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Front cover – **“The Fire Next Time” (after James Baldwin)**
Oil on canvas by David Coffin

Back cover – **“Winter Patterns – Buttonbush Pond”**
Photograph by Sally Nelson-Olin

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To Begin the World Anew

By David W. Orr

[Editor's note: Adapted from the introduction David wrote for the new book he edited, Democracy in a Hotter Time: Climate Change and Democratic Transformation, published in September 2023 by The MIT Press.]

In 1770, Tom Paine, 33, was teaching school in Lewes, England; newly married Thomas Jefferson was building Monticello; and 19-year-old James Madison was a student at Princeton. The convergence of ideas, people, circumstance, and serendipity that we call the American Revolution was still in the future. By 1800 – 30 years later – these men had written some of the most brilliant reflections on government ever. The Colonies had declared their independence, won a war against the mightiest army in Europe, conceived a new constitutional order, launched a bold experiment in large-scale democracy, elected George Washington as the first president, and peacefully transferred power from one faction to another.

Against all odds, they had imagined and launched the first modern democracy. Imperfect though it was, the fledgling nation had the capacity for self-repair evolving toward “a more perfect union.” Sojourner Truth, in that year of 1800, was three years old. Our challenge, similarly, requires us to begin the world anew, conceiving and building a fair, decent, and effective democracy, this time better fitted to a planet with an ecosphere.

This book is a scouting expedition to that possible future and a speculative inquiry about the transition to a more durable, fair, and resilient democracy, and what that will require of us. We are close either to a precipice or to a historic turning point, and for a brief time, the choice is ours to make. . . .

[T]here are reasons to hope that long-overdue change is finally happening. In August, Congress passed the first major climate legislation in U.S. history. The costs of renewable energy and improved efficiency continue to decline and are increasingly competitive with energy from fossil fuels and nuclear power almost everywhere. Sizeable majorities of the public support action on climate change and adoption of renewable energy. Business and finance are moving mostly in the right direction because the liabilities of “green” investments are lower and profits higher. Buildings and entire cities are being designed to be carbon neutral, driven by market demand, better technology, superior design, and more comprehensive building standards and international codes. And New

York and two other states have amended their constitutions to include the right to “clean air and water and a healthful environment.” Whether all this is too little, too late, time will tell. Had we acted earlier, the hole we’ve dug would not be nearly so deep, but even after the first authoritative warnings decades ago, we kept digging. It did not have to be this way.

By the mid-1980s, there was more than enough scientific evidence for the United States to lead a worldwide transition to energy efficiency, renewable energy, and ecologically smarter design of economies, cities, transportation, farms, and factories. We were warned, repeatedly, in ever greater detail, but did not act, committing [what American environmental lawyer Gus Speth has called] “the greatest dereliction of civic responsibility in the history of the Republic.” In other words, we squandered whatever margin of safety we might once have had. Our failure to meet the challenge early on, when it would have been much easier, cannot be excused by a lack of technology or even by economics, since efficiency, renewable energy, and superior design have long been cheaper, faster, and more resilient than the alternatives and without the incalculable costs of climate chaos. The cause, rather, is political. Our fossil-fuel- and corporate-dominated democracy seems to have stalled out; our institutions corrupted by too much unaccountable money and elected officials with too much ambition and too little integrity; our various media by too much venom, too little concern for the common good. Now, in an ongoing right-wing insurrection, we are vexed and troubled, still struggling to solve even the most basic problems, including climate change, that threaten our own survival.

In short, we face two related existential crises: a global crisis of rapid climate change and potentially lethal threats to democracy. We believe these are related, and because people have an unalienable and hard-won right to choose how they are governed and to what ends, democracy is worth fighting for. We believe, further, that a more robust democracy would be a more effective, fair, and durable way to organize the transition to a post-fossil-fuel world than any possible alternative. And there’s the rub: democracy as it exists may not survive for long on a rapidly warming Earth, but on the other hand, as James Hansen says, “We cannot fix the climate until we first fix democracy.” Fixing democracy, however, requires fundamental improvements that, among other things, protect the written and unwritten rules that contain our political disputes and provide greater political equality, economic justice, and protection of the rights of future generations. . . .

Rapid climate change, in short, [say John Dryzek, Richard Norgaard, and David Schlosberg], “presents the most profound challenge ever to have confronted

human social, political, and economic systems.” As such, it is first and foremost a political and moral crisis, not one solely of technology or economics, as important as those obviously are. . . .

All the while, carbon emissions are rapidly changing Earth into a different and less hospitable planet for humans. Even in the rosiest scenarios imaginable, a warming climate driving more capricious weather will destabilize governments and increase conflicts over water, food, and land, stressing global supply chains and international institutions to the breaking point. It could be worse, but without concerted preventative action, it is not likely to be better. In either case, governing will become more difficult at all levels because of increasing climate-driven weather disasters, the difficulty of making systemic solutions necessary to manage multiple problems without causing new ones, and intensifying conflicts between rich and poor.

One thing more: The U.S. Constitution rigorously protects private property but not what we hold in common and in trust, such as climate stability and biological diversity. It does not acknowledge our dependence on ecological systems with complex feedback loops and cause and effect separated in space and time. It does not protect future generations who will live with the consequences we leave behind – Jefferson’s “remote tyranny,” across generations.

In sum, there is no plausible resolution for the convergence of crises in the “long emergency” that does not include healing our uncivil civic culture and reforming our politics, policies, governing institutions, and laws to accord with Earth systems and a larger sense of solidarity and self-interest that includes our posterity. Our best and, I believe, our only authentic hope is in a renewed commitment to repair and fundamentally improve democratic institutions and governments at all levels. It won’t be easy to do, but much easier than not doing it.

Democracy has always demanded a great deal from citizens. Now it requires learning how to be dual citizens in a political system *and* in an ecological community and knowing why these are inseparable. We must learn – perhaps relearn – the arts of tolerance, neighborliness, ecological competence, and the kind of patriotism that shifts loyalties from “I,” “me,” and “mine” to “we,” “ours,” and “us,” including posterity and other species. I imagine that in some future time we will be judged not just by our technological prowess, but by our skill in the arts of effective, wise, and accountable government – a democracy undergirded by a civically smarter and more supportive citizenry and provisioned by a better-thought-out and more carefully designed technology in an

economy harmonized to the carrying capacity of Earth's various ecosystems and grounded in vibrant and diverse and resilient local communities. . . .

Writing in 1919, W.E.B. Du Bois put it this way: "The real argument for democracy is . . . that in the people we have the source of that endless life and unbounded wisdom which the rulers of men must have . . . a mighty reservoir of experience, knowledge, beauty, love, and deed." The challenge is how to harness the great power and intelligence latent in that untapped reservoir to build a just, inclusive, and sustainable world powered by sunlight.

Visions are easy to dream but hard to implement. If that better, more inclusive, and effective democracy is to grow and flourish, and if we are to be reconciled to the Earth, those more expansive and necessary visions must live in the minds and lives of our youth. For that reason, among others, educational institutions are on the front lines in the battle for democracy and a habitable Earth. Every graduate from every school, college, or university should know how the Earth works as a physical system. They should understand the civic foundations of democracy. They should come into adulthood with a sense of authentic hope in a world still rich in possibilities. For those who teach and administer, it is time to ask, what is education for, especially now? It is time to rethink the enterprise called "research" and better deploy our intelligence and compassion to meet human needs for food, shelter, health care, education, conviviality, safety, and energy. . . .

One way or another, decisions will be made about the scale of the human enterprise relative to the ecosphere, the just distribution of costs and benefits within and across generations, and what we owe to posterity. [T]he transition ahead is both political, having to do with "who gets what, when, and how," and moral, having to do with matters of fairness and decency. . . . [W]e must better understand ourselves and what we've become shaped by, a culture of consumption that is ravaging the ecosphere, and what we might yet become, with foresight and a bit of help from the angels of our better nature.

This is not, however, primarily a book about policy or recent developments in energy technology or the sins of capitalism, as important as those are. The focus is upstream, on the political and governmental institutions where decisions about policy, technology, and the economy are made, or not. It is, rather, a conjecture from various perspectives about the human response to rapid climate destabilization, and possibilities for improving democratic institutions and civic culture to meet the stresses ahead.



NASA image from the James Webb Space Telescope

CREATION – A Work in Progress

By Sarah M. Lloyd

God opened her womb and took out a handful of Fire. And in that handful of Fire were the seeds of everything that would ever be, all Matter and Energy and Energy and Matter, flowing one into another and flowing back again. And it was all smaller than the smallest tip of the smallest pin, and all around was Void. Alone it did not fill the Void, but turned upon itself. *Always shifting, always changing, always moving, never still.*

Then God herself leaped into the handful of Fire, and it exploded into the Void. The Void became Space for the new thing to happen. Then the first seed sprouted, and Time began. *Always shifting, always changing, always moving, never still.*

God brought her womb and the function of her womb with her into the handful of Fire, so it did not become *more* Fire, *more* Matter and Energy flowing one into another and flowing back again. It began to have an order. Some parts stayed Energy and some parts stayed Matter. Time offered them *before* and *after* and Space gave them room for *in between*. With God and her womb inside, it all began to find new ways to be. *Always shifting, always changing, always moving, never still.*

NASA image: Earth seen from Apollo 17



At first the Matter was all alike – an atom here, an atom there – spread across expanding Space and Time. The Energy was here and there and everywhere as well, but soon it all began to organize. Great currents of Energy moved through Space and Time and their swirls and eddies collected up the Matter into spheres. First the size of a fish’s egg, then the size of a woman’s folded hand, then bigger than the highest mountains in the world . . . and bigger yet . . . and bigger yet . . . until there was so much Matter all packed together in each one that it changed

into Energy again, and the spheres became the Stars and gave off light. And there were many, many Stars. They danced together in great swirling floes to make the Galaxies, with dark and empty spaces in between. *Always shifting, always changing, always moving, never still.*

The Stars, with God inside, went on looking for new ways to be. They made more complicated Matter as they created light. The new Matter spread across the Galaxies when Stars exploded as they died, and was collected up in turn to form new Stars. There were generations of Stars, all throughout expanding Space across millennia of Time. Between the Stars were other clouds of Matter that the swirls and eddies collected into other kinds of spheres. Some were very small and some were bigger than the smaller Stars themselves. They moved around each other and revolved around the stars, crashing together, trading places, and sending each other onto different paths. They became the Planets and the Moons and Asteroids. One of the Stars is our own Sun, circled by many Planets and clouds of Asteroids. One of the Planets is our amazing Earth, accompanied by our much beloved Moon, all with God inside, and looking for new and different ways to be. *Always shifting, always changing, always moving, never still.*

Earth at first was molten from forming in its parent cloud of Matter. It slowly cooled and water fell in sheets out of the sky and rose as steam and fell as rain again. Rocks in the outer layers floated up to become the Land and when it had cooled enough, the rain created lakes and flowed down as rivers to fill



the Seas. The Land gathered itself into the Continents, and the Seas and the Continents moved around the Earth, dividing, joining, trading places, and dividing once again, with God inside, always looking for new ways to be. *Always shifting, always changing, always moving, never still.*

There were currents in the Seas and the Moon drew the water this way and that in tides. Parts of the Land dissolved into the Seas and different kinds of Matter came together in new ways. There was heat from deep inside the Earth as well as from the Sun and sometimes lightning struck . . . God and her womb and the function of her womb were inside it all, and from this came little bits of life. *Always shifting, always changing, always moving, never still.*

The little bits of Life with God inside began to multiply and change. They swirled and joined and split and grew and tried new forms and tried again and got more cells and got more size and fronts and backs and ears and eyes and lots of legs . . . until the Seas were filled with many forms of Life. Some of them became animals and some of them became plants, and all were trying out new ways to be. Some ways of living life worked out and some did not, but new ones always came to be. *Always shifting, always changing, always moving, never still.*

As the many forms of Life with God inside grew more and more complex, some kinds of creatures came to have two different sorts. One had a womb and the other had a spark. And as God herself leaped into the handful of Fire

that she had taken from her womb, so does the one sort place a spark inside the womb of the other, coming together to create new Life. *Always shifting, always changing, always moving, never still.*

As Life with God inside sought ever more new ways to be, some animals and plants moved out of the Seas and up onto the Land. There were grasses and bushes and trees and flowers and creatures that swam and hopped and climbed and ran and flew. Some made a go of Life and some did not, while Earth itself tried different ways to be. The Continents moved and there were earthquakes as they did. Volcanoes erupted and made new Land. Meteors struck causing great devastation and centuries of cold brought sheets of ice. Many kinds of plants and creatures died, but others came, in time, to take their place. Sometimes whole ways of living Life died out. Crinoids were beautiful and trilobites were cool and dinosaurs lost their size to become the birds. Life, with God inside, made new and different complex forms and different forms again. *Always shifting, always changing, always moving, never still.*

Millenia passed and creatures came to be who could care for one another and were self-aware. They could look around in wonder at the world they saw and consider what their place in it might be. They pondered the beginnings and knew there would be ends. Some creatures in the oceans, some in the forests, and some on the plains were aware of God inside, linking everyone and everything together. One of them was us, but then our lives grew more complex and we forgot. *Always shifting, always changing, always moving, never still.*

We got language and fire and opposable thumbs and learned how to make tools and befriended the wolves, and wove baskets of reeds and made pots out of clay. We partnered with horses and oxen and cats. We learned how to count and then how to write and traveled and traded and built ourselves cities and forts. We told stories about who we were, and how we began and where we went wrong and why we must die, and we turned the stories into art when we honored our dead. *Always shifting, always changing, always moving, never still.*

Our stories told of gods outside ourselves, who they were and where they were and what they did and what they thought that we should do and build and sacrifice to honor them. Often the stories did not agree and we went to war to prove which one was right. We lost our sense of God inside ourselves and inside other creatures and the natural world, but God and her womb and the function of her womb are here no matter what we think. Let us give thanks for Creation unfinished, and still looking for new ways to be. *Always shifting, always changing, always moving, never still.*

Oneness Falling Free

By Bob Cothran

Perfect pale oneness
One gray
on gray on gray on gray
from zenith to horizon
then on across the world
Almost pure white
fat soft fluffy
slowly falling flakes
That's how they look
That's not what they are
Miniscule crystals
self-designed
from brittle ornamental ice
holding hands for reassurance
as they fall
And sure enough
the more that join the ring
the slower it descends
Hardly heavier than air
once it gains the breadth
that numbers lend

Almost floating they arrive
welcomed by the throng
who got there first

falling seeming done
A tiny tiny tiny joyous cheer
is lifted *Yaaaaaaaaay!*
from every inch for miles
If you listen closely
you can hear
the whispering chorale
of falling snow

I stand here and listen
motionless and fairly cold
as is only right
The little drummers
in my ears
pick up the sticks
but God they're tired
nowadays
Those hands in which the sticks feel so at home
are stiffened and arthritic
The drumheads not as tight
as they should be
The years of Party Poppers
Jet planes too close by
Toccata and Fugue in D Minor
Falling snow singing
almost too softly
to be heard
but never quite

until tonight

The hammers and the anvils
used to passing on
the rhythm
by occult and mystic means
into my mind
and heart and soul
are well past a thousand billion
well-timed beats
and almost worn out
worn through
The little beats no longer
quite ring clear or true

The text of the chorale
of snowfall
ever is
interrogative
*Do you feel how welcome
you are here?
How completely you're connected
and belong?*
I watch the beauty of the falling
falling falling

white-sound oneness
that I cannot hear this morning
Beauty with a small, sad price tag
now tied on
Were the saturated
radiance of the sight
of all that white
not mine to glory in
I would not have
to have in mind
or hold in heart
that I no longer hear
its whispered song.

My own lovely fall
seems somewhere near to done.
I'd love to be part of
a gently falling ring
holding hands for reassurance
and to so rejoice and join
the great
majestic
universal
One

Yaaaaaaaaaay!

A Life: Ten Vignettes

By Kathleen Cerveny

—1—

My grandmother, my father's mother, lost the first joint of a finger in a mangle when she was young – working in an industrial laundry. It was her ring finger. All the while she lived with us, from the time my sister was born and Mom went to work, I never saw my grandmother wear a wedding ring or engagement ring. Her husband had abandoned her and their two boys when my father was just a child. Maybe she never had a ring. Or maybe she put it aside after he left. I never thought to ask her.

My father's younger brother fell victim to diphtheria early in life and so my dad was raised by a single, working parent in the hard times during and between the two world wars.

It was during that second one, in the Ardennes Forest, that harsh, harsh last winter of the war, that my father lost his legs. The land mine took one mid-thigh and shattered the knee (an irreplaceable loss back then) of the other.

—2—

They'd been engaged before he volunteered. He could have been exempt from service, being an only surviving son. He'd wanted the Navy, but was color blind. And so he went into that forest, a Sergeant and sharpshooter in the Century Division of the U.S. Army, following those who'd taken the beaches half a year before.

—3—

The letter, on that ephemeral airmail paper that too often carried the hardest news across the sea, came in late December. It asked his mother to release his fiancée from her promise to him: "Virginia can find a better man than I am now," the letter said.

—4—

They were married in November the following year, his right leg, where the

doctors had removed the knee and fused the upper and lower bones together, still in a heavy plaster cast. The other leg, now a wooden one, was articulated at the knee.

I came along in August.

—5—

In high school, he'd been captain of the baseball team and shortstop, quarterback in football, and lead tenor in the school musical. He drew cartoons for the school newspaper, and four years after Jesse Owens won four gold medals in Berlin, my father was scouted by the U.S. Olympic Gymnastics Committee (Rings, Pommel Horse, Parallel Bars) for the games that never took place.

—6—

Dad taught me to shoot, to play tennis, bowl, fish, draw landscapes, and work with wood in his basement shop. He built an extra room to our house and fixed anything that broke. He got me a puppy for Christmas one year, a chemistry set, a microscope, and John Nagy drawing supplies on other holidays. He drove me 30 miles across town to the Cleveland Institute of Art and sat in the car while I went to night school there when I was 16. The money he made from his second, night-time job paid for me to go full time when I turned 18.

—7—

His Oldsmobile 88 was one of the first cars fitted with hand controls after the war. He and I would travel to the country every summer Saturday to fish the pond on Eiben's dairy farm. We'd park under the shade of a tree near the pond, the radio tuned to the ball game. Dad never had an accident, with the exception of the time a cow leaned into the side of his car and dented a fender as he waited for me to open the cattle gate to the pasture.

—8—

After the war, the owners of the machine shop where he'd been foreman refused to employ him, and so he spent 25 years behind a desk at the Immigration and Naturalization Service headquarters in Cleveland. He took early disability retirement from his government job, went on a Caribbean cruise

with Mom for their 30th Anniversary, and in their late 60s, they both took in his mother's two elderly sisters, caring for all three older siblings until they passed.

—9—

His final chapter was spent in the Veterans' Home in Sandusky. A brief time, where he left us the last day that I visited him – two years to the day after Mom had died.

—10—

On the bookshelves in my cottage there's a small photo of the two of them sitting on a couch, Dad's arm around Mom, both smiling. It's not a posed photo, just a casual, comfortable, captured moment from an ordinary, extraordinary, shared life. I've painted small gold hearts on both their chests.

* * * * *

Pajamas **By Judi Bachrach**

I still have a pair of your pajamas. They are the brand-new pair you ordered just before you went into the hospital for the last time. You weren't going in for any more chemo, but to see what they could do for the escalating pain in your back, the loss of half your field of vision due to tumors, and other symptoms from the stem cell treatment that had decimated you and had obviously not worked. Despite "bringing you to the point of death" (doctor's words) by even more potent chemicals meant to eradicate the most minute speck of lymphoma, it was clear within a month that your own stem cells had not regrown healthy bone marrow. The cancer was back wreaking havoc in your spinal cord and brain. It was the end of any more possible interventions.

We had taken away your credit cards once we realized you were enticed by late night TV ads in your hospital room for useless items that touted: "On Sale for Just \$49.99!" But a last pair of pajamas? If you wanted them, of course you should have them. For 18 months, whenever our friend arrived at our door to drive you into Manhattan, you carefully packed a small bag with PJs and toiletries. You made sure that you wore your watch and had your cell phone and wallet in your pockets. Befuddled as you became, you were still the dear man who wondered if he had his keys, as well as all the other things men routinely check before leaving the house.

You could not have worn those pajamas more than once or twice. In the hospital, they were always moving you for this or that test, or palliative treatment, and you would have worn a hospital gown. Once you arrived back home for your final 12 days in hospice care, our hired attendants also could not have you in pajamas as they cared for all your needs. Those PJs were basically still brand new when I unpacked your travel bag for the last time.

Six months after you died, I was packing up only what I needed for moving into one room at Kendal. Packing was not a rational process, as losing you had induced powerful widow shock. Once settled, I discovered that some sentimental items did not make it to my new Assisted Living home. Fortunately, our daughter had just moved into a new house not far from me, and she had room enough to use, or safely store, many things I would have left behind.

For whatever reason, your new pajamas did make it to my room. The other night, I had just thrown away a pair of my old pajamas with one too many little holes in them. I didn't want to wear my remaining heavier night clothes, and then – I recalled your PJs. They were folded neatly in a bottom drawer I rarely access. You and I were not too different in size. When we were still teenagers, we could wear each other's jeans and tee shirts. Tenderly, I looked at your jammies. I considered them rather formal for you: charcoal gray cotton with white piping around the cuffs and breast pocket, a button-up top with lapels, and pull-on bottoms.

Style aside, they were the right weight and fit me fine. As I easily slipped into them, I thought about how you finally had slipped out of your body and how it seemed easy for you at the end. I thanked you for sharing your pajamas and your life with me. I was covered by the soft warmth of so many loving memories, and I took you with me as I drifted into sleep.

My Railroad Adventures

By Thomas Klosterman

[Editor's note: This story was originally published in 2022 in The Keystone, a quarterly publication of the Pennsylvania Railroad Technical and Historical Society.]

I grew up near many railroad tracks. Two railroad mainlines, one branch line (it shared tracks with one of the mainlines), and a short line switching railroad ran near my house in Barberton, Ohio. When I was small, steam locomotives ruled. There were three road crossings of the mainlines within a mile and a half, producing much whistle work for the engineers, who had to blow warnings for each crossing. Many engineers, especially the B & O men, "played a tune" continuously over all three.

I shared a paper route with someone whose brother worked at the town depot. He agreed to introduce us to the local yard train crew that came to town daily to switch cars headed for some local industries, including a match factory and a tire factory. That led me to a multiyear friendship with the train crew, especially the engineer, Howard H. Wade. He was known as HH by his fellow railroaders. He was nearing retirement after a 40+-year career. He told me that he once "ran the sleepers" on a passenger train on this route. Passenger service had been ended for almost a decade by this time.

One train became my Saturday haunt most weekends for a few years. This train left the yards at Akron, Ohio, and ran to my town. I encountered the train after all my papers were delivered. It frequently passed me with my now-empty *Akron Beacon Journal* canvas bag as I walked along the right-of-way. At the north end of the siding, I helped a railroad employee (if I arrived on time) to align the switches to allow the train to enter the siding. I then spent the afternoon in the cab of the locomotive or riding in the caboose.

One day, while I was riding in the caboose, a brakeman asked me if I would like to have a large lantern from the caboose. It was called a marker light and was one of the two red lamps placed on the back of a train at night. I put it in my canvas newspaper bag and took it home. I still have it.

The crew spent the remainder of the day switching cars in the yard. Upon finishing their day, they assembled their train, switched onto the mainline, and returned to Akron. They let me off the locomotive near my home. One of many enjoyable Saturdays!



A Ham Puts Auntie in a Pickle

By Jan Klaveness

This reminiscence, from a winter's day in the late 1800s, was among those passed down to the author by her paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Schoensiegel, who was known as Auntie.

By her own admission, Auntie was not an easy child to have around. When she was told *not* to do something, as she would say to me, "Little Elizabeth would do it anyway." So she was constantly getting into trouble and being reprimanded for not being a *good* little lady.

Take the Christmas ham. She went to a Christian Brothers school, and every Christmas each child would bring a gift for the Brothers. And I guess in most families the gift consisted of a fine linen handkerchief or a scarf – something rather elegant. Because, as Auntie emphasized to me, the Christian Brothers had good taste.

So when it came time for her to take her gift at Christmastime to the Brothers, her father announced that he would give her a ham. (Her father was a butcher, with an Uptown New York clientele whose horse-drawn buggies helped give the carriage trade its name.)

Well! Auntie was having none of the ham! She would be embarrassed, she said. It was a dreadful gift to have to cart, you know, this *ham* into school when everybody else was bringing fancy bottles of cologne or wine or handkerchiefs! And here she would be with this ham!

But her father insisted that that's what he had, and that's what she would take. And so, when the day rolled around, Auntie went off carting the ham to school.

It doesn't take a genius to figure out which gift pleased the Christian Brothers the most that season. When they all gathered in Assembly, the head Christian Brother – whatever they called him – stood up and *particularly* thanked Elizabeth Schoensiegel for her *fine* Christmas ham.

Of course, Auntie would tell me that story as a cautionary example of why I should always listen to my parents. And as a *good* little lady, I did as she said. Sometimes.

What I Think of When I Read *Madeline*

By Nina Love

[Author's note: Madeline, written and illustrated by Ludwig Bemelmans, was first published in 1939.]

*In an old house in Paris that was covered in vines
Lived twelve little girls in two straight lines.
In two straight lines they broke their bread,
Brushed their teeth and went to bed.
In the middle of the night, Miss Clavel woke up in fright.
"Something," she said, "is not quite right."*

In my case, it started in the afternoon with a tummy ache that had me doubled up in pain. My three aunts at first thought I was being dramatic, but all their coddling and coaxing came to naught. Moster Else took my temperature and pulse. Moster Rita urged me to eat just a little supper, or at least a little treat. Moster Nethe, her brow furrowed, sighed and hovered, wringing her hands, and my younger sister Mette sucked her thumb and watched. The tummy ache only got worse.

*Soon after Dr. Cohn
Came, he rushed out to the phone
And he dialed DANton-ten-six
"Nurse," he said, "it's an appendix!"
Everybody had to cry.
Not a single eye was dry.*

So the ambulance was called to our apartment in Copenhagen, and I too was carried off. I watched the long faces of Moster Rita, Moster Else, and Mette leaning over the railing slowly spin above me and grow smaller as I was carried in the arms of a medic round and round and round down three flights of circular stairs and then carried outdoors and tucked under blankets in the back of an ambulance.

*In a car with a red light
They drove out into the night.*

It was a long ride to the hospital. The ambulance threaded its way through the

traffic with its siren wailing along the dark wintry streets. Moster Nethe leaned over me, her face flashing red or white in the glow of the revolving ambulance lights. I arrived to glare and bustle in the emergency room.

*She was not afraid of mice.
She loved winter snow and ice.
To the tiger in the zoo
Madeline just said, "Pooh-pooh!"*

The young physician exuded caring, for I remember feeling secure in his ability to make the tummy ache go away. So I trusted him as he made the diagnostic exam, and I was soon whisked into surgery.

*Madeline woke up two hours
Later in a room with flowers . . .
A crack on the ceiling had the habit
Of sometimes looking like a rabbit.*

The room I woke up in was battleship gray, and everything in it was white – white metal bed frames, white bed covers, white bed curtains, white nurses and doctors. The room had 16 beds and was partitioned by a white curtain into two rooms of eight beds each. All the beds were filled with adult women save mine. A starched nurse cautioned me to stay in bed and handed me, as she did three times a day to each of us, a thermometer with a little dollop of Vaseline on the business end so we could take our own temperatures.

*Madeline soon ate and drank
And on her bed there was a crank.*

The woman in the bed opposite me must have been gravely ill, for I never heard a peep out of her. But happily, the woman in the next bed was wonderful company. I must have started singing one day, for soon from all the beds in the room came the requests, "Sing, Nina. Sing for us." And sing I did, every childhood song I could think of, as well as the Danish songs I had learned by that time. Gradually, when I was permitted out of bed and began to explore the ward, I discovered a small room with only a crib, and in it a very small, very pale little girl. She was happy to see another child, and I visited her every day. But I sensed even then that this little girl would not be going home.

*"Visitors from two to four"
Read a sign outside her door.
With some flowers in a vase,
Tiptoeing with solemn face,
In they walked . . .*

Moster Nethe and Mette came with paper dolls, books, and fruit. Moster Nethe had been hospitalized for months when she had had appendicitis a few years earlier, for hers, in pre-penicillin days, must have ruptured. So she expected that I too would hover at death's door. Her face was always drawn and anxious. My sister, however, reacted differently.

*- and then said "Ahhhhh"
When they saw the toys and candy,
And the dollhouse from Papa.
But the biggest surprise by far -
On her stomach was a **scar!***

I think Mette was both relieved that I was mending and envious of my adventure. She perched at the foot of my bed, ate my treats and oranges, played with my paper dolls, brought drawings and letters from our classmates, jabbered incessantly, and, of course, admired my bandaged stomach. As the days wore on, this timid little sister of mine astonished me by coming to visit me on her own – something strictly prohibited by hospital rules. Though only nine, she soon found her way from school to the hospital on the complicated maze of Copenhagen's trolley lines, and would sneak past the guards at the hospital entrance gates by walking alongside strange adults, pretending to be a member of their family.

After two or three weeks, I was discharged – but **not** to home. Oh, no! In Denmark, after a hospitalization, one must go to a special place, preferably in the country, to "convalesce." To that end, my aunts had persuaded a distant relative, Cousin Agnes, to take me in. She lived about 40 miles west of Copenhagen in an all-boys boarding school, where she was the resident nurse in the 20-bed infirmary. It was there I spent a month. At first, I stayed in her quarters adjoining the infirmary, but gradually, as I grew stronger and became increasingly bored, I was permitted upstairs into the sick bay. To the self-conscious boys in striped pajamas, I was an object of great curiosity because I was an American girl – but probably also because I made them homesick

for their families and sisters. I made the rounds of those closest to my age, perching on the edges of their beds in turn, talking or playing cards and board games. Perhaps we sang, too.

One night a storm dumped two feet of snow outdoors, which beckoned irresistibly in the morning sun. A couple of boys, who must have been almost well, and I clamored to be allowed outdoors. Eventually, Cousin Agnes gave in. Thoroughly bundled up, we were soon gleefully sinking into the white deep up to our thighs. Great piles of snow were pushed and rolled to construct forts, and we pelted each other in mock battles. Finally, we were ordered indoors. Flushed and exhilarated, with numb fingers and toes, we came in to dry and warm up over hot chocolate. But in the evening, when I had my bath, Cousin Agnes discovered that my incision had opened slightly from all the outdoor activity, and I was promptly confined to my own bed in her quarters. My days with the boys in the infirmary had ended. Later, I sometimes wondered how Madeline might have convalesced.

Eventually, my incision healed, and I returned to my aunts and sister in Copenhagen, and to my school, from which I had been absent for more than a month. My aunts had been writing my parents bright, upbeat letters in which they reported on Mette's activities – outings to the theater, dance class, visits with cousins, schoolwork, and cute sayings – all without any mention of me. Since mail was so slow in those days, they thus managed to lie about my condition by skillful omission, and their stalling techniques worked. Even so, it didn't take my parents long to suspect something wasn't quite right, but they got a full report only after I had completely recovered.

Though my parents read many stories and books to my sister and me when we were growing up, I only discovered the story of Madeline when I began to read to my own children. It always brings back my own experience – not exactly like that of Madeline, but not unlike it, either. So . . .

*Good night, little girls!
Thank the Lord you are well,
And now go to sleep,
Said Miss Clavel.
And she turned out the light
And closed the door –
And that's all there is –
There isn't any more.*

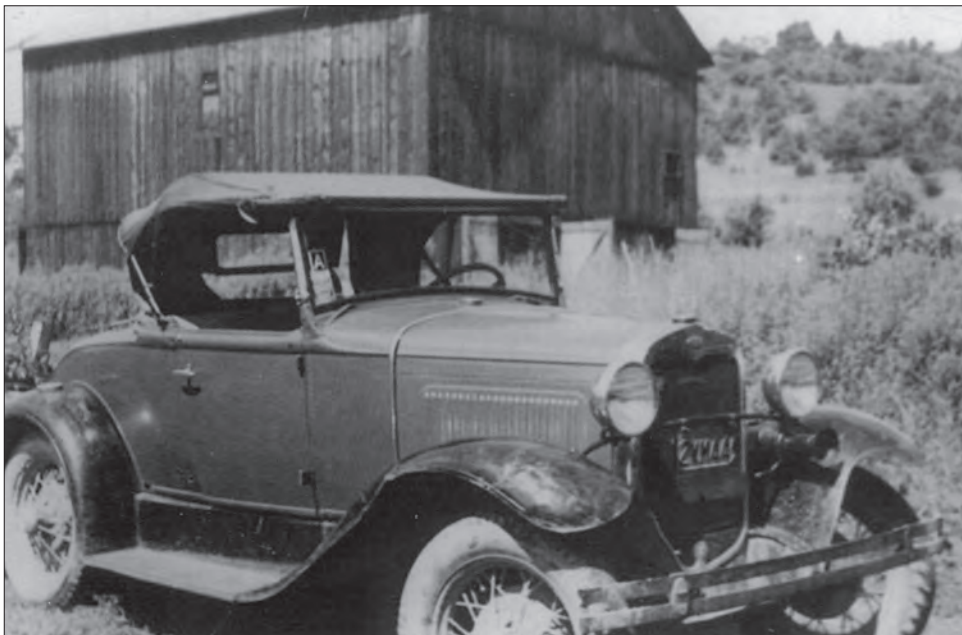
A Day at the Farm

By Stephen Kerr

I'm in the rolling hills of Northwestern Pennsylvania where I grew up. It's a perfect midsummer day in 1944. I'm lying on my back in the middle of the meadow that slopes down from the front of the old farmhouse where we spend every summer. The house is a big square gray weathered clapboard structure, built in the 1860s by my great-grandfather. After he died, my mother bought the property from the other heirs, and it's been my family's summer retreat since the late 1920s.

The house is solid and square and welcoming, with windows that look like eyes and a front porch that overlooks the grassy spot where I'm lying. I look up at the clear blue sky and watch the shape-shifting clouds as they roll across above me. I'm content and safe. The grass in the meadow is freshly cut, and I breathe in the sweet smells that surround me – the odors of clover blossoms, hay, and the earth underneath me. I close my eyes and listen to the sounds of the bees gathering pollen and the birds chattering in the big maple and oak trees that line the road leading up to the house.

We've just returned from a morning shopping trip with my mother to the small town near us in the old Model A Ford coupe that we keep at the farm. At some point, it's been repainted an ugly shade of bright green with black fenders, and we've nicknamed it "The Green Hornet" after the popular comic book character.



"The Green Hornet"

It has a folding open-air "rumble" seat in the back, and there's always a fight among us five kids to see who gets to ride back there, so Mother usually has to step in and settle things. It's supposedly a roadster, but we never put the top down

because we're afraid it will crumble when we try to put it up again.

I'm the youngest of the five children, and behind me, near the farmhouse, I can hear my three brothers and my sister talking and arguing as they weed the garden near the back door. From the kitchen I can hear the sounds of my mother and grandmother preparing lunch. We have no electricity or running water, or indoor plumbing, but we do have a telephone – the old-fashioned kind that hangs on the wall in a wood cabinet and has a crank to get the operator's attention when you want to make a call.

All the cooking is done on an ancient hulking black iron coal stove that dominates the large kitchen. My mother struggles and battles with the stove, but for my grandmother it is an old friend, and she understands how to work with it and coax it to produce marvelous things. The Second World War is a distant event; our only reminders of it are the occasional sirens from the small town near us when they schedule practice air raid alerts.

It's late in the morning, and soon I hear my mother calling me, "Stevie, Stevie – where are you? It's time for lunch." I reluctantly pull myself up from my nest and walk up the hill to join my siblings as we rush into the kitchen through the back door and gather around the big wooden table in the middle of the kitchen where we share all of our meals. There's much laughter and joking as we eat a hearty lunch of sandwiches on homemade bread, applesauce, potato salad, and lemonade.

Today is Wednesday, which is a special day because it means that our father will be arriving in the afternoon for his midweek visit. We have a weekly ritual we follow to greet him. After lunch, the five of us walk down the farm lane and follow the winding dirt road that leads to the paved highway about a mile away. There we reach a spot on the road where we can look down over the high hill



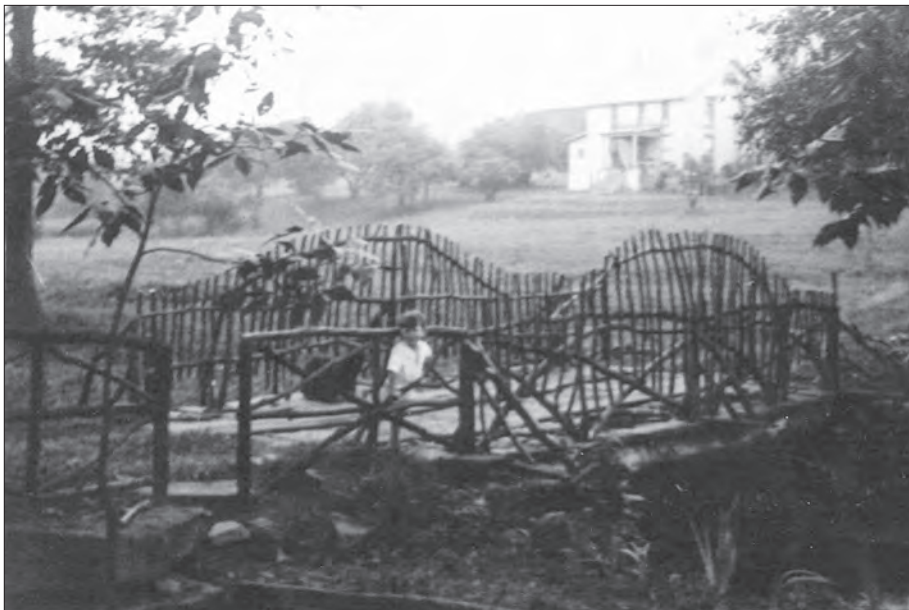
The Kerr kids on the front steps of the family farmhouse in 1944, with Cousin Sally in the middle. The author is in front at the right.

that borders the Allegheny River and see the bridge down below that crosses it. We know that we'll be able to see our father's car when it crosses the bridge.

"I see him," somebody yells, and sure enough, there is our blue Dodge sedan crossing the bridge. The excitement builds, and a few minutes later the car reaches the top of the hill, and we surround it as it comes to a stop. After we all get our chance to say hello, we get a special treat. We're allowed to stand on the running boards as Dad drives, very slowly, the rest of the way back to the farmhouse.

After a family dinner outdoors on the big picnic table under the trees, we play badminton or croquet or horseshoes while our parents and Grandma Kiskaddon sit in chairs on the back lawn and talk and relax. As the sun sets, we move into the back parlor in the farmhouse. We rarely use the front parlor. It's reserved for special occasions. The only light is provided by the big shaded kerosene Aladdin lamps. My brother Jim and sister Jane play swing band records on the old wind-up Victrola and practice the latest jitterbug steps, while the rest of us read or play board games on the center table. After an hour or so, it's time to head upstairs to bed. My sister Jane and Grandma have their own bedrooms. My three brothers share another room, and, as the youngest, I get to sleep in my parents' room on a trundle bed that pulls out from under theirs.

My mother listens as I say my prayers, then I watch from my bed as my father kisses my mother good night and gives her a tender pat on her rear end. Then he turns down the lamp, and we all settle under our covers. I can hear the mur-



The author's brother Jim on the bridge at the family farm in 1935.

All photographs courtesy of the author

mur of voices from the other bedrooms as everyone settles down for the night, the rustle of the wind in the trees, the distant cry of a hoot owl, and the chirping of crickets outside. All is well in the world, and I quickly drift off to sleep on my feather bed, as I hear my father starting to snore softly.

Thoughts as I Approach My 97th Birthday

By John Matsushima

I am going to be 97 in February and have some mixed feelings about arriving at that milestone. On the one hand, I'm pleased that I'm fortunate enough to be on the threshold of that marker, as I'm the only one in my family who will have attained that advanced age. On the other hand, I am feeling sad and a bit guilty that I will have surpassed all of my loved ones in longevity. My father, sister, wife, and son all passed due to illness before approaching their anticipated life spans, while my mother was the longest lived, in that she was just two months short of 95 when she passed away.

All those members of my family endured months and years of pain and suffering before their "release." I was able to arrange the necessary care for them and visited each with frequency. They passed peacefully, and I was relieved that their pain and suffering had finally come to an end.

My mother had a particularly extended and difficult life, as she needed to be in a nursing home for several years. Born in Japan, she had emigrated to the United States in 1920 with her husband and had made an acceptable adjustment to her new circumstances. However, she had never fully mastered the English language, which meant that the acceptance of the need for a nursing home and her subsequent adaptation to those circumstances were difficult for her. Widowed for years and affected by dementia, she was confused by the doctor's recommendations, although I did my best in broken Japanese to help her comprehend the doctor's explanations.

Although she never did fully understand why a nursing home was necessary for her, she did defer to the doctor's advice and relied on my frequent visits to her new setting. She often confused me with my father, though, wondering why I didn't wear "my" customary fedora to and from my visits to the nursing home. The aides were helpful on the occasions when she became lost in the halls.

My mother's Christian background (her father had established one of the first Christian secondary schools in Japan) proved to be helpful upon her entrance into the nursing home. As a youngster, she had been educated in her father's school, where she had learned to play Protestant hymns on the piano. After emigrating to the United States, she had been the choir director at the Jap-

anese Protestant church she had attended in Seattle and later in Cleveland. This served her well in the nursing home as she sometimes spontaneously played hymns on the piano there – and fellow residents came to group around and join in singing familiar hymns in English, while my mother sang along with them in a mixture of Japanese and English.

My wife Grace, in addition to the chronic illnesses that resulted in the doctor's decision that she needed to be cared for in a nursing home, also developed dementia that caused her much distress. On some evenings, for example, she had implored me to go out and search for her mother. "Mother's gone to the market again – but it's dark and she hasn't come home, so please go out and look for her." I would gently remind her that her mother had passed away years before, but Grace would still go out to the back porch and call, "Mother! Mother-r-r!" And dissolve into tears when there was no response.

On another occasion, when I had accompanied her to her psychiatrist's office, and he had assured her that I (her husband) was trying to help her, Grace pointedly told the doctor, "That man isn't John! I've been married to John for over 40 years, and that man isn't my husband!" The doctor responded, "We're all trying to help you," but his assurance didn't seem to settle her annoyance at his "misidentification" of me. Eventually, after receiving medication, my wife returned to a semblance of her usual self, but she continued to depend on my visits to retain her orientation. I visited her daily for the years that she was in the nursing home, just as I had done with my mother in earlier years.

I must have been a familiar figure to medical personnel in the Cleveland area, as I had consistently visited my father and my son during their frequent and prolonged stays in hospitals (both had repeated episodes of cancer during their final years). In fact, one of the nurses who had been a staff member in my mother's nursing home recognized me when I visited my wife sometime later in her nursing home. Apparently, that nurse had coincidentally changed her employment site and warmly greeted me at my wife's nursing home.

As I look back at the years I've spent in daily visits to hospitals and nursing homes, I marvel at the circumstances that permitted me to meet those responsibilities throughout my adulthood. The frequency of those visits kept me current on how my loved ones were faring and were most helpful when advocacy on their behalf became necessary.

I wonder why I have been spared the fate that overtook all of my immediate

family. Some years following my retirement, I moved to Kendal at Oberlin. I've had cancer and do have physical issues now, including limited mobility, but I'm reasonably intact with regard to my mental processes, and doctors assure me that I am in good health for one my age.

I've been preparing myself for my own demise for years since my retirement more than two decades ago. I think of my preparations as common sense, as I've experienced the confusion and pressure accompanying the need to settle my family members' personal affairs after their deaths. My will is in place, my cremation has been paid for, I have a family plot where I will join my wife and son when my time comes, and I have funds in a joint account with a trusted friend to pay associated expenses.

I made these anticipatory arrangements based on past experience. I do not want any surviving relatives to be inconvenienced beyond what may be absolutely unavoidable. As sensible as these steps appear to me, I also feel that a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy is taking place – that I am somehow bringing on the final step that I seem to have evaded via an accident of genetics and good fortune.

Why of all my immediate family am I on the threshold of attaining my 97th year? Why should I have that privilege? What have I done to deserve that status? On the other hand, where is it written that I will reach my 97th birthday? I've become progressively more uneasy and anxious as that milestone has approached. But there is no reason why I should die immediately before or after my 97th birthday, so that "premonition" is likely my pessimistic nature more than an omen.

I recall a picture of my mother on her return trip to Japan years after her retirement and widowhood. It was a snapshot of her coming ashore from the ship, and the smile on her face was the broadest and most joyful I had ever seen. After all, it had been at least 50 years since she had left Japan for the United States as a young bride, and this was the first time she was returning to be reunited with her family there. I felt so happy for her!

I don't know when my maternal grandmother died, but even if it was shortly after my mother's visit to Japan, that would still mean my grandmother must have been about 100 years of age, as my mother was into her 80s when she returned to Japan. The likeliest explanation for my longevity is that my grandmother's genes may be responsible for my mother's long life as well as my own.

My father died at age 67 after a very difficult life. A less than welcome Japanese immigrant to the United States, he first found employment as a desk clerk in a Japanese-owned hotel. When the hotel went bankrupt during the depression of the 1930s, he found employment as a shipping clerk/janitor in a Caucasian men's haberdashery until that business also went bankrupt. He then took a week's lessons operating a pressing machine in a friend's dry cleaning shop and opened his own store – "Joe's Cleaners." Largely due to my father's initiative and determination, our family survived the long economic depression. For me, he was a lifelong model of courage and steadfastness.

My parents, as must be true for all of us, encountered many disappointments as well as satisfactions over their lifetimes – perhaps more of the former. At times, they must have wished they had remained in their homeland. Who knows what might have happened in their lives had they not left Japan? My father might well have been forcibly sent to Manchuria after Japan's conquest of that country in the 1930s, as happened to his brother, who did not survive the harsh living conditions there. And my mother might not have survived World War II if she had stayed in Japan. She would have suffered deprivation and near-starvation as her siblings did.

Aside from the question of my longevity, I'm much aware that I've had my chances and enjoyed some measure of personal and professional success. Whatever awaits me in the days to come, I've certainly been fortunate in having been granted ample time and opportunities. Most of all, I'm pleased that my father would have nodded his approval that I had met my family responsibilities, as he had done in providing for us throughout his life.

* * * * *

A Quotable Quote

"Life is the first gift, love is the second, understanding the third."

– Marge Piercy, American activist and writer,
from *Gone to Soldiers*, 2016



St. Émilion vineyard in Bordeaux.

Photograph by David Lytle via Wikimedia

How to Drink a Bottle of Wine

By A. V. Shirk

[Editor's note: Part One of this series was published in the Spring 2022 issue of Eureka!, Part Two in the Fall 2022 issue, and Part Three in the Winter 2023 issue.]

Part Four: What are some of the more interesting wine-producing regions? Let's start with France. Let's start with Bordeaux.

Bordeaux is one of the oldest, and certainly one of the most prestigious, wine-producing areas in the world. The earliest reference to wine production in Bordeaux is dated 379 CE, but wine production was well established in that area by then. More of the world's great wines come from Bordeaux than anywhere else in the world. But these famous wines are only about five percent of Bordeaux's enormous production of some five and a half million hectoliters a year (one hl is 100 liters; this is a lot of wine). But much of that wine is of variable quality, so the word "Bordeaux" alone on a wine label is a poor guide

to how much you are likely to enjoy drinking that wine.

In 1855, there was an exhibition of French agricultural and industrial products, which included a display of wines from Bordeaux. For this, Emperor Napoleon III wanted the Bordeaux brokers to prepare a ranking of the best Bordeaux wines, “possibly so that dignitaries there should effectively know what to be impressed by.” The brokers drew up a complex, five-tier classification of the most prestigious producers, plus rankings of “lesser” wines. However complicated the resulting list may be (and there are those who consider it ridiculously complicated), the brokers’ approach to compiling the list was refreshingly straightforward. They based the classification solely on the market price of the wines. Things such as how good the wine tasted were never considered. If the wine fetched a better price, it was a better wine. Period. There were four top-ranked wines, called First Growth Estates (*Premiers Crus*):

- Château Lafite Rothschild
- Château Latour
- Château Margaux
- Château Haut-Brion

Château Haut-Brion has the distinction of being mentioned in Pepys’ Diary. On Friday, April 10, 1663, he wrote, “Off . . . to the Royall Oak Tavern, in Lumbard Street, . . . and here drank a sort of French wine, called Ho Bryan, that hath a good and most particular taste that I never met with.”

These First Growths were followed by a succession of Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Growths. There is a lot more, but it involves the sort of detail of interest primarily to wine professionals who specialize in Bordeaux, and really dedicated wine connoisseurs.

Now, this classification may have made some sense in 1855, but things have changed in the last 169 years. Some classified properties don’t produce wine that is as good as it used to be. Some produce wine that is better. And some properties no longer produce wine at all, or no longer even exist. But the 1855 classification ignores such things. It has made only one change. In 1973, Château Mouton-Rothschild was elevated from Second Growth to First Growth.

But, one thing that has not changed, of course, is the high prices that the four – now five – First Growth wines fetch. Since they are officially the “best” wines of Bordeaux, they almost always bring in more money than the others. They do not, however, always make better wine than the others. The great

wine expert Hugh Johnson once even went so far as to criticize Château Lafite for sometimes having “produced a disappointing product from such a sublime estate.” (That was almost a half century ago, and I think Lafite has shaped up since then.) Although I have tasted all of the First Growth Bordeaux at one time or another, I have never bought one and paid for it out of my own pocket. They are simply overpriced. A bottle of Château Lafite Rothschild (if you can find one) may set you back \$1,000. But you can get a bottle of Château Pichon Lalande, a magnificent Second Growth, for a couple of hundred dollars or so (presuming, of course, that you think spending a couple of hundred dollars or so for a bottle of wine is a good idea).

Bordeaux red wines are a blend from several different grapes, the most famous of which is Cabernet Sauvignon – a fact that I strongly suspect has a lot to do with Cabernet Sauvignon wines being produced in so many other places around the world. The blend varies from producer to producer, but it is usually a lot of Cabernet Sauvignon, some Merlot, and maybe some Cabernet Franc. At its best (and Bordeaux is by no means always at its best), red Bordeaux has a delicacy and finesse with a slightly dry fruitiness and an aroma that reminds some people of graphite or freshly sharpened pencils.

Great Bordeaux wine is magnificent. It also ages better than any other dry table wine I have ever known. It develops a wonderful depth and complexity over the years. My wife Debbie and I were married in 1978, which was a great year for Bordeaux. So we bought a case of 1978 Château Léoville-Las Cases as our anniversary wine. (We paid \$16 a bottle, about \$50 a bottle today. Wine prices were more reasonable back then.) We originally intended to open the first bottle on our 10th wedding anniversary. But we kept hearing that the wine was still young, so we waited until our 15th anniversary. It was wonderful! We opened a bottle each year on our anniversary, and they kept getting better and better. When we opened the last bottle, it was 27 years old, and it was superb. (The discerning reader will realize that when I use words like magnificent, wonderful, and superb, I am describing my reaction to the wine – not necessarily the reader’s.)

Bordeaux also produces white wine. It is not as well-known as the red, and there is less of it. It is a light wine, to be drunk young. I like white Bordeaux and usually have a few bottles on hand. There is also an absolutely magnificent, luscious dessert wine produced in Bordeaux. Maybe we’ll get around to that later.

Next, we’ll take our tour of French wine regions to Burgundy.

What's in a Name?

By Carol Conti-Entin

We met the day she was moving into a single room on the hospice floor of a nursing home. I'm not allowed to tell you her actual name: even before HIPAA became law, hospice volunteers were prohibited from divulging the identities of the people they visited. Lest I let anything slip, I took to inventing pseudonyms that expressed admiration for the patients assigned to me.

This particular woman had brought along three-ring binders overflowing with poems and essays she had penned. Some of her excellent paintings soon graced the walls. One daughter told me that they played together in a suburban orchestra. When I asked if I might call her Mrs. Gifted, she was delighted.

We'd been paired because the hospice team knew that I had editing experience and desktop-publishing skills. Hospice patients who get busy creating legacies tend to outlive their "six months or less" prognoses. Not only did Mrs. Gifted want to make a book, but her children craved a keepsake of their beloved mother that they could share with her grandchildren and large circle of friends.

Our work together meant that I visited far more often than was customary. I saw how her children, despite juggling parenting tasks and demanding careers, still tried valiantly to fulfill Mrs. Gifted's wish that she never be left alone.

I didn't yet know the half of it.

Their father (I'll call him Mr. Newman) was living in a different nursing home some distance away. During midlife, he had divorced Mrs. Gifted, and she had resumed using her natal name. Her children knew that she adamantly did not want her ex under the same roof. But after months of scrambling to meet both parents' needs, they were sufficiently exhausted to risk Mrs. Gifted's wrath. They moved their father into a room on the floor above their mother's. Then they endured her guilt-inducing glares.

One day, Mr. Newman wandered into Mrs. Gifted's room while I was there. I expected fireworks, but the conversation was civil. Her face even betrayed a hint of pleasure at his attention. After he left, I gently asked Mrs. Gifted why she had let him stay. She said she felt sorry for him.

Mr. Newman's visits became frequent. One day, he bragged about how envious

his buddies had been when he began asking her out, because “she used to be a real beauty.” I knew that Mrs. Gifted, ravaged by cancer, mourned the loss of her body’s former attractiveness. Resisting the urge to give him a surreptitious kick, I said, “She’s beautiful now. It’s a different kind of beauty.”

My words had no discernible effect. A few days later, Mr. Newman repeated his boast about Mrs. Gifted’s bygone desirability. I again said, “She’s beautiful now. It’s a different kind of beauty.” *Mirabile dictu*, he began to see her anew.

Mrs. Gifted soon became too weak to feed herself. Her will to live, however, was undiminished. She gazed longingly at her food tray. We hospice volunteers, even the three retired registered nurses, were forbidden to feed patients. The nursing home’s aides, meanwhile, were frazzled from all their other duties. Family members could, of course, feed their loved ones. Mr. Newman was there. Could he be taught to do so safely? It seemed the only option.

When I broached the subject, he was more than willing – he was eager. I had to remind him often not to attempt to insert another *small* spoonful until Mrs. Gifted indicated her readiness by opening her mouth wide. Whenever she did so, it was with the expectancy of a gaping nestling. Her pleasure in being fed by him, and his skill at serving each morsel with perfect timing, grew during subsequent meals.

The printed program at Mrs. Gifted’s funeral showed her surname as Newman. When I asked her family about that afterwards, I learned that the day before she died, she told the daughter at her bedside that she wanted to retake her married name. As excited as her children had been to receive and distribute copies of the book that contained their beloved mother’s best writing and artwork, they were ecstatic that their family had once again become whole.

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A Quotable Quote

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is ‘What are you doing for others?’”

– Martin Luther King, Jr., American minister and civil rights activist, 1929-1968

Memories from the Two Germanys

By Nancy MacRae

It was 1964. As the newly married wife of a newly assigned vice consul at the U.S. Consulate in Bremen, Germany, I was very aware of the political hotspot that was Berlin. The Wall went up in 1961, and it was not just Berlin that the Russians had bisected; it had split the country.

As Mayor of Berlin, Willy Brandt wanted to keep the world's attention on his city, so he created a series of flights into Berlin. There was no other way to get there, of course. In mid-December, diplomatic wives received invitations to fly to Berlin for a day, and of course we went. We had lunch hosted by Frau Brandt and then went on a tour of the free sector of the city (which had been occupied by Great Britain and the U.S.). At the Brandenburg Gate, I gazed in horror at the monstrosity of guards, brick, barbed wire, and mine field near the gate, and the shabby buildings on the other side. I thought of the people who had died trying to escape.

Then we all went Christmas shopping at the elegant stores along the famous avenue Unter den Linden. I still have Christmas ornaments I bought that day.

The two parts of Germany were reunited in 1989; I vividly remember the news clips of people knocking the Berlin Wall down with their bare hands. My husband and I returned to Germany sometime in the '90s for the wedding of the daughter of German friends. We were staying near Frankfurt and were curious about what crossing the barrier into the former East Germany would be like. We decided to visit Erfurt, a city noted for its cathedral and the locations where Martin Luther lived and worked.

The border, of course, no longer existed. Erfurt was abuzz with construction cranes, modernizing and repairing buildings. There were clearly many residents getting used to new things: a restaurant refused to honor our Deutschmark travelers checks but happily took our American Express card.

We were eager to visit the Erfurt Cathedral, first built in 742, rebuilt over the ages, and where Martin Luther was ordained as a priest in 1507. When we knocked on the door of the cathedral, a grumpy man opened the door and said the place was closed, but he warmly welcomed us when we said we were Americans (speaking to him in German). He was the organist and had been

given permission to perform in the United States several times. He was practicing, but he interrupted his session to give us a tour of the famous cathedral.

Eventually, he needed to return to his work. To my shock, he invited me to turn the pages while he continued to practice. I was terrified. He was playing one of Bach's most beautiful and famous fugues. What a thrill it was to be seated in that great cathedral next to one of the world's best organists and to follow his nods to turn the page. And I didn't mess up.

* * * * *

The Old Man **By Tom Morgan**

The young boy stands outside the garden apartment window
listening, watching, imitating the old man's movements.

Made of a cigar box, the five-year-old's
home-made one-string fiddle makes no sound.

The boy's mother learns of this from the old man.

Soon thereafter, the boy begins violin lessons with the old man.

Eighty years later, the boy is now the age of the old man.

He recalls the first tune learned –
the "Barcarolle" from *The Tales of Hoffman*.

Although inconstant in his study of the instrument,
he is grateful to the old man for bringing the joy of music to his life.



Good Neighbor Sam

By William R. Siebenschuh

The odd-looking object in the photo is a security robot. I took its picture on a recent trip to Crocker Park, where, as I left Barnes & Noble and began to walk toward Dick's, I spotted it heading my way. Smoothly avoiding objects in its path, it glided by without a sound and continued on what appeared to be its appointed rounds. Shoppers smiled, and a few exchanged glances as it passed, but in general people took surprisingly little notice.

When I got back to Kendal, I found an online article in the *Plain Dealer* and learned that the security robot I had just seen is a relatively new feature at Crocker Park and is called S.A.M., an acronym that stands for "Secret Agent Man." As the article explains, S.A.M. has "a 360-degree view, [which helps him

keep an eye out] for theft, car accidents, fires, vandalism, and more. He reads license plates and has thermal-imaging capabilities, so he can distinguish between mom walking her kids and a stoic mannequin in a window." According to the manufacturer, Knightscope, S.A.M. operates "24/7/365, successfully patrols parking lots and structures, continues monitoring in adverse conditions," and, like all of Knightscope's robots, is "always on time, always on best behavior, and follows orders consistently."

My reaction to S.A.M. surprised me. As a rule, I am not a fan of new technology, and that's putting it mildly. At my age, my first response to anything that's digital or mechanical or uses Artificial Intelligence is usually defensive hostility that conceals worries that it's just one more thing I probably won't understand and can't learn to use. For some reason, S.A.M. didn't trigger those kinds of reactions, and so, my curiosity aroused, I decided to find out more about robots in general.

A visit to Wikipedia revealed that the word "robot" is relatively new, first coined in 1950. The idea of a machine that functions automatically and can replicate human, or animal, behavior is much older. According to an article titled "A Few Facts about Robots that are Interesting to Know," the first robot was developed in the 5th century BC by a Greek scientist named Archytas, who designed a bird with a wooden body and wings powered by steam. According to *The History of Robots*, in Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks from the 15th century there are detailed drawings of a mechanical knight in armor that could sit up, wave its arms, and move its jaw. A variety of what were then called "automata" were developed in the 18th and 19th centuries, but the first digitally operated and programmable robot was invented by George Devol in 1954 and called the Unimate, which, according to the article, "later laid the foundations of the modern robotics industry." Pretty interesting, I thought, but what interested me even more was what I learned about the role played by robots in popular culture in the 20th and 21st centuries.

It turns out that fictional robots have been part of our imaginative lives for nearly a century. According to an article titled *The 100 Best Movie Robots of All Time*, beginning in films in the 1930s and on early television, there is a direct line of robot monsters, from Flash Gordon's iron mechanical men called "the Annihilators" (1936) to Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator (1984). With names like "Ro-Man," "Venusians," and "Tobor the Great" (robot spelled backward), they have been terrorizing cities, frightening helpless heroines, and even threatening the Earth itself for decades. There are also good, even

loveable, imaginary robots, as I learned in a piece titled *20 Cartoon Robots: A Toast to Our Favorites*. These turned out to be mechanical beings with attractive human characteristics, personality quirks, and problems just like ours – including Ron the robot boy, who struggles to fit in with other robots, and Astro Boy, a beloved Anime cartoon character with both human characteristics and superpowers. And who can forget the Jetson’s talkative mechanical maid Rosie or R2-D2 and C-3PO from *Star Wars*?

What’s happening now, though, is something different. Real robots who are not fictional characters are starting to become part of our daily lives, and I don’t mean things like Roombas, Siri, or the voice in our GPS. These are independent mechanical creatures with human characteristics that are beginning to live, act, and play increasingly complex roles in the world we now share. There’s S.A.M., of course, and a counterpart made by the same company that is getting a tryout patrolling Times Square and selected subway stations in New York City. But it’s not just S.A.M.s. As an online article in *Robotics and Automation News* announced recently,

Five humanoid “spokesbots” will assist guests at the Sphere concert venue at the Venetian Resort in Las Vegas. The Aura robots will communicate with visitors, using human-like facial expressions and mobility when answering queries. The devices reportedly will be able to “answer complex questions about the groundbreaking engineering, layers of custom-designed technology, and the creative mission at the core of the venue,” as well as provide directions and additional information on performances. David Dibble with Sphere Entertainment subsidiary MSG Ventures said the Aura robots can recognize individual humans, and artificial intelligence will help them learn through their interactions with people.

I’ve seen pictures, and while it’s clear these “spokesbots” are machines, they have human shapes and features. How realistic they’re going to be in ten years’ time is anybody’s guess. It took only 66 years to make the jump from the Wright Brothers’ first flight at Kitty Hawk in 1903 to Neil Armstrong’s walk on the moon in 1969.

I’m not a deep thinker. Anyone who knows me will tell you that. But I will hazard a guess that, given the history of technology and the pace of progress, before you know it we’re all going to be living side by side with robots that look and act considerably more human than the Las Vegas spokesbots, and we

will be routinely interacting with them. Besides performing mechanical tasks, they'll be able to talk using complex sentences, answer a broad spectrum of questions, provide information, think, learn from experience, maybe even have opinions and personalities, and we're going to have to learn to coexist with them. What that's going to mean in practice is anybody's guess.

I don't think I'd want to find a robot on the other side of the desk if my taxes were being audited. "License and registration please" is not a sentence I'd like to hear from a mechanical creature. I don't know about dentistbots, either, and I'm sure everyone would have their own favorite examples. But I don't think that's the whole story. I can already imagine a robot like S.A.M. putt-putting around the perimeter here at Kendal, charged with annoying the geese, reporting coyote sightings, and generally keeping an eye out for residents in trouble. I can imagine them delivering meals and packages to residents confined to their cottages and answering simple questions they would be programmed to respond to.

If that happens, who knows what else is coming? Consider the possibility of a scenario like the following:

You start interacting with a robot you see at Kendal every day. It talks to you. You talk to it. It remembers what you talked about during previous visits. You find yourself greeting one another and making small talk. It asks about your day. You answer and start asking about its day, and it tells you. After a while, it starts giving advice and constructive criticism. I'm not kidding. I just read an article about bots attending video conferencing sessions and critiquing the speakers. "The AI," the article says, ". . . acts as a kind of virtual Miss Manners, reminding people to share the mic and to modulate their speaking voice."

Future bots will surely be capable of storing and remembering previous conversations. They'll archive things they hear you say about your family and may feel free to remind you to send your grown daughter a birthday card or maybe they'll ask why you didn't go to the last KORA Council meeting. It's entirely possible you'll make friends with one. Someday you may even buy a six-pack and a new aerosol spray can of WD-40 for your mechanical buddy and invite it to watch a Browns game with you.

So far, so good, but what happens if you discover that, for completely rational and statistically driven reasons, your robot buddy is a Steelers fan?

Don't say I didn't warn you.

A short story by Maxine Houck

Myrna leaned back into the warm sunshine of her cozy, imagined bubble and a Balcony of Betterment, a Mezzanine of Muchness, and had landed on Wall of Infamy, which she now could not shake from her brain.

So Myrna avoided talking about it, smiled a sweet smile, and occasionally remembered that the award was actually the Gallery of Success. Small brass plates hung from hooks on a wooden plaque at the edge of the atrium leading to the cafeteria, and today Chris's little plate would join the 42 others to bring honor to his clan – her daughter Melanie and his mother Cornelia – and the other five recipients. But for right now, Myrna settled smiling, semi-oblivious, into her own small cocoon. It was 10:10 a.m., and she felt that she had already put in a full day's work.

In truth, the work had begun the evening before when Chris and Melanie had flown in from Denver to spend the next two nights with her, just like old times. They had had a drink and begun to discuss the next day's procedures. Her son-in-law became fixated on the idea that they must leave the house at 8:15 the next morning because rehearsal began between 8:30 and 9:00 (he forgot exactly, but he'd check), and he couldn't be late. Couldn't! Her daughter chimed in, "I'm going to set my alarm for 7:15, and you should too, Mother. You know how you are."

Myrna drew her line in the sand. She hated getting up early and had vowed after retirement she'd not do it again unless lives were at stake. "7:30!" she'd said, bargaining for her extra minutes. And all had gone to bed – skeptically.

At 7:30 that morning – to prove the point – Myrna had half-heartedly dragged herself from bed, showered and dressed, let the dogs out and back in, fed them, and sat somewhat smugly waiting to go at 8:15. And sat. And waited.

At 8:20, she called, "Are you guys almost ready?" "Almost," Melanie shouted from the bathroom. "Chris, have you seen my eye liner?" At two minutes before 8:30, Myrna noted, they pulled out of the driveway. When Chris said that it was at least a half hour to the school and he hoped they wouldn't be too late, she said nothing.

Conversation was minimal, silences long. "So," said Myrna eventually, "you're expected to make some kind of speech, aren't you? What are you going to say?" The minute the answer began, she knew she should not have bothered him with the question. "Well," said Chris, "we've been given three minutes to

accept our nominations. I thought I'd mention how much I owed to my mom and how much she'd sacrificed after my dad just picked up and left, and how she and Coach Olmstead had faith in me and encouraged me so that I went on to college and then med school."

"Sounds good," said Myrna flatly. As a former speech teacher, she knew that now was not the time to offer suggestions that might have him craft a more tactful and effective speech than the one he had outlined, with its generalities that did not convey his success nor his deep emotions about his family. She also knew it was too late to do anything but shake what confidence he had for this great moment back on his home turf. Silence filled the time to the school.

Then, adding insult to injury, they pulled into the school's visitors parking lot and found only two other cars there. "I wonder where everyone else is?" said Chris. "I forgot to check the letter, but I swear it said between 8:30 and 9:00, and it's now ten of. I guess I ought to go see what's going on." He hustled into the building. Five minutes later he was back. "The letter said 9:00 to 9:30, but that was to make sure everyone was here by 9:30 so that they could get everyone organized for basic instructions by ten of ten."

No one in the car liked waiting, so they decided to go for a quick coffee at Starbuck's. Distracted and a bit sheepish, Chris said he'd treat all of them and managed his role as go-between as best he could with every variation of coffee and tea imaginable. Then he decided, with group input, to add pastries. By the time it was all doled out, they had about ten real minutes to eat and drink in order to get back to the school at the appointed hour.

This time there were plenty of cars in the parking lot and a stream of people entering the school's atrium. The boys of the National Honor Society, mannerly and spit-polished, welcomed them, seated them at a small table, and took orders for – coffee and tea – offering them their choice of pastries from a well-laden table. Sloshing, Myrna got her cheese and apricot danishes and sat small-talking with Chris and Melanie.

After one bite, which Myrna hurried to chew so she wouldn't spit crumbs, Cornelia entered, and Chris rushed to usher her to the table. Cornelia – the other-mother – and Myrna had conversed over the years, mainly in platitudes, all of which they now hastily employed. The two women liked each other well enough, but after talk of their offspring and education systems, in which they both had earned their living, they had never had too much to say to each other. They both habitually drifted as quickly and politely as possible to other areas and other people.

Bored with small talk, Chris and Melanie suddenly rushed off to greet his best friend and fellow honoree. "And then go right to the rehearsal," he informed both mothers, trying to disguise his sense of relief. The women traded a few more vapidities and were wondering how they, themselves, could move on when a plain-looking man eyed the vacant chair next to them and asked apologetically, "Do you mind if I sit down?"

"No, no, please do," both assured him, warmly encouraging him to take a seat, as if he were the most welcome person in the room, rather than the savior they had both been praying for. They tossed in a few details about their children and their pride in being there, and relapsed into vigorous smiles and nods to downplay their relief.

A little shyly, the unknown man began launching into his own story of how he happened to be there: his best friend and classmate at the very same school was also hanging in the Gallery of Success. He was so honored to know such a man, a Brigadier General no less, and the Brigadier had specifically asked him to come to the ceremony, although they hadn't had any contact for about 15 years and the Brigadier had a part in the program and he could hardly wait to see him after all these years. He wasn't much himself, just a plumber, so he was so pleased the General had even remembered him Myrna nodded politely, smiling and encouraging, for she rather liked the man. Her assessment of the yet-unseen Brigadier was rapidly fading into skepticism as she thought of one man's willing humility and what she guessed was the other's not totally deserved pride and confidence.

Myrna saw the man's face brighten as he eagerly slipped off his chair, extending his hand to greet someone. And there stood a stocky figure in perfectly creased khakis and spit-shined shoes, whipping a kepi off his head. Without a smile, the Brigadier shook the proffered hand with the touch of condescension that Myrna had anticipated. The nice man excused himself to her, allowing his happiness to cover his realization that he should introduce the two of them, but he had no idea who she was or what her name was. One final nod and

smile took care of the situation, and the General moved away, ignoring her, and returned to impressing his friend.

So now Myrna sat back in her little bubble of sunshine and warmth. Relaxed, she began to think about the need for a restroom. She also wondered what role the Brigadier was slated to play in today's ceremony. The P.A. came to life to urge everyone to gather immediately in the auditorium/gym. Myrna hoped she could find the auditorium, a ladies' room on the way, and Chris and Melanie. She followed the crowd down the hall to the right, found the girls' bathroom, and then continued her journey to the gym-with-stage. Melanie and Cornelia waved wildly from across the room so she couldn't miss them, and indicated the seats they had saved for the three of them. She dutifully took the one that bore the brunt of their gesticulations, and then the two of them walked away to greet still more old friends.

Myrna began reading her program. The choir would sing, the honorees and the presenters would take their places, and (ta-dah) the little Brigadier would lead the Pledge of Allegiance. Myrna snickered to herself. Now there was an important role, she thought, already anticipating the solemn droning.

The young, nervous faculty advisor for the National Honor Society stood up, surveyed his momentary realm, and began the proceedings. The choir sang creditably, even impressively. Myrna watched the nominators and the nominees walk to their wooden chairs, all ages, shapes, gaits, and outfits. A much older woman with a walker was carefully tended by a solicitous teen so that she could maneuver along the edge of the stage without fear. As soon as all were in place and seated, the General stood and took charge.

"Now," he said, "I want to point out to you that there are no commas before and after 'under God' in our Pledge of Allegiance. That's right! It's all one phrase: 'One-nation-under-God.' Our forefathers never meant to separate our great United States of America from God. We are one!"

Myrna was stunned. What an idiot, she thought. What a dodo. Not only doesn't he know anything about commas and what they can and cannot do, he has no sense of history. Joseph McCarthy was responsible for putting "under God" into the Pledge. His self-serving politics made everyone run in circles until there was no freedom and fairness left in U.S. democracy. And it was the Army that called his bluff and saved the USA, at least for that moment. And you think that you're advocating patriotism? You stupid S.O.B.

"Now, we're going to practice. No pauses. Say with me, 'One-nation-under-God-with-liberty-and-justice-for-all.' Remember, no pause. Here we go. 'One-

nation-under-God-with-liberty-and-justice-for-all.” He banged every word. “Again. Louder.” It was done. “Okay, I think you’re ready now to say our Pledge of Allegiance the way it’s supposed to be said.” He took his stance facing the flag, his careful creases facing the stars and stripes, saluting proudly as he raised his voice in fealty and praise one more time and led the somewhat abashed audience all the way through. Myrna silently moved her lips but clamped them shut, as she always did, at “under God.”

“Oy, vey,” she thought. “Oy, vey, and I’m not even Jewish!”

Chris was the first honoree. She listened not quite as carefully as she should have to his acceptance. The next five people fell into the slated intro-respond program that they were told to follow. Finally, the ceremony was over, and everyone was directed back to the atrium for the ritual moment of hanging little brass plates on little hooks, with a few ceremonial mutterings while the janitors took the time to set up the chairs and long paper-covered tables in the gym for the festive feast à la Northern Ohio. Myrna could hardly wait because then she could go home and stop critiquing. She could relax in the day’s newspaper reading and walking the dogs.

Smiling a bit, she started down the corridor, enjoying her solitude. And then she saw him, the little Brigadier, surrounded by a wall of plaques and dozens of little blue-haired grandmothers and ash-blond-dyed mothers, all dotting, all praising his courage, all chattering as he nodded and tried to be modestly deserving.

Myrna’s fury returned as she saw Melanie and Chris. She strode over to them spouting: “That idiot! He doesn’t know a damned thing about either commas or the Pledge. Doesn’t he realize the Pledge was invented to sell flags? There was a flag company that was probably going out of business because, after the Civil War, the bottom had gone out of the market and the owner hated to see his employees out of work. So the management decided what the company needed to do was to put a flag in every classroom in America, and the best way to do that was to get every kid in America pledging allegiance to that flag. When I was a kid, there was no ‘under God’ in the Pledge. McCarthy got that put in as people tried to avoid being called Communists. It breaks the scansion. The rhythm goes off. And then the Army finally stopped McCarthy. The ARMY! That this joker supposedly represents! I feel like going over there and telling him that!”

Myrna finally looked down at Melanie. “Oh, Mother,” the stricken Melanie said. “Please don’t.” Chris just stared.

Myrna was startled. This child had lived with her for 25 of her 46 years. Melanie and she had argued politics, drunk together, weathered crises and craziness. How could Melanie not know that she often ranted and threatened, but almost never followed through, never followed through that she could recall.

"Of course not," Myrna said, after a pause, relieved to see the fear and dread fade from Melanie's eyes. "I would never actually do that. Besides, I'd hate to crush all those silly, adoring old ladies."

So they ate the not-bad food and got their piece of very sweet, thickly frosted cake, especially thick where the yellow roses met "Congratulations," and drove home, relishing the triumphs of the day and praising everyone from choir to caterer. The little Brigadier was not mentioned.

That evening, they all went to the restaurant owned by Chris's best friend and fellow honoree. Myrna's two older sons joined them with wives and grandchildren. They were careful not to drink too much, needing to drive back to the East Side of Cleveland and get the grandchildren home at a reasonable time. Those grandchildren managed to be cute and well behaved, making their parents proud and keeping their aunts and uncles entertained. Cornelia and Myrna hid their boredom as best they could until finally the party broke up. Myrna's oldest son drove her home.

She let the dogs out and gave them their evening treats. Finally free of the encumbrance of other people, she poured herself a martini and read for a while before brushing her teeth and going to bed. Melanie and Chris weren't home yet, but they had a key, and she'd never worried over any of her kids, futile enterprises not being her bag.

Reviewing the day, however, was different. Myrna considered that a useful futile enterprise. And so she fell into her evening habit and began. She chuckled over the time fiasco and how she'd taken it in stride. And Chris's coffee and pastry atonement. She smiled over the nice man and hoped he'd give up being manipulated by the little Brigadier, although she thought he might not. She shook her head over her fury when the little General started in on comma rules and rehearsing the Pledge, not realizing that commas might actually strengthen God's case instead of diluting it.

Her eyes began to get heavy about half-way through her diatribe on the Pledge. She fell asleep just as Melanie was saying, "Oh, Mother, please don't."

A Modern-Day Rip Van Winkle

By Dwight Call

Slowly I wake up as if from a long sleep, not unlike the way Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle awoke in the early 19th century. Little by little, I become aware of my surroundings. Deeply puzzled, I stand up and find myself walking on a sidewalk on a bright and sunny late summer day. Where am I? How did I get here? What's happening?

I look around and recognize that I'm on Woodland Street in Oberlin, Ohio. I'm walking past dormitories on the east side of the street and in the direction of North Hall, where I lived my sophomore and junior years at Oberlin College. The Philips Physical Education Center and Knowlton Athletics Complex are straight ahead.

A small crowd has gathered in front of a house on the west side of the street that has a large porch. The crowd faces a man with the appearance and manner of an auctioneer. It's hard to tell, since I've only ever been to one auction in my life, and I'm trying to remember where that was and how I happened to be there. The auctioneer begins calling for bids on a six-foot-tall, four-panel Japanese screen, which looks very much like the one I once bought at a secondhand store in Dublin, Georgia, nearly 20 years ago. The auctioneer's cry is repetitive and includes both the current highest bid and the asking price in a rhythmic chant that excites the crowd.



In Dublin, I had found and bought my Japanese screen in a very upscale antique shop. Today's auction isn't upscale or very interesting for me until I see that screen. It doesn't appear to be very popular at the auction. Only one man has bid, and the auctioneer finally gives it to him for the \$50 he'd shouted out. Strangely, the auctioneer doesn't appear to have heard the higher bid of \$75 that I had shouted for the beautiful screen. That really irritates me. Ever since I lived in Japan when I was fresh out of college and taught English at the Yamanashi YMCA, I've loved lacquerware screens, but today my bid is ignored. It's almost as if I am not really here.

Opposite: Japanese screen. Right, top to bottom: Ghanaian chief's stool; pair of masks from Zimbabwe; triptych of an Andes scene in Peru; and a fez from Morocco.

The auctioneer begins to call for bids on various other contents of the house on Woodland Street. I walk closer, mesmerized, as if in a trance. The porch of the house looks familiar. Have I been here before? Many other lovely and surprisingly familiar pieces of furniture and other artifacts from around the world are also being auctioned off. I've traveled to many corners of the world and lived on six continents from half a year to much longer. I've usually returned home with some typical crafted object as a reminder of that time and place abroad. Most of the items I am seeing closely resemble items that have filled my own house over the years.

After the Japanese screen has been carried away, the auctioneer's assistant brings forward a miniature model of an Ashanti chief's wooden stool, with which I am familiar. If this were a regular-sized and official stool, only the chief would be allowed to sit on it. The Ashanti tribe, located in central Ghana, is the largest group in the region. I remember clearly visiting central Ghana more than 20 years ago, when I was acting Regional Director for Africa Programs for the School for International Training, headquartered in Brattleboro, Vermont. We were working at developing another "semester study abroad" site in Ghana. I also remember that in Ghana I had sat on and bought a small replica of such an official stool.

Next the auctioneer calls for bids on a pair of exquisitely carved African masks from Zimbabwe. If my foggy memory is correct, I once bought a similar pair of masks just inside the Zimbabwe border with Zambia, from a man who ap-



peared suddenly as my friend Florin and I were crossing an open area toward the train station. We'd just been mesmerized by Victoria Falls and were soon to be bound by train for Great Zimbabwe, by way of Bulawayo and Masvingo. The man was quite eager to sell and, since the terrible inflation under Mugabe's oppressive dictatorship had made the Zimbabwean currency virtually worthless, he insisted he wanted US dollars. Already, we could buy several million of their dollars for US \$1.

Next is what appears to be a replica of the triptych photo my longtime German friend Dorit took near the ancient ruins of Machu Picchu in the mountains of Peru 15 years ago, when she, her boyfriend Maik, and I explored the country by bus. How did that same photo get replicated and find its way here? Of course, tens of thousands of tourists visit Machu Picchu every year. I shout out another bid, this time for \$10, because I'd like to have something that reminds me of Dorit. Again, the auctioneer doesn't hear my bid.

Amazingly, I recognize the next item as a print in the distinct style of Jiří Kodym, whom I met when I was visiting my longtime friend Standa, a professor of musicology, more than a dozen years ago in his personal hideaway in the Czech village of Kuks. Standa told me some years ago by email that Jiří Kodym had passed away. He was a famous, modern Czech painter, graphic designer, and ceramist. As Standa reminded me in a recent email, "Kodym had his beautiful studio in Kuks, where we listened to his colorful speeches, sometimes under the influence of beer, vodka, and wine Nice guy. He'll stay with us in his wooden prints." Jiří Kodym is often described as the "Czech Pablo Picasso." I recently searched on the Internet for his artwork and found one, similar to the print Standa had given me, for sale for nearly US \$25,000. Now I'm really



Above: miniature carved Nepalese temple window, and aboriginal carved digging stick and inverted platter from central Australia.

Opposite: 19th-century pump organ.



puzzled because I can't figure out how one of Jiří's wooden prints has made it to South Woodland Street in Oberlin. There are beaded belt buckles similar to those I've bought from the Lakota and Cheyenne indigenous peoples of the upper Great Plains. There's a painting from the coast of Maine that appears very much like one painted by my mother when she was nearly 80 and we teased her about becoming another Grandma Moses. On that one, I double the \$100 bid by an eager buyer, but once more the auctioneer doesn't hear me. And there's a *fez* similar to the one worn by an Egyptian student friend, a short cylindrical flat hat, red with a long tassel attached to the top.

There's a Tibetan bank note like the one given to me by the upstairs

Tibetan neighbor of my Nepalese friends in Kathmandu. The Tibetan man's father had carried banknotes when fleeing across the mountains from Tibet after the invasion by Communist China. And there's a Nepalese carving of a temple window that resembles one of those that collapsed in the earthquake of 2014 (which I can confirm from personal experience was terrifying). There is an Aboriginal Australian carved wooden digging stick and a matching carved dish that resemble those I brought back from my first journey to Alice Springs and Uluru by bus in 1992 with Aussie friend Waza. And a battered

woven hat from Cote d'Ivoire that looks exactly like the one given me by Boniface, a camp counselor from that country who spent a summer working at the Sioux Indian YMCA's Camp Leslie Marrowbone on the Cheyenne River Reservation, where I spent 18 years.

The next to last item being auctioned off at the sale is an old pump organ that looks exactly like one that was in my grandparents' house in Skowhegan, Maine, and came to me when both grandparents passed away more than 40 years ago. It was built by the Estey Organ Company in Brattleboro, Vermont. My friend Randy, a certified master organ builder, has identified my organ as having been built in 1884. Could this really be my grandparents' organ from Maine and these other objects mine from my homes in Vermont, Georgia, and Kendal right here in Oberlin? If so, how did they get here on Woodland Street?



Above: the rocking chair.
All photos courtesy of the author.

The final item appears on the porch to be auctioned. "Hey, that's definitely my rocking chair," I say. Now, immediately and at last, I fully remember and know where I am. I bought that same chair at this very house at a similar auction 56 years ago, and it's moved with me from place to place ever since. When I was a student at Oberlin College, my roommates in a three-room quad of North Hall and I had decided that we needed another chair in which to relax in the room we used as a lounge. No one else at that earlier auction wanted the rocking chair. So I had bid \$1, and it was mine, a rocking chair made in the latter half of the 19th century. That was the only other auction I'd ever attended. How did the chair get here again? I shout: "Why are you selling it? It's mine!" Again, the auctioneer doesn't appear to hear me. The rocking chair has been sold and is being carried away.

Am I really at that house on Woodland Street? If so, why don't any of these people hear me? Or am I dreaming? That must be it. I am replaying bits from my life, and the bits are jumbled together in random scenarios. Is this really how we pass from one world into the next, as we piece together our old lives and move into new ones? Is this how our lives pass before us when we're leaving our earthly abode? Is this how we process the material of our past lives as we prepare for the future?

For me, the process has been to stand here on the sidewalk watching an auctioneer call for bids on one item after the next from my old life, and I am now able to begin to focus on what comes next.

Let the Art Begin

By David Coffin

I am not aware of my surroundings.

My worlds are colliding.

I feel the power of wonder exploding inside me.

Art and beauty talk to the sky.

I live second upon second,

Listening for the colors to start.

Give me the lightning!

Give me the thunder!

So I can complete the storm.

I do not want to waste any more time.

I wait for nothing and for no one.

Once more I am alone with Art.

I will not be afraid of failure.

Let the Art begin!



Back cover: "Winter Patterns—Buttonbush Pond"
Photograph by Sally Nelson-Olin

Front cover: "The Fire Next Time"
(after James Baldwin)
Oil on canvas by David Coffin

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