks.
I like those wasabi peas
and chili peanuts.

My mortality ...
how much more life have I left?
What to do with it? ■

SOLTAIRE SEASON

by Lane Jennings

There was once a time before McDonalds, when the guy who ran a sit-down diner somewhere out on Sheridan Road just north of Evanston, sent forth the shakes and fries and burgers from his kitchen packed in model railway cars pulled by a B&O Line engine on a curving track he'd laid along his entire counter and I guess controlled from a switch installed beside the register—though how he could have known from there which customer had ordered what or when the next express delivery was ready to be shipped. I've no idea.

Did he wear an engineer's cap? I know I would have, but I don't remember. Were the shakes and burgers any good? I thought so. Maybe there were onion rings as well—my favorite of favorites. I remember pleading with my parents to stop in the place at the end of a Sunday drive, maybe not to eat if it was too expensive, but to know that it was still there and would be waiting for us sometime special when we could afford it.

My folks weren't poor exactly, just getting started with not much to spare. We lived in married student housing on the campus while my father worked as a research assistant by day and attended classes for his PhD at night, while my mother worked in a local hospital as a night nurse. I was alone a lot but didn't mind because there was a public library next door and I felt I could spend forever there. I feel that way still.

Our only living relatives (all of them my mother's people) were back east in and around Philadelphia, so that was where we'd visit every summer (my dad got a whole month off). I grew up as the only child of two only children, so solitude never felt awkward to me. I attended public school, must have had classmates, friends, but no names remain.

I got my fun watching things, making up stories, imagining I had the lead role in a movie with everyone else I the world as my supporting cast. There were no rehearsals, things just happened. Especially in winter, when the world went snowy and not much was going on outside. The whole of existence seemed to consist then of me and my books and my thoughts and the coziness of quiet.

I wish each and all of you just such a cozy season, and somewhere to admire and look forward to being. ■



THE UNIVERSE
by Mike Brennan



When I was young, the universe was four blocks west to the gym
Five blocks east to the beach on the Hudson River
And nine blocks north to the school I went to until I was seventeen.

I was taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph
All I knew of the universe came from Genesis in the Old Testament
Which I now believe was a Story

Then I became a Scientist
And learned the scientific story of the Big Bang
Which was first noticed by the background of cosmic energy
In the late 1960s, a satellite called COBRA found proof for the Big Bang theory.

It all started as a tiny field of intense heat no bigger than an atom

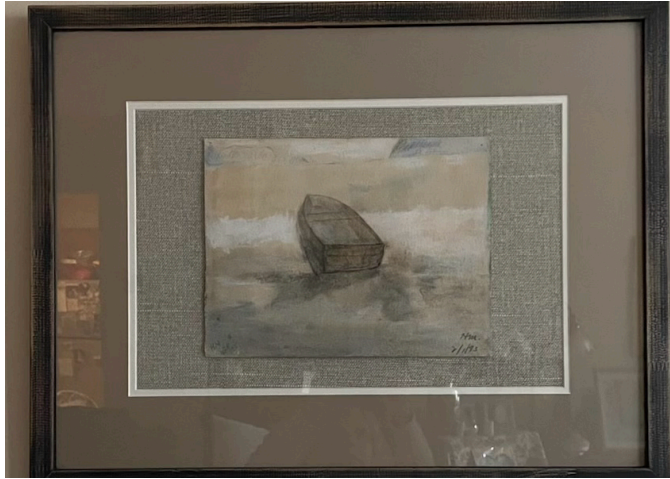
As it cooled, it grew larger
It added an electron to other elements by around 350,000 years
And then galaxies, stars and planets formed over billions of years

The universe is thought to be over 13 billion years old
And it is expanding at a fantastic rate
It is full of many galaxies in addition to the Milky Way
Although life may exist on other planets, so far life has been found only on Earth
Many, many years from now the universe will likely contract
Until there is nothing in the universe
The future is a mystery
Will God still exist? ■

Tales from Riderwood

HERB

by Mike Brennan



I met Herb when he was in his nineties
Tall and thin, he could not see well
He had been a doorman in New York City
And lived there most of his life

He was, lets say, rough around the edges
He liked to swear and talk about his early life
He was addicted to chocolate peanut butter cups

When young he hung out with young toughs
They got in trouble and liked to drink
But Herb changed his life
He had a lot of stories

But there was a more interesting side to Herb
He was talented and he liked to paint
He liked to sing
He told jokes

Herb had an old somewhat dilapidated chair on his front porch
He liked to lounge in it and watch the neighbors
He had many opinions about the world
And the characters in it

Herb died last week
He had a lot of friends
Many showed up to remember him
And tell good stories about Herb ■

Writers Guild

The Writers Guild provides aspiring Riderwood writers a variety of opportunities to expand their writing skills through mutual aid and the promotion of activities of common interest. The group meets every fourth Monday from 3-4 PM in the Montgomery Station classroom. All are welcome.

Readings by Resident Writers & Discussion

The Writers Guild sponsors *Tales from Riderwood*, available at Front Desks.

Hundreds of residents have chronicled in this publication the triumphs, challenges, influences, people and events that have shaped their personal and professional lives and experiences. For nearly 20 years their tales have entertained and inspired readers.

Personal Experience Stories, Memoirs, Biographical Sketches, Essays, Short Fiction, Original Poetry, Photos and Art

Length of Submissions: 850 words max for prose, 200 words for poetry

Send submissions (preferably as a WORD document) via email to:
Charles (Ed) Vilade at evilade@icloud.com

The Editorial Board reserves the right to accept, edit, or reject all submissions.

