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Tales from Riderwood

Stories by and for Riderwood Residents
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ARE WE NOT ALL IMMIGRANTS?

by David Lassiter

We move when disaster is at our heels and when opportunity lies within reach. We move when survival outweighs attachment to a fading past, when feeding our families matters more than holding on to what can no longer sustain us. We move toward the promise of a better fit for our deepest aspirations—or, in moments of desperation, because we have no other choice. We move because, in the simplest terms, life is preferable to its absence.

We move—almost all of us. If not in our own lifetimes, then in the journeys of those who came before us. Few can claim to be native to the exact place they now inhabit, perhaps excepting those who remain near humanity's earliest origins in Africa's Rift Valley—and even there, history stretches beyond memory into archaeology.



And still, we move. In ever greater numbers, people seek safety, dignity, and the possibility of a better life, leaving behind places marked by fear, hardship, and loss. Who among us would not do the same?

Yet in these new places, newcomers are often met not with welcome, but with suspicion or fear. And still, there are those who remember their own stories—who recognize in these travelers the echoes of their ancestors—and offer compassion instead of rejection.

Who among us is not, in some way, a migrant? Who does not have a parent, a grandparent, or distant ancestor who crossed borders—by choice or by necessity—to arrive where we now stand? And who, having made such a journey, would not hope for a kind word, an outstretched hand, a drink of water, a meal, a job to support themselves?

This is not an abstract reflection for me. My own grandparents came from Italy in the late nineteenth century, speaking no English but carrying determination, courage, and hope for a better life. I sit here today as a beneficiary of their resilience — their willingness to leave the familiar behind and begin again in an unfamiliar land.

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ARE WE NOT ALL IMMIGRANTS? *continued from page 1*

We are not perfect, but we are, at our core, a nation shaped by such journeys. A nation of immigrants. How, then, can we strive to remain true to that legacy—to extend hope, opportunity, and welcome to others?

On a recent visit to Sicily, I traveled to the fishing village of Porto Palo, a landing point for migrants crossing the Mediterranean from North Africa. I met survivors whose stories mirror countless others across time and geography. Two men from sub-Saharan Africa shared with me their journeys—one fleeing for his life, the other seeking work to support his family. Nearby lay the remains of boats like the one that carried them. Not all who began that journey with them survived.

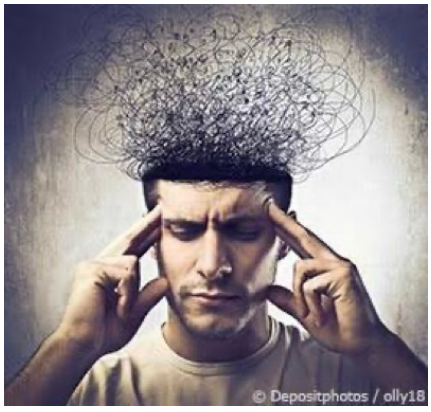
Migration, driven by war, famine, repression, and the simple human desire for a better life, is as old as humanity itself. It is enduring. It is inevitable.

In this day and age, can we not find a more humane and thoughtful way to understand and manage this?

I believe we can. And I remain hopeful that we will. ■

CONFUSION

by Michael J. Brennan



I woke this morning early
I woke up confused
Not knowing where I was
Not knowing what to do

Did I need to be somewhere?
Where was I going?
Was I late?
Or was I too early?

My life seems to be full of confusion
Is this what it is like to get old—
To forget where you are
To forget where you are going?

Where do the geese go when the pond is frozen?
Where do the bees go when the fields are filled with snow?
Where do I go when no one is watching? ■

IN PURSUIT OF JUSTICE

by Bonnie Friedman

"All right, sweetie. You're under arrest." The cop barked his not-so-sweet message in my ear as he grabbed my arms behind my back and pushed me into the crowd. Tears streamed down my face as I snapped into a state of fearful disbelief. How could this be happening, I wondered, here in the United States where we are supposed to be free to express our opinions and engage in protests under the protective umbrella of the First Amendment.

I was a student at American University in Washington, D.C., in 1970, when we learned that the U.S. had invaded Cambodia. We had no cell phones or internet to keep up with the news. Sitting on the quad in the center of campus on a beautiful spring day, we heard on our transistor radios that President Richard Nixon—already the subject of our contempt—had ordered troops into the peaceful country of Cambodia, alleging the nation was aiding the North Vietnamese. Tensions ran high as we surged toward the intersection of Massachusetts and Nebraska Avenues.

As students, we had been actively protesting the Vietnam War on the streets of our Nation's Capital for several years. This protest brought us to the grassy grounds of Ward Circle on the edge of our own campus. The gathering was spontaneous, sparked by horror over the invasion and the killing of four Kent State students by the Ohio National Guard just two days before. We had no permit to protest or block traffic; we were armed only with our anger and youthful certitude.

The D.C. police, of course, didn't see it that way. Their Civil Defense Unit, decked out in baby blue jodhpurs and knee-high, black leather boots, was ready to use whatever force they could to quell our rush-hour protest. I didn't count heads but later learned there were about 1,000 of us in and around the circle and on the slopes of the A.U. campus. Some students were throwing eggs and flowers; others, I later learned, were throwing rocks. Rumors had it they were outside agitators. I was throwing nothing more than chants to stop the war, but the police were enraged, and I was in the wrong place at the wrong time.



Bonnie Friedman's arrest at Ward Circle, Washington, D.C., 1970

IN PURSUIT OF JUSTICE *continued*

The cop who arrested me would not state the charge when I asked. He also refused to read me my Miranda rights. And he even turned his badge around so I couldn't see his identifying numbers.

A small group of us—just eight kids who were arrested—were herded into a paddy wagon and taken a few miles to the Tenleytown police station. I was the only girl in the wagon. The ride was bumpy, and we were jostled about with no seatbelts or even hand rails to steady our bodies or jangled nerves. At the police station, the guys were crowded into a small cell. I was put in a separate room with a police matron to guard over me—as if I were about to commit some act of violence there. Through the open door I witnessed a fellow student being beaten bloody by cops who outweighed him in size and numbers. His cries of pain were met with only more beating. I kept asking myself if this was really happening in America.

The hours in the police station were a blur of fear, boredom, and outrage. At one point the police matron guarding me asked where I got the poncho I was wearing. Maybe she was just trying to be nice. Or maybe she was bored too. I told her I had made it, and she asked questions about how I had done that. Under the circumstances, the exchange seemed ludicrous then, and it still does now.

Finally, we were bailed out by the student union. I had been charged with two offenses: obstructing traffic and breaking police lines. The fine, as I recall, was set at $40 for the two charges combined. I guess that was a bargain.

Back on campus, we found the air thick with tear gas which we learned the police had sprayed for hours. It was still impossible to see or breathe without the burning, choking sensations that lingered. Our campus appeared under siege; our sense of freedom seemed shattered; and our belief in the justice system felt betrayed.

Months later I learned that the American Civil Liberties Union had taken the case of students who were arrested at Ward Circle. They won, and our records were to be expunged. The problem was that D.C. at that time had no expungement provision on the books. So we were told our records were locked up somewhere—perhaps where the Raiders found the Lost Ark—and the key would figuratively be tossed away.

Justice in some way had been served. I moved on with my life, less innocent, less naïve, less idealistic, but still certain our cause had been just. The Vietnam War was illegal and immoral. Millions of lives on both sides had been lost for no reason. Four students were murdered at Kent State University for doing the same thing my fellow students and I did just two days later on the grassy grounds of Ward Circle in Washington, D.C., on a beautiful spring day. ■

NEW MEXICO'S CAPTIVATING HOODOOS

by Bonnie Friedman



Excitement mounted as my husband and I drove along a narrow, unpaved road leading to Kasha-Katuwe National Monument. I felt like a little kid, giddy with anticipation. I couldn't wait to see New Mexico's fabled hoodoos—often called tent rocks—and to climb the steep canyon trail with its spectacular views.

Kashe-Katuwe is nicknamed Tent Rocks because of its cone-shaped rock formations caused by volcanic eruptions millions of years ago and the erosion that followed. This remarkable gift of nature offers breathtaking views for those who climb the steep, slot canyon with its magnificent vistas of the Sangre de Cristo, Jemez, and Sandia mountains along with the yawning Rio Grande Valley below.

I set off with a camera, water bottle, and sense of adventure I hadn't felt in decades. My hopes were high as I began the easy ascent at the start of the trail. The tight slot canyon passes meant I had to slither sideways occasionally to squeeze through a narrow passage. The canyon walls were worth it. The striated rock formation in alternating streaks of white, beige, pink, and gray offered a kaleidoscope of changing patterns and light, depending on the position of the sun or even the tilt of your eyes.

Up and up I slowly progressed, awe-struck by the beauty of the canyon and the exhilaration of making my first solo hike. My camera clicked away, capturing as many angles and views as possible. The hike itself was not very steep to start, and I rationed my water to make sure it would last to the top of the climb. Occasionally I paused at signs warning of flooding during rainstorms. But it was a glorious day, and I didn't stop long to worry about cloudbursts.

As I neared the top where the climb grew steeper, I concentrated on my footing. At last, I reached the plateau where the panoramic views of the mountains all around me and the valley below captivated both my

NEW MEXICO'S CAPTIVATING HOODOOS *continued*

senses and imagination. The majestic sight of the other-worldly hoodoos took my breath away. Some were shorter than I; others rose nearly a hundred feet into the sky. Together, they looked like an ancient community of carnival tents, patiently waiting on the side of the mountains for the show to begin.

The hoodoos were captivating. Yet I couldn't help but wonder if there would be an even better view if I climbed just a little higher. I saw what appeared to be an opening and finished my last drop of water, feeling sure the hardest part of the hike was behind me. Working my way up to another level, I stared in expanded wonder at the overwhelming beauty all around me.

At last, it was time to go. I searched for the path down to the plateau and could not find it. I was determined to remain patient, knowing it had to be there. But no matter how hard I looked, I could not find the trail-head. "Stay calm," I told myself repeatedly; "Don't worry. It has to be here somewhere."

As my anxiety built, the overhead sun felt hotter. I had no hat on my head and no water left in my bottle. I called out for help, hoping someone would hear me. Most of all, I tried not to panic. Would my husband realize I was gone too long and send help? Would someone see me and show a way out? Would I die on top of the mountain due to dehydration and sheer stupidity? I began yelling frantically for someone—anyone—to help me.

Finally, down in the distance, I saw two women on the rocks. I called to them as loudly as I could. Eventually they heard me.

"How did you get all the way up there?" they answered. "I don't know," I hollered back, "but I can't find the way down."

They guided me to a small opening in the rocks and said they would wait while I descended. Could this little passageway have been the same one I had confidently strode just a short time ago? When I got to the plateau, I looked down. The women were still waiting. They called for me to be careful but not be too slow as soon the park would be closing. I continued on the trail until I reached them, nearly collapsing with relief. They greeted me with a hug and some much-needed water.

Then they asked, "Didn't you see the sign that said to stop and not to go beyond that point?" I had to admit I hadn't seen it.

Together we made our way to the bottom. The long shadows in the canyon changed the views, but I was not taking more pictures. At the base, I thanked the women profusely, and we said our goodbyes. Then I set off to find my husband. What a story I had to tell him!

Looking back, I know there are important lessons to be learned from this experience. But what I recall most vividly is the exhilaration of the glorious canyon, the sense of empowerment of my first solo climb, and the glorious beauty of the Kasha-Katuwe National Monument. ■

DAUGHTER OF THE WIND

by Jenny Graham



I saw her at a friend's ranch in Montana. The speed that drove her effortless stride caught my eye. She was Thoroughbred to the bone and breathtaking to watch.

After a weekend of branding and moving the cattle to their summer range, I went home and the mare came with me. Her registered name was Silky Flicka, but she was called Spunke, and that described her nature.

Spunke loved small critters. She hung around the goat pen and watched the baby goats. I had a wild piglet that followed her everywhere. When the piglet tired, he jumped up, grabbed a mouthful of the mare's tail, and hung there. The mare, unruffled by the little hitchhiker, transported him around the pasture. One day I noticed Spunke standing with her head hung so low her nose nearly touched the ground. I rushed over to investigate and discovered an escaped bantam chick sound asleep against Spunke's front hoof. The size difference between a 1200-pound horse and a 1-ounce chick is impressive, and I thought it remarkable the mare hadn't stepped on the bird while guarding it.

Horses are prey animals, so they are vigilant and may be afraid of unfamiliar objects or sounds. Sometimes the threats are imaginary and sometimes they're real. Manhole covers terrified Spunke. One day she spotted a discarded hot water heater. She became very nervous, dancing around and snorting. I managed to get her close enough so she could see it wasn't going to get her, and she punched the water heater with her nose. When her nose hit the rotted tank, it gave off a high-pitched squeak. She jumped sideways, lost her balance, and fell over. I was able to step off and avoid being crushed. While riding through a cornfield on the farm behind my house, Spunke became agitated and uncontrollable. I dismounted and led the mare home. Later, I learned the park service captured a bear there, eating the corn to fatten for winter.

Firecrackers were a challenge for Spunke. After a July 4th afternoon ride, just as we reached the barn door, a series of loud pops startled both of us. Spunke's reaction was instantaneous. Mine was slower. The mare swung her head around and the blow caught me full force in the head. When I woke, I saw Spunke trembling, but watching over me, her muzzle resting on my chest.

DAUGHTER OF THE WIND *continued*

High strung, unpredictable, even unmanageable at times, Spunke knew inexperienced riders needed her to be calm, and she behaved accordingly. With me, she challenged and improved my riding ability. If I slouched in the saddle, or failed to maintain perfect balance, she corrected me by biting the tip of my riding boot.

When Spunke was 30 years old, she had an episode of colic and treatment was unsuccessful. Her condition deteriorated and the vet came to euthanize her. Dr. Brown waited outside the stall door for us. I hesitated. The thermometer read below zero and the stall seemed safe from the bitter cold outside. I stripped the blanket off the mare's back and led her outside. Her eyes were bright with pain.

Dr. Brown adjusted her headlamp, and she inserted the needle into Spunke's jugular vein. Sweat beaded on the mare's body and froze. Spunke shimmered under the full moon. A crystalline horse. She stood still, but she trembled; then she raised her head high.

Dr. Brown injected a portion of the euthanasia solution. There was a gentle, almost imperceptible swaying. Then Spunke was falling. I was unprepared for the sound of her head striking the ground. Sharp and explosive, like the crack of a rifle shot.

I stood, immobilized, looking down at the mare. The vet said, "She's unconscious. You can go to her now."

I held Spunke's head in my lap and whispered, "Go to sleep."

Dr. Brown injected the lethal dose of anesthesia. Spunke's breathing slowed and each breath released with a loud *whoosh*. The sound of a giant bellows. I thought she would never stop breathing. The mare's lungs labored to keep functioning, then failed. Dr. Brown listened with her stethoscope for the heart to stop. She lifted her head and said, "She's gone."

I covered Spunke's lifeless form with her blanket. My friend. My constant companion for more than a third of my lifetime. A cloudbank drifted across the moon's face and shadow covered the mare in darkness. I left her then, feeling only detached numbness. But I heard in my mind, over and again, the horrific sound of my beloved mare crashing against the ground.

The next morning, I buried Spunke with her head facing the Rocky Mountains. She spent time each day gazing at those mountains. I often wondered, what held her gaze for so long? Perhaps it wasn't what she saw. Maybe she felt the feeling given off by the mountains. The untamed spirit. Spunke was so wild. That's what I loved about her the most. ■

THE DOGS IN HEAVEN

by Margaret Holley

All the dogs in Heaven decided to go on a vacation at the same time. They thought about going to Hell, just to see what it was like, but Saint Francis talked them out of it.

"Once you get there," he said, "it might be hard to find your way back. You'll feel sorry for the poor humans who are stuck there, and you will want to comfort them, but that is beyond our ability. At this point, all we can do is pray and ask God to have mercy on their souls."

"OK, then, but where will we go?" asked Tenico.

"Well, we could go back to Earth and visit Margy again," said River Dog.

"Or, we could take Bill with us and go visit Bill's and Margy's sister, Jenny," said Luby, who had been one of Jenny's dogs.

"I know! We could go back to the future and ahead to the past!" a little poodle thought out loud.

"Haven't you got that backwards?" River Dog asked.

"Probably. Time has always been a big mystery to me."

"Why don't we just start out on a big adventure?" asked a spaced-out but happy-looking golden retriever. "First we'll go to one universe, then another, to see where we'll end up."

"Is that all right with you, Francis?" River Dog asked.



"OK, but make sure you get back before the autumnal equinox, so we can get the fall season going here in the heavenly realm."

The dogs found their traveling leashes and used them to stay connected to each other as they began their trip through the Milky Way. They passed the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper and waved their paws at Pegasus.

"This is really good exercise," commented Te Amo. "Much better than running around in the small yard I had when I lived on Earth."

The dogs decided to stop at a place that looked like a lake, so they could go swimming, but as they got closer, they felt themselves being pulled into a dark, circular tunnel. The more they tried to move away, the more they felt a strong force drawing them into the center.

Tenico and the others looked puzzled and frightened as they whirled around, going deeper and deeper.

THE DOGS IN HEAVEN *continued*

River Dog used the smart dog phone on his collar to call Francis.

"I'm afraid we're being sucked into a black hole," he told his friend. "I don't know if we'll make it back before the autumnal equinox."

"Oh, my," Francis answered. "This is way beyond my experience. I'll have to consult with the Heavenly Council to see about sending out a search party. You hang in there, River Dog. We'll come get you and the others as soon as we can."

"OK, Francis. I know you will."

"All right, boys and girls," River Dog said to the others. "Nothing to worry about. They'll be here to rescue us before we know it."

River Dog tried to sound like he meant it, but he wasn't sure if anyone could find them.

Suddenly, the tunnel they were going through became smaller, and they could see a pale, pink light on the other side. When they came out, it looked like an unfamiliar part of Heaven.

"This is really confusing," River Dog thought.

He tried using the GPS on his smart dog phone, but nothing happened. He tried calling Francis again, but there was no signal.

"Let's say a prayer," Tenico suggested. "We can always call on God, because after all, 'God' is 'Dog' spelled backwards."

"That's a good idea," Fluffy said. "Somebody start, then others can add something. Mind if I begin?"

"Go for it, Fluffy."

"Dear Father God, we are lost and scared. We've come through a black hole to another part of the universe and it looks kind of like Heaven, but we know it's not right. River Dog's GPS and smart dog phone don't work here, and we don't know what to do next."

"Yes, Lord, we need your guidance," River Dog said. "Francis was going to send out a search party, but I'm afraid they won't find us."

Just then a woman wrapped in a blue blanket appeared in front of them. "God has sent me to give you a message," she said. "Remember that you are dogs. You do not need smart phones or a GPS. Just use your noses and your ears to find your way back home." And then the woman was gone.

"Why didn't I think of that?" Toby asked. "We've become so used to all this technology that we've forgotten to use our own noses and ears."

The dogs began alternately sniffing the ground and lifting their heads to listen. This went on for a while as they tried to decide which scents and sounds to follow. Gradually, they began to move in the same general direction until they came to a river. River Dog jumped in and began swimming toward home and the others followed. ■

GATEWAY EXPERIENCE

by Bob Kuhns



We drove downtown to the River Front and found a parking lot near the base of the "Gateway to the West" Arch. The huge chrome handle looked ready to be used by some future giant to pick up the entire city of St. Louis. We stood directly below the Arch as the sun set, then walked inside the underground Visitor Center. At the IMAX theater, we bought tickets to the next showing of "The Great American West," along with tram tickets for the ride to the top of the Arch for a night view.

Entering the theater, we sat in the center of the third row. The IMAX screen showed great views of the West that we were working so hard to get to and great reenactments of the pioneer events that preceded us a century or so ago, such as the Lewis and Clark Expedition, filmed where the scenery matched what the director had in mind. So, there were the stalwart explorers with Sacagawea, looking West into the Grand Teton Range—Hollywood does not care that the expedition passed north of Yellowstone, never close enough to even see any part of the Grand Teton Range.

But the movie was enjoyable and even intriguing in places. The opening built some suspense as we tried to figure out why we were watching a fancy carriage rushing along cobblestone streets, led by a mounted escort, then out into the countryside to a castle-like mansion. Not what you would expect in the time of Jefferson's presidency in this newly developing country. But then you realize that we are in France. The well-dressed gentleman climbs quickly from the coach as it stops at the mansion. He is greeted and escorted to a short man alone in a large, well-furnished room. The short man gives the gentleman permission to speak. "Mr. Jefferson says the cash offer still stands." The short man asks if there is any reason not to sell the land. "Is it worth anything?" The gentleman is noncommittal, "Nobody knows what is there. It is largely unexplored." So, with a shrug of his shoulders, Napoleon signed the bill of sale, and Jefferson's United States of America had bought the Louisiana Purchase.

After the movie, we joined one of the last groups for the night to be allowed to ride the tram up to the view area, 620 feet above the ground. To understand what the tram ride is like, try to imagine five human sardines sitting face to face, hunched over to keep from bopping their heads on the low ceiling of the "tram car." There are ten doorways in the wall of the loading stairway. Behind each door is one of these tram cars. You can't tell from outside how small the cars actually are. But when you stoop over and step through the

GATEWAY EXPERIENCE *continued*

narrow portal, you feel like you have just entered an igloo for pigmies. There are five saddle seats inside, two on each side, facing the middle, and one at the back wall. When the five seats are occupied, there are ten knees touching each other in the middle. When all ten cars have been loaded, the doors close and the tram begins to move along a vertically curving track that makes the car bump and shift and creak. Everyone in the car takes turns telling dark humor jokes about the ride—except one ashen-faced lady in the back

We stayed at the top for about fifteen minutes, enjoying the view out the downward angled windows. St. Louis is a pretty city at night. We returned to the RV Park Campground by 10 pm. We called home to report that the car had been fixed this morning and that we were well under way toward the West. In bed by 11:30 pm. ■

LIVING A DAY AT A TIME

by Harvey Simsohn

Before I state my current life-view,
I want to share past views with you:

Yestertimes were fretful times,
Shoulda, coulda, regretful times.
An awful mix, of things I could not fix.
Soul infections, with no healing directions.

Future times devoid of hopes,
Never yesses, always nopes.
Filled with great anxiety
In nightmares of what things might be.

Now I'll share my current plan:
Living a day at a time, saying "Yes I can."
Doing, moving, caring, daring,
Feeling that I am always sharing.
Taking a day at a time makes my life sublime



SPAIN IN REMINISCENCE

by Alexander Patico



Walking in sluggish surge
Dustily down the sea road,
With the sun of fairly fainting power,
But glorious, glorious.

The olive trees stand
On the green-brown waves of hills
Like ordered buffalo herds of green —
Pale green and paler.

The mountain stream silvers and whites itself
Against the heat, and, oh!...
The fog lifts…dwindled to vacuum
By an errant phantom-breeze of cool.

Only the slope of the hill
Keeps my boots on the move,
Through the rubble of wandered rock —
On to the sea,
Where the brava hills turn costa at last,
At the western edge of the Mediterranean.

SPAIN IN REMINISCENCE *continued*

And then, oh, God! The bay!
Like molten velvet of deepest indigo,
Calm and incredible.

If not held by its narrow neck
To the vast, acceptable Sea itself —
The water, still panther-sleek and mirror-mellow,
Would ascend to drown the viewer;
The liquid soft would buzz round his head,
And all his lifetime's shades of blue
Would march mistily before him.

Where the rocks restrain the watery blue,
The blue bristles at their containment,
Making flocks of leaping ivory blossoms,
Which kiss the rock, while wearing it back —
Year by century, eon by instant,
Constantly changing, but always the same.

That, for unthinkable and unthought time
Such beauty should endure!
No stasis of the amorous Greek pursuer here,
But ongoing life for this elemental play
Of hard-to-get.



Note on this poetry:

What words can I find to puff such smoke rings—big enough to share with a friend?
Why do I even try?—harmless madness, I suppose.

THOUGHTS ON GRAY

by Jenny Graham

Drab, dreary gray. Indecisive, sitting on the fence between black and white. I can think of a few good things about the color gray, and the rest are not so good.

Gray covers the wrinkled and bristled hide of elephants. Who doesn't love an elephant?

Dapple Gray horses are unique with their coat of many colors. They are born a solid color, black, bay, or chestnut, but never gray. The coat color begins to transition after the foal's first major coat shed. At this stage, the first white hairs are noticeable. At ages two to four, the coat changes to a dark gray or early dapple stage. When the horse is four to eight years old, the dapple pattern is well-defined. The coat lightens gradually at age ten and beyond, resulting in a coat color of nearly or completely white.

The African Grey Parrot comes to mind with its cognitive and language skill equal to a four- or five-year-old human. They are not simply mimics. Intensive research has proved they can count, understand zero concepts, identify different shapes and colors, and correctly label many different objects. African Greys are very sensitive and become depressed when neglected. They need constant mental challenges and enrichment such as puzzle toys and social interaction to avoid boredom and stress-related behaviors like feather plucking or self-mutilation.

Silver, the precious metal, is a light shade of gray, with many applications. Silver jewelry comes to mind.

Gray is formal, elegant, and able to tone down bright colors. Gray is not glamorous or exciting; it is serious, aloof, and quiet.

Sweet, smiling dolphins. And gray singing whales. But then the gray, perfect eating machine of the ocean glides in. Shark!

The welcomed gray of rain clouds promises relief to drought-stricken areas and suffering livestock. The downside is the gray funnel that drops, mutates to an F-5, wields widespread destruction and ruins lives.

Mushrooms. They are delicious but beware the gray mushroom cloud that annihilates and vaporizes the living.



Confederate gray is an uncomfortable reminder of atrocities the human spirit committed and endured.

The gray bellies of black rats sheltered fleas who were the perpetrators of the Black Death that led to the extinction of half Europe's population in the Great Pandemic of 1347-1351.

Monotonous gray coats our nation's roads, lulls hapless drivers to a dream state behind the wheel and converts them to highway assassins.

THOUGHTS ON GRAY *continued*

Jack the Ripper, cloaked and hidden, plied his bloody trade behind a curtain of gray London fog.

Gray smoke, wrought by terrorist hands hung thick and heavy in the air after the World Trade Center collapsed and buried 2,763 innocent victims. The 9/11 terrorist attack shifted with the speed of quicksilver to *911*.

The most horrific and evil gray covered concrete gas chambers and steel incinerators that asphyxiated Holocaust victims and reduced their bodies to gray ash.

The hopeless gray of depression devours souls, makes death preferable to life, and lays some victims beneath gray tombstones.

Relentless gray flecks our hair and hints of diminished faculties to come, the decay of physical prowess, and the tragedy of dementia that steals our most precious memories and wipes out our identity.

If life were black and white, it would be easy because everything would be good or bad, true or false, right or wrong. Instead, we live in shades of gray. That can be hard. ■

RANGER PERKS

by Bob Kuhns (Ranger Bob)

One of the nice things about being a seasonal ranger in Shenandoah National Park is that I am eligible to rent government housing in the park. When I get up and go to work, I might see wildlife just outside. Wildlife such as white-tailed deer, ground hogs, red-shouldered hawks, wild turkey, skunks, and American black bear often wander past my deck.

The Byrd Visitor Center, where I report to work, sits just a half mile away. I usually drive but I could walk. Skyline Drive is the only road for visitors to get in or out of the Big Meadows area. The nearest entrance/exit to the south is Swift Run Gap, fifteen miles of mountain road. The closest to the north is Thornton Gap, twenty miles of even more twisty, steeper mountain road.

A side perk to living at Big Meadows happens in the spring or fall, when the snow or ice closes Skyline Drive. A Park Ranger needs to open the Visitor Center to tell people from the Big Meadows Lodge and the Big Meadows Camp Ground, that no, they can't leave. They are stuck here until the roads are made safe enough for all vehicles to drive. That includes for large recreation vehicles to drive without sliding off the mountain. There will be crews out there trying to clear the road, but it is not easy to keep steep pavement free of blowing snow of melting and refreezing ice.

Meanwhile, visitors and rangers who are outside the park cannot drive into the park either. The rangers living in Big Meadows housing are asked to walk to the Visitor Center and open it to tell people why they can't leave, and if we know when they can leave.

Late October 2011, I was that ranger. A strong blizzard had blasted in overnight, depositing six to eight inches of snow on the ground. Before daylight, blizzard in my

RANGER PERKS *continued*

face, I walked the half mile, with a headlamp showing the way. The sleety snow, blowing sideways, stung any exposed skin. But as I said, there are ranger perks. The uniform that I wore included a fleece lined jacket, gloves, and what I affectionately call "My Elmer Fudd hat." The hat has fleece lined flaps the fold down over my ears and attach under my chin with Velcro. Other than my face, I was toasty warm as I trudged through the snow. I walked the access road, rather than the path, because the snow was not as deep on the road, still warm from yesterday's sun.

The blowing snow restricted the distance my headlamp projected before it bounced back at me. As I stared ahead, I thought I saw a yellow light. A blinking yellow light approached me quickly. Realizing that a snowplow was headed my way, I stepped off the road and up the bank. The plow operator would be concentrating on following the edge of the road, not looking for pedestrians in the middle of the road. When the truck came into view, I could see it was moving fast and trusting big waves of snow to the side—my side. As I moved up the bank a little further, the compacted snow wave smacked my legs, almost knocking me down. The driver of the plow had not seen me, and the truck was gone from sight in a second or two.



When I got to the Visitor Center, I went around to the side door that we are supposed to use on first entry to the building, because once inside, we can disable the burglar alarm before it sends a signal to summon Law Enforcement Ranger response. The key would not go into the lock because it was coated with ice. After scraping the ice away, the key went in and turned. I pulled on the handle. The door did not budge. The blowing ice had effectively welded the door closed all the way around. There was not a chance of chipping away all that ice.

I walked back to the front door, away from the windblown ice, and entered that way, setting off the building's burglar alarm. I went first to the alarm keypad to shut it off. Then I went to the phone and called off the police response.

Visitor Center opening procedures were completed with time to spare before the scheduled time to unlock the front door. But when I looked out the door, there was a line of park visitors standing in the blowing snow waiting to ask, "How soon can we drive out of the park to go home?"

That day, I opened Byrd Visitor Center early so cold park visitors could find out that "No Skyline Drive is not open yet. We don't know when it will open. When it opens, I will announce it on the PA system for those still here. The Lodge will also get notified, and if the Campground Office is open, they will know."

A Park Ranger's life is full of perks when living in a National Park. ■

1954

by John Doellinger

If his parents ever wanted to read the sports section of the *Columbus Dispatch*, they had to do it early. Every day he cut out the current baseball standings and the highlights of the games from the day before, then taped those clippings to the wall of his bedroom. He was especially interested in the results of his beloved Cleveland Indians.

It was tough being an Indians fan in those days, because they seemed to finish every season second to the "damn Yankees." Until—until—a year when finally they finished in first place and won the pennant. And not only did they win the pennant, but they set an American League record by winning 111 games in a season that in those days was only 154 games. World Series, here we come! And even better: his father had scored tickets to two of the three games up in Cleveland.

So on that wonderful day, the two of them got in the car and drove up Route 3, the 3-C's highway connecting Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland. The first two games had been played in New York, not against the Yankees of course, but against another team from New York. By the way, in one of those games, a certain Giants outfielder had made a spectacular catch that later became famous. But they didn't care about that. Go Tribe!



On their drive to Cleveland, they listened to Jimmy Dudley's radio broadcast of the third game and, unfortunately, the Giants won that game as well. But it'll be okay.

"We're going to be at the next two games." They checked into a hotel and got a good night's sleep. The next day was very nice in Municipal Stadium in downtown Cleveland, and they had really good seats. But maybe you can guess what happened. The Giants won that day's game too. Four straight wins. The World Series was over. So with the tickets for the fifth game still in his father's pocket, they went back to the hotel, checked out, and drove home.

The Cleveland Indians, now the Cleveland Guardians, have never won a World Series since. ■

WHO SAID IT WOULD BE EASY *(to Pau Monroe)*

by Norm Braveman

Not too long ago I was one of a crowd of eager fishermen lining both sides of a river for more than half a mile. We were all fishing for steelhead, a very large form of trout that in the spring returned to the place where it was born. I was fishing in a section of the river that was reserved for fly fishing. We were limited by the tight quarters, so the best we could do to get our flies into deeper water was by joining to a rhythm of roll casting and letting the line drift several yards downstream, retrieving the line, and repeating the sequence. There was a rhythm to this and it could go on for hours—in most instances with no success. Still we never gave up and hoped that a fish would mistake one of our flies, grab it, and swim away with it in his mouth. The battle was not only between fish and fishers, but it was also between fishers who were doing the same thing and were only a few yards away. In either case the question was which one would give up first, the fish or the fishers?

Even though we fished for hours through the day, the best times to hook a fish, and actually land it, were just after sunrise and before sunset. That's not to suggest that during clear daylight it was impossible to get a steelhead hooked, but more than not during bright daylight anyone whose fishing rod was bent over was because they had snagged the bottom of the river or another fisher's line. But whenever your line stopped flowing with the current and the top half of your fishing rod was bent over, the fisher would yell out, "fish on!" Almost immediately, when the fisher realized that his line had been taken by a rock, they calledout, "fish off," but that didn't happen soon enough to prevent a chorus line of fly rods from just dipping their tips into the water or reeling up fly line altogether.

The day I'm writing about was pretty much like most other days. By mid-afternoon the excitement for me had been when my line got snagged on a large rock in the middle of the river, or when my line crossed the lines of fishers on either side of me, which in all cases was always followed by the mandatory, "Oops! Sorry!" And the standard reply that belied the more-often-than-not steely gaze from the other fishers, "No problem pal."

But on this particular day, it was with some surprise—and a whole lot of gratification—that as dusk began to set in and the crowds had thinned, I set the hook in a rather large and very strong steelhead. He made me chase him up and down the river. My job was to simultaneously keep the fish from winning the race back to his spawning grounds, avoid the few fishers who remained fishing from the shoreline, and not trip over the many boulders that lined the bottom of the river. After several long runs, the fish and I settled into an acrobatic type tug-of-war in a flat section of the river. We were in full view of a bridge that ran across the river and the boat launch where most of the guides put in to drift the river downstream every day. On this evening few people were standing on the bridge watching me try to master this fish. Most of them were rooting for the fish.

WHO SAID IT WOULD BE EASY *continued*

The fish made several heroic leaps, twisting and turning in mid-air, all the while showing the brilliant red stripe on his side. He was a classic steelhead, beautiful in what was left in the setting sun light. The two of us went up and down the river, and I excused myself for causing other fishers having to take their lines out of the water as we passed by.

Judging from the comments I heard from the bystanders, I was making a big deal over a nothing fish. "Four pounds at the most" I heard them say. "He should have had the fish in after ten minutes." My estimate was at least fifteen pounds, and maybe up to twenty-five. Whatever he weighed, he seemed to gain strength and pounds with each spectacular leap. And the longer the dance continued, the more I lost a little bit of confidence that I would actually land him.

"Cut the line and let the fish go," I heard them say, but the fight kept going for well over an hour, although as the years went by and as I tell the story now, "the battle lasted close to two hours." But who cares. Break off this wonderful creature? No way. Moreover, all the fishers that I know go by



the principle that the story is over when the fish says it's over, and it either breaks the line or stops running—or when we run out of single malt scotch and no one cares anymore whether or not I landed the fish. ■

A BAD DAY FOR A MELTDOWN

by Ed Vilade

What would you say was the worst day of your life? Deaths, injuries, and other trauma are way up there. But what of a day where you could see your entire career—your future—disappear with one misstep? My day was March 28, 1979.

I may have mentioned that I had been hired by the government as a so-called "energy expert" during the Arab Oil Embargo in 1973. The pressure was so intense and the hours so long that many thrown into the cauldron didn't last long, Somehow I did last, and through sheer attrition, kept getting promoted—or at least given more responsibility.

As oil and natural gas shortages, coal strikes, and other energy supply constrictions cascaded through the decade, I stayed on. Detailed to the White House Energy Policy and Planning office, I did a lot of grunt work such as writing and planning trips and press conferences in support of the big shots who were creating the Department of Energy (DOE).

On March 28, 1979, I was dogging the footsteps of James Rodney Schlesinger, former Secretary of Defense and brand-new Secretary of Energy, as he strode into a House hearing room to face off against Rep. John D. Dingell.

Schlesinger was a tall, broad, gray-haired man, professorial but with an edge that told you that he could eviscerate you with a look if you crossed, or failed, him.

"Big John" Dingell was his equal in scariness, but more of the mouth-frothing, bite-your-head off variety. Dingell also persisted in the belief that DOE was a tool of the major oil companies, and he could not be persuaded otherwise. Six years after the embargo, he continued to investigate us.

The March 28 hearing promised to be an epic faceoff of two vicious Washington infighters. And then it got worse. With Schlesinger literally sitting in front of Dingell, another aide rushed in and whispered the news that the Three Mile Island Unit 2 nuclear plant was melting down. There were no smartphones or other electronics back then, so we scribbled frantic notes to one another about how to get word of the accident to Schlesinger without tipping off Dingell, because we knew that if one molecule of information got to Dingell before Schlesinger, we all might as well be in the core of the melting reactor.



But I was in deeper doodoo than the others in the entourage because, six months earlier, I had thought it would be a good idea to have the Deputy Secretary, Jack O'Leary, speak at the dedication of TMI2 and take

A BAD DAY FOR A MELTDOWN *continued*

along a planeload of reporters. So I was the only one among the aides who had actually been to TMI and could recall enough background information to brief him effectively.

I raced to a nearby payphone, dialed up our Nuclear Emergency Response team, transcribed their Information in my awful handwriting, strolled casually back into the hearing room and literally handed it to Schlesinger under the table.

He barely reacted at all when he read my account, but now he had the edge. For the next hour or so I staked out the pay phone—only once threatening bodily harm to a would-be user—and relayed note after note by hand to the big man.

At some point Dingell got word of the accident and started asking hostile questions, which Schlesinger calmly answered. We kept Dingell at bay until he finally ran out of steam.

We won that battle but ultimately lost the public information war over TMI. We left the hearing and all hands went into emergency response mode. I was soon on a plane back to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and upon arrival discovered total chaos—throngs of media making all kinds of wild overstatements and the governor of Pennsylvania calling for the entire state to be evacuated. We were so far behind the misinformation that we knew we'd never catch up.

Multiple postmortems later found that the plant's operators had not followed proper procedures, directly leading to the partial meltdown. Representatives of the plant's engineers raced to the scene and rapidly shut the plant down safely. Nobody died, or was injured, or exposed to radiation. Nevertheless it became, and remains to this day, a symbol of the dangers of nuclear energy.

I left government a few years later and ultimately worked for four of the country's largest utilities—all of whom had at least one nuclear plant. I was given vague titles such as "Manager of Public Policy Issues" or some such. Basically, I wrote speeches for the chairman and served as spokesman during nuclear emergencies.

And we had some. I counted four as serious problems. TMI had taught me a hard but valuable lesson. The only way to head off overreaction is to tell them everything you know as soon as you know it.

I adhered to that principle—statistics and schematics and access to the top execs, STAT. We coasted through those problems—none of which you will ever have heard of—by supplying so much information that the media got bored. The ultimate success of my strategy came to me during a detailed press briefing when a reporter asked, "Why are you telling us all this?"

Exactly. ■

BALANCED BRAIN

by Jim David

We were old friends. Toby and I were friends 70 years ago during our teenage years. Even then, he was searching for the key to a better life, a more fulfilling and contented life. He was more than well-read. He read voraciously in philosophy, theology, spirituality.

During his lifelong quest for a better life, he learned to trust himself. Some teachings rang true for him while others failed to soothe his being. He resonated with Sheldon Knopp's classic work, *If You Meet the Buddha on the Road, Kill Him*. The message is to listen to your body, trust your instincts, live in your own peace.

He learned patience. He realized he was on a never-ending journey. He practiced balancing awareness. He balanced self-awareness with awareness of outer events. Living in awareness deepened his patience while strengthening his self-acceptance. Being at peace with himself created boundless delight in everything and everyone he encountered. He stepped off the treadmill of life as he lived more powerfully the teaching in *Awareness*, the master work of Anthony DeMello, Jesuit priest and psychologist.

He shared freely about the places, persons, events, and learnings that shaped his life. One of his treasured spiritual masters is Ekhardt Tolle who gained fame with his book, *The Power of Now*. Popularizing the rewards of living fully in the present without regretting the past and not fearing the future has unlocked joy for many people.

Ekhardt Tolle went a giant step forward in his later book, *A New Earth*, wherein he again explained the wisdom of living in "The Now," while adding the challenge of "dying to self." Dying to Self encompasses letting go of our myriad attachments that we all have, power, wealth, status, fame, acclaim. In letting go of our attachments we inhabit the freedom and joy of being okay just in being. Toby knew this was not readily attained. Years of living in awareness, living in the now are the bedrock of being okay, experiencing love, peace, and joy just in being.

I asked Toby if there were any shortcuts, any way to accelerate the process. I knew what his answer would be. He shocked me with his reply. He did begin by saying the tried-and-true method was practicing some form of meditation a minimum of 20 minutes twice daily. He was open to practicing whatever form of meditation speaks to you.

BRAIN WAVES

He then briefly explained brain waves to me. Brain waves are electrical impulses generated by the brain to send information and trigger electrochemical changes. They are produced when our neurons communicate with each other using electricity. They operate at different speeds

BALANCED BRAIN *continued*

measured as Hertz (Hz) per second. Most of our waking moments we live in what he called "the tyranny of Beta," 14-38 Hz, wherein we think, plan, worry, agonize, etc., our normal conscious mind. When we relax deeply, we slide into Alpha, 8-14 Hz, where we can rest, quieting the mind; being comfortable with observing our internal events and external views without judging, experiencing without thinking; drinking in a piece of art experientially.



He emphasized that the next deeper level of relaxation is attainable by all of us with intentionality and practice. Theta, 4-8 Hz is reached with focus and practice while relaxing or effortlessly at other times. Theta includes deep physical relaxation and mental quiet, the conquering of Beta! This state of being is the pleasure of connecting with the love, joy, and peace already present inside each of us.

While in Theta we glide into Delta, 0.5-4 Hz which is sleep. The other polar-opposite extreme is Gamma, which we move into when we experience extreme levels of adrenalin due to stress or positive excitement about an endeavor; 38-80 Hz is associated with high intelligence.

EFFORTLESS THETA

Toby explained that many people may not possess the time, energy, or motivation to access Theta intentionally. He pointed out that immediately upon awakening from sleep we are in effortless Theta. He recommended we stay in Theta as long as possible, providing room or openness for the creativity of Theta to gift us with new perspectives on whatever Beta issue may be lingering around in the shadows of our minds. We then experience the Balanced Brain. We combine whatever Beta issue is paramount in the left hemisphere of our brain with the wondrous creativity of our right hemisphere, activated by basking in the sunlight of Theta. The Corpus Callosum connects the two hemispheres. Toby said, "the more we energize our Corpus Callosum, the more whole we become." ■

LEAVES OF AUTUMN

by David Lassiter

Leaves of autumn red and gold
Silently they fall
In profusion
Resting on the earth
Waiting to dance merrily
In the breath of the wind ■



MUGS

by John Doellinger

My daughter's high school band went on a trip
From New York down to Washington, D.C.
Though only for two days, she thought of me
And bought a mug—But now it has a chip.

And when I took a trip to my home town
I bought a mug that showed my old high school,
A souvenir that seemed at first real cool.
But it faded when I washed it. Now it's gone.

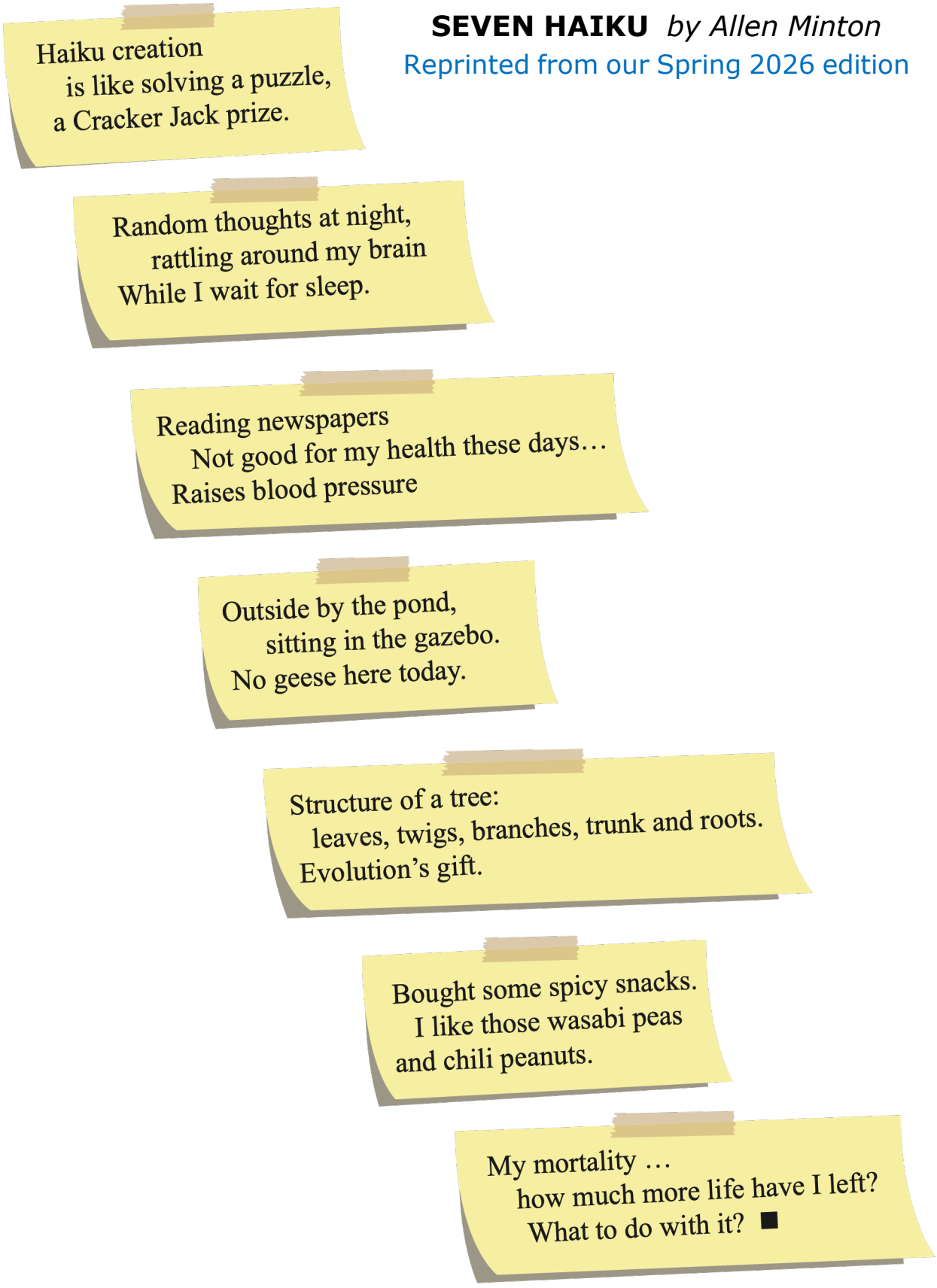
I've had some mugs of my old baseball teams
And mugs with sayings and with corny jokes.
They're gifts I'd gotten from some friends and folks.
But none of these are tops for me, it seems.

On our first Valentine's Day, my sweet wife
Gave me a heart-themed mug, the best one of my life. ■



SEVEN HAIKU *by Allen Minton*

Reprinted from our Spring 2026 edition



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. Members read their writing, followed by a lively discussion. All are welcome.

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.

Members write about 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.

