

The Fox

A Quarterly Journal
by and for
The Residents of Fox Hill Village

Volume VII, Number 4

Winter 2024



Winter at Fox Hill Village

Photo by Happy Spongberg

JOHN PODGER

1921 – 2023

The editors of *The Fox* celebrate the long and productive life of **JOHN PODGER** and share with all of Fox Hill Village the sadness we feel at his passing. John's remarkable life of 102 years included the very special relationship which he had with *The Fox*. John has had an article published in every issue of *The Fox*, beginning with the first issue in the Spring of 2017. He and his contributions will be greatly missed.

His stories were often exotic and at times harrowing. With skill and humor he especially described his many experiences in southeast Asia, both his military experiences during World War II and his civilian activities thereafter. One of his most memorable stories described the accommodations he found for his mother-in-law when she visited him and his wife in Calcutta. The accommodations included an 18-foot boa constrictor which slept under the bed. Its function was to exit the room through the window each night to roam the grounds of the compound and reduce the rat population. His mother-in-law stayed the entire two weeks and never knew the snake was there!

John will be missed, but his memory will stay with us.

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The Fox is published quarterly by its Editorial Board under the auspices of Fox Hill Village, 10 Longwood Drive, Westwood, MA 02090. Residents are invited to send inquiries and submissions to any co-editor by house post or email.

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Remembering John Podger

Dan Leonard



To rephrase Shakespeare, I come to praise John Podger, not to bury him. He was simply the most interesting man whom I have ever met. His ancestry is all British, but he was born in northern India where his father and uncle had a mica mine.

He was one of those rare people who was good at numbers (he was an engineer), good with words (he was a gifted writer), and good with people (he was a noted raconteur and story-teller). He was likeable and self-effacing. You would never hear of his accomplishments unless you asked.

As an engineer, he headed a road-building battalion in Burma during the war. His civilian career was with Metcalf & Eddy, a prominent engineering consulting firm, where he specialized in municipal water systems, both fresh and waste water. Due to his expertise, he was sent all over the world on such projects.

He wrote of his World War II experiences in a privately published book. In 1939, when war was declared, he chose to join the Indian army rather than the British, thinking that he might visit his father occasionally, which did happen. He was eventually promoted to major and commanded a

battalion. His task was road-building, but his battalion did have some contact with the Japanese.

His stories ranged from the time he beat the cruel heat by lining up a series of captured Japanese Zero airplanes to fan their quarters, replacing each as it ran out of fuel; through watching a group of native damsels as they removed their Sunday finest clothes before crossing a shallow river, then replaced them on the other side; to being ordered to some unspecified formal event located across some water. His launch sank as they landed, so that he showed up soaking wet. The event turned out to be the surrender of a Japanese battalion and John accepted the sword of the commanding officer. (He was later criticized for not appearing in proper uniform.)

At Fox Hill Village, he was a vital member of our breakfast group since long before I was invited to



join. That group met for many years, and was always entertained by John with what seemed to be an inexhaustible supply of

anecdotes. He was an avid and skilled photographer. Several times collections of his photographs appeared as a special show here at FHV. When he was chided for spending so much money on a new and expensive camera shortly before his one hundred and second birthday, he replied, "It's better than spending it on dancing girls!" My only regret is that I knew him well for only the last six of his 102 years. We shall all remember John Podger fondly.



A tropical island in the Malacca Straits
Photo by John Podger

Travails of a Business Trip to Moscow

Hank McKenna

In 1974 I was working for an ocean engineering firm. Part of our mission was the development of new products that would be useful in the new field of offshore oil development.

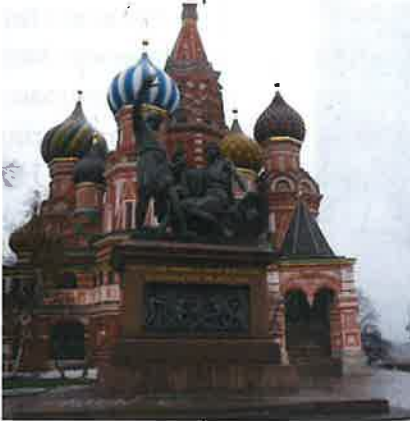
Russia contacted us through the U.S. State Department commercial liaison in Moscow, expressing an interest in large skimmers for picking up spilled oil in the ocean at a time when exploration further offshore was rapidly expanding.

The company decided to prepare a proposal and send a team to Russia to present it. I was in India finishing other work and was directed to meet two colleagues in Moscow. In the cold war, Russia was under rigid Communist rule, and relations with the U.S. were tense. So, the story begins.

My flight on Air India was commercial in appearance, but I was told it was a “diplomatic” run. After being aloft for a while the crew held a party in the first-class cabin, pilots included, with the plane on auto pilot. Very interesting but I guess things were different then.

Getting through clearance and into my hotel was tediously long. Inspectors took my passport away for study (wait), interview (wait), luggage inspection (wait). I finally got to a car provided by the embassy. This took so much time it left no time to buy rubles.

I got to our hotel, met my colleagues and later went down to dinner. We found you couldn't dine unless you could pay in rubles. No one had any so we were literally broke. When we returned to our rooms, the floor matron met us and asked why we were back. It turns out she spoke German, and I do a little. We were able to explain our situation and, happily, she loaned us the cash for dinner.



At dinner the only choice for a drink was a full liter of vodka for the table, and there was no option to take away any remainder. Don't ask what happened to the vodka.

The automatic elevators weren't very automatic or reliable and just plain dangerous. I got tired of waiting one morning and decided to use the stairs. I was just on the fourth floor. I opened the nearby door and went down to the ground floor. The exit door was locked, went back up and all the doors were locked including where I started. Went back

down to the ground floor, rattled the door and called out. When the door finally opened, I was met by two gruff KGB police who took me to a nearby station. My companions saw this and contacted the U.S. Embassy. They quickly had me released and saved me from an unknown fate.

I returned home much relieved, and the company got an order for oil

skimmers.

Tokyo, Lost and Found

Scott Halstead

In July, 1957, having finished U.S. Army Medical Corps basic training at Fort Sam Houston, my wife, new son Rodd, and I were on our way to Tokyo. In New Mexico we joined Route 66, driving nights—no air conditioning—finally reaching the Mojave Desert and then into California. At Los Angeles we took the coast road north, past the Hearst Castle, to Big Sur, enjoying America's most spectacular coastal scenery. Then to San Francisco.

We had to contend with an Army-made family crisis. When I got orders at Fort Sam Houston sending me to Japan, the Army informed me that my wife would not be issued companion orders. They said my two-year tour of duty meant dependents were not eligible for overseas posting. If I extended my service for one year, she could go to Japan! My response was “HELL NO! Not one minute over two years.” I would pay to bring my

family to Japan. But they needed passports and visas. So, we arranged for my wife and son to stay with the parents of my roommate at medical school, the K. H. Lums. Luckily, they lived in Hawaii where there was a Japanese consulate. I purchased tickets for them on the President Lines from San Francisco to Honolulu and from Hawaii to Tokyo.

To this day I am bewildered by the Army's stance. The first thing I would do today after hearing such a crazy rule would be to get a lawyer!

After a short time, I flew off—alone—on a succession of propeller planes to Hawaii, Wake, Guam, Manila, and finally, Tokyo—a three-day trip. I landed at the Tachikawa U.S. Air Force Base. Late on the day of arrival, filled with excitement, three newly-minted U.S. Army Medical Corps Captains headed out the Main Gate. My two companions and I wanted to explore.

I had traveled in Europe. Japan was completely different—nothing in sight was recognizable! Signs were in a language we could not read. We were surrounded by shops, gaily decorated. All emblazoned with vertical neon signs containing Kanji characters. Street traffic, bicycles, motorcycles and tiny cars were moving at dizzying speeds.



Imperial Palace

Our goal was to see the Imperial Palace, which was just about the only thing we knew about Tokyo. Walking along the street, every couple of blocks we came to police booths. At each, we enquired in English, "How do we get to the

Imperial Palace?" Not only did the police not speak English, they probably had no idea where the Imperial Palace was. We encountered the classic Japanese response to questions that were poorly understood: a tilt of the head accompanied by a sucking in of a stream of air through the teeth, emitting a high-pitched inspirational hiss. This signaled bewilderment, embarrassment and

apology. It was a response we received frequently throughout our two-year stay. When encountered on that first trip, we were bewildered. We continued on along the road, asking directions. Responders usually pointed down the street, leading us to believe the Imperial Palace was close at hand. It was 21 miles away! Tokyo was a very big city, only slightly smaller than New York. In the future, we came to learn that streets in Tokyo bear a name only for a few blocks and then the name changes. Numbers were given to buildings based on date of construction, not in consecutive order on the street. The police knew every occupant in their district by name and address. But, knowing the location of the Imperial Palace was something else. So, when asked, all emitted the embarrassed hiss. We began to understand we were lost. So, we did something sensible—took a taxi.

The 1950s' Toyota taxis were minicars with front and back seats. It was a tight squeeze for American-sized adults. We took off at a frightening speed, arriving 30 minutes later at the Imperial Palace. After we drove past the Palace (no visitors), we asked the driver to take us to the Imperial Hotel, the famous Frank Lloyd Wright structure that survived both the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923 and World War II fire bombing. We had a drink and admired the hotel and grounds. We were lucky; the original structure was completely demolished in 1967.

Confusion about street names in Tokyo didn't last long. We benefitted from MacArthur's virtual rule of Japan from August 1945. His administrators had given all major Tokyo streets English names. New street signs were installed and maps issued. When our black



Tokyo Street Sign

1957 Fairlane Ford arrived several months later, armed with MacArthur Tokyo city maps and English street signs, my wife (who had meanwhile arrived in Tokyo) and I happily drove all around Tokyo, to the big PX at U.S. Navy Headquarters in Yokosuka and even an adventurous and very bumpy ride to the foot of Mount Fuji.

Tokyo, lost then found!

My Friendship with the Swans

Regina Lauraitis

My friendship with a pair of swans began during the 1980s, when my parents retired and moved to Cape Cod. Their house was located on a large pond that happened to have a mated pair of resident Mute Swans: a large dominant male known as Herman and a smaller gentle female called Snowy. Mute Swans are very large waterfowl, having snow-white plumage and an orange bill with a black knob on top. Such swans are thoroughly devoted to each other and usually stay together for life.

I befriended “our swans,” as we called them,



Both photos supplied by the author

during my frequent and sometimes lengthy visits to the Cape. Each season, Herman and Snowy would build their nest on the banks of the

pond, a good distance away from the residences, not clearly visible from the house or street. In early spring, Snowy would lay her eggs in the nest, and Herman would be her vigilant protector as she incubated them.

Occasionally, he would take over nest duty giving her a chance to feed and stretch her legs. By late spring, the baby swans (cygnets) would hatch, and the proud parents would escort them over to our shoreline for us to admire. The fluffy little cygnets are initially gray in color and do not turn completely white until they are about a year old. Our meeting spot at the shoreline was beside a small dock that my father had built for his canoe. At each encounter, we would count the cygnets to check if they were all there. Unfortunately, sometimes, some of them had been taken by the formidable resident snapping turtles. The sheer size of the adult swans prevented them from falling victim to the snappers.

The swans appeared to trust us and we loved their daily visits. We would feed them a little soft white bread which we ripped up into bite size pieces and tossed in the water. Natural food such as aquatic plants and grasses are the best dietary option for water fowl, but bread in small quantities to supplement the greens is acceptable and won't harm them. Herman and Snowy always let the cygnets eat first and the parents would only feed after the babies had finished. There were many resident ducks on the pond which Herman would chase away while the cygnets were feeding. As they grew bigger and stronger, he became more tolerant of the ducks and allowed them to enjoy a little bread as well.

My mom named the swan family “Cipai” (pronounced: Tsee-pie)—a Lithuanian term of endearment. When she or I spotted the family in the pond and called out “Cipai, Cipai” to them, the swans would swim over to us, even if they had previously been traveling in the opposite direction. Sometimes, Herman would actually come up the



pond bank searching for us. If no one was on the back patio, he'd walk around front to see if the garage was open. We had built a ramp in the garage because my dad was wheelchair-bound, so up the ramp Herman would go and tap on the kitchen door with his bill! Once I found Herman on the back patio standing in front of a pair of sliding glass doors looking quizzically at his own reflection. He cocked his head from side to side as if trying to figure out what he was looking at.

In late summer, Herman would begin teaching the cygnets how to fly. He would spread his wings and begin “running” on the water across the pond and lift up into the air to show them how it's done. It took the young swans some time to master the technique, but after a week or two of practice, they would succeed. In mid-fall it was time for the cygnets to leave and find themselves another pond to call home. Occasionally, one would return, only to be chased away by the parents. Such are the ways of nature.

Very cold winters can be brutal for wildlife like swans. If the pond freezes solid, they have no

access to the aquatic vegetation that they need to survive. One of our neighbors, another swan lover, built a shelter for Herman and Snowy on his property. During the really cold spells, they would take up residence there and he would provide them with grain, greens, and water. Once the pond thawed, they would head back into the water, and in early spring the cycle would begin again.

As the years passed, the swans grew older and could no longer reproduce, but they still enjoyed our love and care. More time passed; my parents died and the house on the pond was sold. Several years later I had the opportunity to visit our former property and saw that there was a pair of swans swimming in the pond. I called to them but they did not recognize me and did not respond. With a heavy heart, I said goodbye. I often fondly remember my special friendship with the swans.

Tale of a Shih Tzu Banker

Anne Jardim

Lio went to LSE
Where he got his BSc
Then he worked for an Indian bank
Until the US dollar sank.

Now Lio is a punkah wallah*
And must wear a small red collar,
But he works for golden rupees,
And disdains the dollar.

Once it's over Lio hopes
To be in clover on Aspen's slopes,
No more planning, no more fanning
No more dealing with those dopes.

Then he'll hit the sandy beaches
Of the Indies' farthest reaches,
Robert Louis he will say,
I'll take Samoa any day.

*Editors' note: a punkah wallah is a servant who wears a red collar to show his status.

Critters

Barbara Duffy



When Chris had his tonsils out, we gave him a rabbit. The rabbit had a baby. How was I to know that it (she) was pregnant?

The usual childhood colds ensued. During one of these, a nice spring day dawned. I took Chris on an outing, we saw an American Red Star Warbler. Thus began his lifelong passion.

Which led to the purchase of a parrot. He named it Worthless (a take-off on a family friend's rambunctious son's name). More later.

I happened one day to express myself. "There is one thing I will never have—a snake." We sent to the pet store and bought an Indian python, or was it a boa constrictor? It required a cage, food from the Lincoln mouse lady.

Next came the Jackson's chameleon. It required a cage—with garden—a science report for Belmont Hill School. A skeptical science teacher, a request for a home visit. An A!

From critters to college. Remember Worthless? He perched on the University of New Hampshire fraternity's window sill and whistled. Student newspaper reported, "Worthless woos the women with wolfish whistle."

An "invitation" to take a semester off and Chris went to Sandy Hook, New Jersey, and studied fishery. Back to UNH, graduation, on to a commercial fishing boat, grad school, developing a start-up aquaculture business. And not to forget birding. Most every early morning.

He retired from consulting this year, bought a farm and started with turkeys, chickens, vegetables. In the spring a tractor? Goats? Meantime, he is by the wood stove with his Bernese Mountain dog, Bob Marley.



Learning about Football from My Grandson

Sally Burt

I didn't watch football in my youth. I watched horse races and horse shows. When I entered college I went to Yale football games at the invitation of some Yale undergraduates. The Yalies were always handsome and I watched them instead of the game on the field. Or I'd chat with the woman next to me. Consequently I didn't know anything about football except that I rose when there was a Yale touchdown, which in those days was rare.

When I was married and moved to Westwood, the Patriots, Boston's football team, were winning. It was the Tom Brady era and Boston was winning every game scheduled including the Super Bowl. By that time I had three teenage grandchildren and they were all excited about Brady, the GOAT: Greatest Of All Time. When I found all three raving about the Patriots' phenomenon I felt, as a good grandmother should, the urge to understand what they were talking about.

I tried watching the games on TV, but I didn't know what was going on. I saw them switch directions on the field and sometimes fall in a lump of bodies, legs and arms. Finally my grandson gave me a book FOOTBALL FOR DUMMIES. I read the first chapter or two and finally I could text my grandson about the score. I learned some basic vocabulary I could use in texts. I learned the quarterback directs all the offensive moves. Unfortunately, this was the time Brady left and went to Florida to play with the Buccaneers, and the Patriots hired Mac Jones, a rising college football player from Alabama.

Head Coach Bill Belichick had a lot of faith in Mac Jones. In the first year Mac did fairly well, but then he went downhill in the second and third years. Badly. Mac got sacked (tackled) beyond the



line of scrimmage (where they start) and threw too many interceptions (when the opposite team catches the ball). Meanwhile the defensive squad was doing well, but they don't make the touchdowns or kick the extra points. I always texted my grandson, and at first he had hope as I did. Belichick, the Head Coach, wouldn't say who was starting as quarterback. Then my grandson lost all hope in Mac Jones and the Patriots. Finally Mac was "benched" (pulled out of the starting line-up), and Zappe, another quarterback, took over. Zappe's team scored but didn't win. It was then that I lost interest, reading about the game in the paper rather than watching it on TV.

At least I understood the lingo. The quarterback had a few pics. In other words, he was instrumental in throwing the ball away so that the other team could score a touchdown. The news was full of personnel issues. Who was going to be the quarterback and even who the Head Coach?

Sometime in April, the Draft occurs, which means the worst team gets the first pick. My smart grandson let me know what the Draft is. There was a lot of texting about Belichick and Mac Jones.

Then last week happened: Belichick was fired by the Patriots' owner, Bob Kraft. Who would take his place? My grandson urged me to wait when I suggested Mike Vrabel, the fired coach of the Tennessee Titans; he had been a star Patriots player. In a day, Jerod Mayo was picked to take Belichick's place as head coach. He had been the Patriots' linebacker coach. Who was to be the quarterback? Wait until the Draft and Mayo's counsel.

Now I'm all set for next season. I'll have the FOOTBALL FOR DUMMIES by my side in order to have intelligent questions to text with my grandson.

In Memory of Beverly

Patricia Hines

I have many good memories of my cousin Beverly.

Beverly was four years older than I. One of my first clear memories of Beverly is playing croquet with her, her sister Sandy, and brother Ron on lazy summer afternoons. Now, you may think that croquet is a genteel game, and it is, but not entirely. One particularly annoying rule offers a player the choice of either taking a free shot or hitting an opponent's ball off the playing field. The latter choice ensures that the opponent will lose. Unlike her siblings, I could always count on Beverly to take the free shot and not send my ball into the next yard. Her choice was a kindness that forever endeared her to me, even as a youngster.

During my early teenage years, I remember driving with Beverly and Sandy in a Volkswagen



Beverly (third from left), her cousins and their parents

Photo supplied by the author

Beetle throughout the Boston area, with Beverly at the wheel. For some reason, during one drive, Sandy and I were having a conversation about world history. Their father had served with the U.S. Expeditionary Forces sent to Russia during the revolution. The presence of U.S. forces in Russia at that time is not a well-known fact. Sandy exclaimed, "Bev, did you know that Dad was in Russia during The Revolution?" Beverly thought for a moment and then said, "What revolution?" Sandy and I both laughed and laughed. The Russian Revolution is arguably one of the more significant events of the 20th Century and it was not even on Beverly's radar screen. But Sandy and I

both knew that history, politics, and other mundane matters were of no importance to Beverly. Even at that age Beverly marched to a different drummer, in so many ways.

Beverly's greatest concern was the visual. Shortly after she moved to her apartment on 34th Street in Manhattan, I visited her during a very hot summer. The apartment was stifling, almost unbearable. "Why don't you get an air conditioner?" I asked. I have an air conditioner," Beverly replied, "Jonathon gave it to me." "Well," I responded, "why don't you use it?" "Oh," said Beverly, "it's in the closet. It just doesn't work." By that time, I had known Beverly long enough to realize that "doesn't work" did not refer to operational capacity. In Beverly-speak, "doesn't work," meant that it just did not visually fit into the ambiance of her apartment. That was the reason she would not install it. In later years, Beverly installed her computer in a linen closet, which made it very difficult to operate, but it did "work."

Beverly, Sandy, and I enjoyed many vacations together. Beverly always traveled with a single suitcase from which she pulled a tremendous array of clothes and accessories (including a complete manicure set). Beverly developed a system whereby she hung a number of outfits, always in black or red, on a single coat hanger. Typically, she packed three such coat hangers. When we arrived at a hotel, she would unzip her bag, pull out the three hangers, place them in the closet with a flourish, and then announce, "I'm ready." The clothes never wrinkled. I always wondered how she did that.

Beverly, thank you for improving my sense of style, for teaching me to love New York City, for introducing me to a different world, and most of all, for being a dear cousin and a good friend.

I will miss you.



The Hard Way to Learn a New Language

Nancy Bonneville

Have you ever been stuck in an elevator? Only once (so far) have I been in this embarrassing position. It was in 1956 in Norway during a trip my high school friend, Anne, and I took to visit the Scandinavian countries after having graduated from college. We had just returned from shopping for some gifts to take to family and friends and had returned to the new small hotel in which we were staying. Having entered the elevator in the lobby and pushed the button for our floor, we expected the elevator to rise to our floor, but it went only part way. Since the elevator had a glass door, it was possible for us to see the people in the lobby and for them to see us from the waist down, as well as when we were squatting down to look at them with our hands out at our sides in a questioning gesture.

The elevator had been made in Germany so we assumed it was very well made. Some of the words on the panel were in German, a language I had not taken in school. Although I had a working knowledge of French and Latin, and Anne had taken Spanish, German was one about which we knew very little. I knew how to say "good night" and what to say after someone sneezed, but that was the extent of my German.

Down in the lobby people were calling something to us that sounded like, "Fart, fart!" We knew the people in the lobby were trying to help us, and we had been told, with various words, to do a lot of things, but those were new ones to us. Anne, who was inclined to giggle at the drop of a hat, started giggling, which made me start laughing; but getting stuck in an elevator in a foreign country was not a laughing matter. Finally, after looking at the panel in the elevator, I noticed a word that I think was spelled "Fahrt" that was a reasonable facsimile of what the crowd was yelling at us. I pushed the button, and as you might expect,

the elevator rose magically to our floor. The good news is a third word had been added to my German vocabulary: "Fahrt" meaning "ride."



Holding Hands

Mary Jansiewicz

Several years ago, my elder granddaughter (now 17) gave me a cherished gift. As we were having our weekly lunch-plus-walk in Needham, she



casually took my hand and held it while we were walking. She was eleven years old at the time—and it had been a while

since holding hands was part of our routine.

I was thrilled! I took small, even breaths, not wanting to disturb—much less end—this wonderful feeling of connectedness that she had initiated. I never told her how much this short, intimate experience meant to me (but I will someday).

The event touched me in a special way, and I started to think more about how, and why, hand-holding is such a strong way of connecting to other persons. I remember how once, my gynecologist (a female) took my hand and held it briefly prior to a tricky surgery—staying my anxiety. I still recall the warmth of her touch, and how it helped me to relax.

Of course, there have been the romantic trysts of hands under the table—or right on the tabletop to announce that "We're a couple." For me, these days, hand-holding is more likely to be a "helping hand"—an effort to forestall slipping, tripping and falling (still an act of love and/or connectedness).

Old photographs show how my mother or father held my small hand, or those of my siblings, in early days. Decades later, I clearly recall holding my mother's hand when she was bedridden, and covering my father's hand with mine when he was in hospice—making a loving connection that I hoped would comfort them.

Between that granddaughter's gift of her hand and now, there have been many hugs, smiles, conversations. But, perhaps, the next time she takes my hand will be when I, too, am near the end of my life. I know that touch will comfort me—it might even thrill me once again!

A Moment In Time

Carol Henderson

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Boston Symphony allowed schools and colleges to take over ticket sales for an evening at the Boston Pops in the Spring Season. Profits were used for scholarships. In the case of girls' schools, a few students might greet attendees wearing long dresses, selling corsages to the concert attendees, creating a festive atmosphere. On occasion, a school or college might request a special soloist to be part of their program.



Photo supplied by the author

I was sixteen years old and a senior at Dana Hall School when I was asked by the woman who was chairing Dana Hall Night at the Pops if I would consider performing Mendelssohn's G Minor piano concerto which she heard I had memorized. I agreed to let her pursue the possibility, and in

late February I found myself in the Brookline home of Arthur Fiedler with my mother and my teacher for an audition. Fiedler's demeanor was notably gruff.

He told me to sit down and play the first movement of the concerto, whereupon he proceeded to whistle, sing off key, open his mail, beat off time with his foot, open the front door and shut it again and do everything he could to throw me off. Fortunately, I had been taught to focus. Fifteen minutes later, when I had finished playing, the Maestro said perhaps I could perform the first movement of the concerto. My teacher countered that if I was going to play it at all, it should be all three movements. Fiedler considered this for a moment and asked me if I could practice eight hours a day for ten days in a row and then come back for another audition. My March spring

vacation was coming up soon so I said yes, I could do that.

When the time came, I practiced the 45-minute-long composition in four-measure segments, repeating each four measures until I could play them perfectly ten times in a row. If I made even the tiniest mistake, I would start the ten times all over again. After ten days of doing this exercise eight hours every day, I was pretty confident I could play the piece without errors, and I returned to Brookline for a second audition. The Maestro's manner was still brusque and no nonsense. And he went through the same antics to distract me, without success. When I finished and after a long pause, Fiedler posited, "Well, Dana Hall is buying the House, so we could even put a trained seal on the stage." My three older brothers had often made similar degrading remarks, so I let it roll.

When I arrived at Symphony Hall for the rehearsal with the orchestra, Fiedler was a new person, all smiles and graciousness, and he treated me with utmost courtesy. Now he was stuck with me and he needed to make sure I felt comfortable and confident. The rehearsal went well, and it was the thrill of my young life to be able to play with that venerable body of great musicians.

On the night of the performance in early May, I was too naive to be nervous and was only hoping that my long pink dress didn't make me look fat. All went well until, in a very rapid passage in the third movement, when the orchestra and piano were playing very fast together, my fingers suddenly lost a couple of measures but then came right back in again. When I looked up at the Maestro, he nodded and smiled. His ten days of eight hour practicing had paid off.

What a fantastic experience it was to play with an orchestra and especially to perform with one of the greatest in the world! I was a very lucky young lady and I relished every minute.

P.S. I also realized that I never wanted to spend my life practicing the piano eight hours a day and therefore would pursue music as an avocation, not a career.



Blooming Late

*Helen Condon
Powell*

That Saturday morning,
I went down the back

stairs to help my mother with breakfast. Usually so formal, she went weekend casual and offered to make breakfast-to-order for each of us: oatmeal, buttermilk pancakes, waffles, sausages, buttery toast, coffee cake, fruit. Anything we wanted.

During the week, the household cook did all the meals. Our large family was gathered around; the lace tablecloth and antique furniture took over the room, especially at dinner. Sitting at the head of the mahogany table with a small foot buzzer under the red oriental carpet, my mother could ring for help from the kitchen, and someone would look through the small window and then appear from the swinging pantry door.

But none of this happened at weekend breakfasts. The cook had mornings off, and my mother reclaimed her kitchen. The kitchen and the pantry were painted an efficient white, no antiques, lace or brocade. The windows above the countertops showed the trees outside, the large lawn, the shrubbery or the forest brook leading to the meadow below.

Buttermilk waffles were my choice that morning, as I watched the griddle heat up to the right temperature, the creamy batter sizzling as my mother poured it on the griddle. The lid dropped down as just a bit of batter oozed out of the side and slowly raised up the lid. How could batter lift a heavy metal lid? How long would it take? When would the waffle be done, not sticking to the griddle, but just the right color? My mother said nothing, and I waited, looking out the window at the tall trees, the clear sky, then back at the counter, the butter dish and the syrup. At the back of the stove were some shiny link sausages, adding to the smell of batter and butter.

A bit spellbound, I put cutlery on the table, a glass of milk and some simple blue plates from the cupboard. I found paper napkins, straightened the

metal kitchen chairs, and watched and waited for the right moment to mention my report card.

I can't really remember how old I was when my mother simply said, "Don't worry, you're a 'late bloomer.'" I was either in high school or college, and my lackluster grades didn't measure up to my sister's talent for languages and boyfriends. I had curly hair and pretty skin, but they were of little use in our book-oriented world. It was probably the kindest thing she could have said. It stuck with me for years: Be Patient.

I struggled with grades in high school, college and graduate school. Ear infections meant I needed to sit in the front of the classroom to hear the teacher. They said I would grow out of it, so be patient. School plays distracted me in college, so I had to drop out of extra-curriculars to get my grades up. In graduate school, a statistics course I couldn't pass meant that I had to get an A in order to get credit for the D. Always struggling and wondering whether I was in the right niche.

When I left my first job in NYC to go to graduate school, I married a promising intellectual in Boston, and shifted from arts research to arts management, public relations, fundraising and teaching. Student teaching showed me that I could manage students, just as I had managed my brothers, without even a microphone in the high school auditorium. Then came two research contracts, one for the Massachusetts Department of Education, another working on event publicity for the Museum of Fine Arts. An advertising agency, teaching again, and then ten years going from fabric art to art clothing.

Somehow, I was able to shift again, from art clothing to the clothing business, learning design, marketing and manufacturing in a far-from-waspy world that seemed to tolerate my willingness to learn the trade. Fellow manufacturers had showrooms and salespeople with much more trade-savvy, so I got a Yiddish dictionary to learn a few key terms, or at least know what was being said around me—not to be intimidated—but to stay focused on the creative process. Always the arts, a good place for someone with doubts, to find herself, her talents, her niche.

Creativity is a wonderful refuge for people who don't quite fit in! Glenn Gould said it best: "What would have become of me, if I hadn't found

music?"

Years later, my friends both marvel at—and underestimate—the creative life I still lead. They say, "How nice to be talented," or "You are a Renaissance Woman," or "How do you do it all?" I sometimes share my little secret. Have faith in the possibility of blooming late

Leadfoot at the Wheel in Old Westwood

Judy Robbins

When my newlywed parents moved into their home on High Street in 1936, my father was the only doctor in Westwood. My mother did everything but the doctoring—ran the business side of things, raised the kids, organized the house, was a library trustee. As a result, she was very busy and had formidable skills. One of these skills was driving fast to get everything done.

She would speed down Nahatan Street or Pond Street coming from errands in Norwood, or zip down High Street in the old days when traffic used to allow for zipping (the town's population was 5,000). Occasionally a police officer would pull her over. She relied on the fact that most people in town knew my father. He was the family practitioner who delivered babies and made house calls; he was the on-call doctor for the fire department; the police gave him rides if there was a snowstorm and the driveway wasn't plowed.

So, when a police officer would pull her over, Mother would look up pleadingly and say, "I'm terribly sorry, officer. I have to get the car back to Doctor Fisher for an emergency." He would let her go with a warning or even clear the way. Well, there came a time when my father retired, the population of the town had tripled, and the younger police officers didn't know him.

One day Mother was racing down Nahatan Street when a young officer stopped her by the high school. She knew the old ways wouldn't work. So, this little old lady, now in her eighties, looked up at him and said, "I'm terribly sorry, officer; I'm hurrying to the airport because I have to pick up my old mother."

Speechless, he waved her on her way.

New Snow

Don Smith

I saw video of young dogs leaping joyously
in snow,

Their first time ever encountering such a
magical show.

And I saw joyous Jets doing snow angels
with mirth,
As they humbled the Patriots on their very
own turf.

And I remembered my own past delight at
the gift
Of a jump and a frolic in a new-fallen white
drift.

Oh, what miracles nature does sometimes
bestow,
As we breathlessly, expectantly wait here
below.

I want to turn off the TV, refrain from online
chatter,
While I reflect on those things that really do
matter:

The beauty and the magic on this planet
we're planted,
And the fervent wish we don't ever take
that for granted.

Oh, to keep focused on all these positive
gifts and smile,
And refrain from recalling, reflecting on all
that is vile.



In the Chemo Room

Mimi Baird

There are very few people who don't have a friend or relative who has been diagnosed with an illness. Today we view chemotherapy as a medical treatment not only for cancer but also for a variety of other ailments.

Have we ever stopped to think what goes on in a chemo room? My daughter-in-law is currently experiencing this treatment. She is open to discussing her experience, which I find very illuminating and brave.

The chemo room is split into lots of little cubbies. Each "cube" has a heated massaging chair. There is also room for a guest chair, a small refrigerator, and a tall thin gray metal stand from which the chemo bag hangs. The stand is placed next to the patient's chair. The nurses hand out heated blankets if a patient so desires. There is some privacy provided by short walls or panels placed between each patient's cube. Television and the internet are available. She says she feels comfortable in this challenging and unexpected situation.

Chemo rooms have many windows extending from the ceiling to the floor of the area. This brings a positive atmosphere to the patient when experiencing weakness, fatigue or nausea. The natural light also gives the patient a sense of healing. The cubbies are arranged so that each patient is in sight of the nurses' station, thus giving confidence that if anything goes amiss, a nurse is immediately available.

My daughter-in-law is a gregarious young woman who enjoys socializing. The chemo room is no exception. She spots a friend of a friend who immediately pulls her chair and metal stand over to my daughter-in-law's chair. Before you know it, they are engaged in lively conversation. Her assessment of this chemo treatment day: fun!



A Family Secret

Jane Freed

A few years before my mother died, she revealed a family secret. She had a younger brother, Henry, who had spent his entire life in a psychiatric hospital, diagnosed with schizophrenia. Their older brother, Joe, was his guardian, with court authority to make all the health-care and medication decisions for Henry. But now Joe had died, and the hospital contacted my mother as his next of kin to become Henry's guardian. My mother was nearly 100 years old and was emotionally and physically unable to accept the task, so I volunteered.

I had never met Henry. None of my cousins even knew he existed! He had been in a psychiatric hospital in New York state, and he no longer needed a hospital; he needed a nursing home. But one that accepted New York Medicaid was not easy to find in Massachusetts. They found one in Palmer, but I told them they might as well put him on the moon. I could not easily visit him there. But a nursing home in Hyannis on the Cape had space and would take him.

A few years later, that nursing home called to say they were closing and converting the property to apartments. Fortunately, we were able to find a place in Worcester. The majority of the residents were young people with head injuries from motorcycle accidents. The average age was 41, less than half Henry's age, but that would be of little importance to him. So along with his few belongings he was moved to Worcester. He was settled in an area near the nurses' station and often sat in his wheelchair in the hall. Everyone who walked by greeted him.

Jerry, my husband, and I visited him a few times, taking a photo of my mother, but of course he couldn't recognize the old lady she had become. He was in his own world, conversing with people in his imagination. He was well cared for and seemed happy.

Eventually the nursing home called me to say that Henry, now almost 103, was dying. Did I want to call a rabbi? I didn't know what to do. He knew no rabbi and no rabbi knew him! Jerry suggested

that we call our rabbi, Seth Bernstein. When I told him our story, he said "Every Jew deserves a chance to confess. I'll come after my class at U.Mass Medical." We had never heard of Jewish confession! We gave him directions to the place and agreed to meet him there.

When we arrived, Henry was in bed, writhing with distress, waving his arms and crying. Seth went to the head of the bed and said, "Henry, you are in transition now and I am going to recite some prayers." I doubt that Henry could hear him over his own sounds, but as Seth prayed out loud in Hebrew, Henry began to quiet down and relax. We sang some songs in Hebrew. By the end of the half-hour or so that we were there, Henry became so quiet and still that I thought he had died.

As we were leaving, one of the nursing staff, a man from an African nation, Ghana, I think, said in a gentle way, "He will not be alone. Someone will be with him always." Henry died the next day.

A Birding Walk

Dan Leonard

I am not an ornithologist, nor even a very skilled bird-watcher. But I like to think of myself as a woodsman, and as such I have a keen interest in nature. And I can identify a dozen or two species of birds.

Due to several physical limitations, I don't get nearly as much exercise as I should. But when Happy announced a bird-watching walk, I gave it a try. However, we were not to stay on the pavement as I had expected. I used to take the woodsy trail—but not lately.

Well, I tried my best. The terrain was not a problem: The problem was my legs and my stamina. Or serious lack thereof. So, after a while I had to sit down for a minute. I located a convenient fallen tree, sat down, and immediately ended up on the ground: The tree broke under my weight.

Graham was nearby and promptly lifted me up. (He was later heard to say that he had once needed me on his rugby team because I was so heavy!)

From there I tried to stand around for a while to get my breath. I am not good at standing around. Soon I realized that I couldn't really walk. My legs

were frozen up and just wouldn't work properly. I tried to go back to the beginning of the trail but could not.

What to do now? My friends were very helpful; someone called the Front Desk, and soon J.P., from Maintenance, arrived on a golf cart to retrieve me.



Rose Breasted Grosbeak

Wonderful! In the process of maneuvering the cart, a backup was involved, so naturally we all heard a "beep-beep! Everyone in the birding group (except me) had a "Merlin" app on their cell-phone, and several, people exclaimed, almost in unison, "That's a Rose Breasted Grosbeak!"

And it then developed that the cart couldn't navigate a tiny ditch, so small that it was almost unnoticeable.

What to do now? Someone, probably at the Front Desk, called the Westwood Fire Department. Shortly I had two fire engines, four firefighters and a police cruiser all watching out for my best interests! (If I were embarrassable, I would have been embarrassed by now!) Two of the firefighters found a canvas device, picked me up bodily, and carried me to the golf cart. Finally, amid great laughter and applause, J.P. delivered me safely to the main building.

In the final analysis, we saw only a few birds, but the experience was unforgettable.



Marion Bermuda Race

Bill Gundy

In 1977, the first of the Marion Bermuda races was held. The more well-known Newport Bermuda race had been in existence since 1906, running every even year, and had become a race of super-rich titans with quasi-professional crews, the very latest technology in equipment and sails and "trained apes" to man the winches. Marion Bermuda was organized to protest the Newport model, aiming to make it more of a family race.

For this race, navigational aids like Loran or



A racing sloop Both photos supplied by the author

GPS were not allowed, which meant only celestial navigation and DR (dead reckoning) could be used. In addition, no spinnakers, which demanded more experienced crews, were allowed.

For this very first Marion race, I was fortunate to be included, based on being a friend of a friend of the skipper, and having some known sailboat racing experience. I joined the skipper and six other experienced crew members, including the skipper's wife, on a gorgeous 46-foot Bowman center cockpit yawl.

This is a brief story of what I experienced during this race.

At the start, 104 ocean sailing boats left just outside Marion harbor in Massachusetts and began their journey down Buzzards Bay for what was expected to be a five-day sail around the clock.



A yawl similar to ours (slower moving). (Note the rear mizzenmast and center cockpit.)

Entries were divided into five different classes based on length, weight, sail area and mast configuration.

As I said goodbye to my wife on the dock, I noticed that a few other send-offs near me were accompanied with tears, leaving me to wonder, "Do they know something about this race that I don't?"

Because of the motion of the boats in the seas, it took a full day, with restricted eating, to get through seasickness. It was notable, as a reminder of how big the ocean is, that after one day, we never saw another boat until the last approach into Bermuda. The skipper's wife had prepared meals for each night which were kept in a freezer until their appointed time--along with some very nice wines. We had two in the crew whose Navy experience enabled them to "shoot the stars" using a sextant to identify where we were. That was sometimes restricted, fortunately for not too long a stretch, by clouds covering the stars.

We were assigned "watches" of four hours, during which two or three of us were on duty to sail through the night, trading off on assigned duties of tending the sheets, adjusting halyards, tracking our route, or taking the helm. Changes in wind speed and direction made it necessary to change sails or their reefs to maintain desired speed and manage the degree of heel. The night watches were seldom uneventful or relaxing. All work on deck, especially at night, required a safety harness

which was hooked to a cable to avoid losing anyone overboard.

After a couple of days, we figured out that the skipper, although generally experienced in boating, was probably the least knowledgeable one on board in ocean racing and sometimes gave directions contrary to what the rest of us knew was best. He often appeared on deck in the middle of the night to question the sail configuration or some other detail. The skipper's wife was noticeably more experienced and knowledgeable about sailing than her husband, and that made for some interesting and challenging situations.

We took water temperature readings to help confirm when we had reached the Gulf Stream. The wind basically disappeared for one day, with sails just flapping in the middle of our race, adding an additional day to our race time. When not on duty or watch, I might have thought there would be ample time to read, but the normal rocking and rolling kept that from being an option.

Although this was supposed to be more of a "family race" with less pressure to compete, the Naval Academy sloop faced some embarrassment. The lost day of no wind caused them to run out of drinking water. They called it too close trying to keep their weight down and had to contact the Coast Guard two days short of Bermuda to get replenished.

As we approached Bermuda, or where we thought it should be, we had a healthy respect for the shoals which protect the island. We were aware that several boats had been hung up on these shoals, with some going to their graveyards, in previous races. It was also hard to see with less than clear skies. To gain a higher perspective, I was sent up the mast in hopes of gaining a better view. It was not to happen, and as we proceeded carefully, guided by radio direction signal, we found that we could literally smell the island before we could see it. Upon setting foot for the first time on the docks of Bermuda, I experienced being something like a "drunken sailor" when walking since my vestibular system needed to adjust back to a stable surface. The outcome of the race placed us in fourth place within our division--

not too bad, and remarkable considering the Bowman we sailed on was designed and constructed with more emphasis on seaworthiness than on speed.

I found this to be a most rewarding experience which taught me more about ocean sailing, the beauty and awesome power of the ocean, and the importance of good teamwork to optimize boat speed and to ensure the best decisions.

Defused

Peter Fiscoeder

Aunt Millie is very proud of her impeccable driving record—over sixty flawless years of deftly maneuvering all manner of automobiles on all manner of roads, even in countries where cars move on what she has long been convinced is the wrong side of the road. Double-clutching and stick-shifting are as much a part of her repertoire as backing up with the aid of mirrors only. She still thinks little of back-up cameras and electronic eyes in bumpers; they are for sissies. And she expects the quality and drivability of her car to match her skills in traffic—no failures!



Illustration supplied by the author

Several months ago, this happy circumstance suffered an irritating dent—she began to feel unsure of herself behind the wheel, increasingly asking her husband, Uncle Emmet, to run

some errands, then to drive her to this and that appointment, at first only at night, then also during the day. When she could not avoid driving herself, he noted her hesitation and frequent requests for reassurance before setting off, all indicators, he felt, that her comfort in driving was slowly vanishing; meanwhile the annual mileage on her car's odometer was dropping to an insignificant level.

Uncle Emmet is a noble character, polite and accommodating yet always straightforward and honest in expressing his views. It was in this vein

that he started quietly to bring up, in unhurried conversation with Aunt Millie, that her driving volume had become a trickle and whether, as a consequence, the time was perhaps approaching for her car to be taken out of service. He knew, of course, that the matter of giving up driving, and with it a degree of independence if not also a sense of one's strength, alertness and, indeed, a good portion of personal identity, tends to be a difficult and often emotional subject with aging people, and certainly with Aunt Millie. His walk on egg shells and carefully chosen words were a work of marital art and love, lacking any push and pressure but, at the same time, not a clear direction.

And then, right at the moment when a plan for a decision could no longer be rolled aside, Fred, their son, informed his parents that not only had he just lost his job but also was in need of a vehicle for some days because his family's SUV, now in its eleventh year, had virtually collapsed under them. Could he borrow mother's car until they could find a suitable replacement?

Aunt Millie and Uncle Emmet didn't have to deliberate for long. They said "yes" at once and then, quite naturally driven by parental sentiment, eased into the thought of why not let Fred have Mother's car for good, help him and his family out of a patch that wasn't of their doing. Thus, the tricky knot of only a few days earlier of how to deal diplomatically with lost identity, waning driving comfort and disappearing alertness, dissolved into a defused mix of gratitude and relief on one side and the warm feeling on the other, paired with relief as well, that parents remain on duty for life.



A Walk in the Woods Turns Dangerous

Harold Wilkinson

I have a vacation home in the mountains of southern Vermont. The house closest to ours is a vacation home also. Our neighbor's principal home is in a Massachusetts urban area, but he is an enthusiastic athlete and sportsman. He has box seats at Fenway Park, but he loves being out of doors, especially when he can get to his Vermont home. In Vermont and elsewhere he and his "significant other" go for long bike rides in the mountains in spring, summer and fall. In the winter they like to snowshoe.



Photo supplied by the author

One January a few years ago he was spending a weekend alone in his Vermont retreat. It was a briskly cold day with clear blue sky and no wind. A snowfall had blanketed the area with about a foot of sparkling new snow the night before. A warm morning sun had softened the outer layer of the snow, but falling temperature in the early afternoon had solidified a surface crust. He decided to snowshoe alone in the beautiful woods which surround our properties.

Walking through the woods was invigorating and exhilarating. The crusted snow crunched cheerily as he walked and the snow-covered trees turned the woods into a fairyland. Deep in the woods he came to a small clearing with a flat and sparkling snow cover. In the summer this area is covered by a dense thicket of raspberry bushes, standing about three feet tall.

He took only a few steps onto the snow cover before it gave way and he pitched forward head first. His head and upper body sank through the snow and deep into the thicket. His snowshoes, tightly strapped on, kept his feet above the snow and the brambles. He was face down with his feet several feet higher than his head.

He tried to free himself, but the brambles clung to his clothing and resisted every attempt at movement. His cell phone was in an inner pocket—and besides there was no cell coverage in this part of the mountains. It was late afternoon and would soon be dark. And he was all alone.

He didn't panic—well, perhaps a bit at first.

Struggling mightily he managed to turn his body enough that he could draw up his knees. With effort he managed to reach his snowshoes, then managed to unstrap them. Holding the snowshoes in his hands he could push down enough on the snow-covered brambles that he finally got his feet on the ground and stood up.

Wading on his feet through clinging brambles several feet tall required monumental effort. Eventually he reached the relative cover of the woods where there was only low underbrush and moss-covered ground below the newly-fallen snow. Gratefully, he replaced his snowshoes. Following his own tracks led him back to his house.

Once indoors he breathed a sigh of relief and swore never again to go out alone. Then he stoked up the fire in the fireplace and broke out the bourbon!



A Town Named... A True Story

Harry Collias

Cousin George had just left the site of the Pont du Gard ancient Roman aqueduct in the south of France. On summer leave from his position as an architecture professor at Ryerson University in Toronto, he was soon on his bicycle, pedaling toward Nimes to study the Roman amphitheatre and the many Roman temples there.

Now, if you looked at a map of the area, you'd see that the Gard river runs south toward Nimes, passing many small towns along the way. And this was the route George took, passing hikers, kayakers, and other vacationers. Until...he was fascinated by a road direction signpost. He stopped and read the sign: "COLLIAS—2 km." Huh? The only other COLLIAS he knew was a family of cousins in the eastern United States, descended from a small village in Greece. But, never had he heard of a branch in France, let alone one with a

French town named after it! This took some exploring, and soon George was pedaling the two kilometers to see what COLLIAS was all about.



Sure enough, there was a real French town named COLLIAS, with lovely country homes, a fine little hotel, a market, and even a passenger bus from Nimes with the destination COLLIAS scrolled above the driver's head stood in the town square. George couldn't resist using his Canadian French to ask some townspeople in the

square: Where did the name COLLIAS come from? Was he (or she) a war hero? A prominent politician? A landowner?

The answer was invariably, "*Je ne sais pas.*" It is what it is, but thanks for asking.

Communication to the States ensued, followed by photographic proof of George's discovery, and soon COLLIAS was the subject of much discussion within the stateside Collias family. It took a couple of years, but cousins Harry and Jim traveled (with their wives) to the south of France to find COLLIAS. They took along Mary, another cousin, versed in French, to help them get over the

language barrier. After a long trip from the States, there was COLLIAS, as George had described it.

Soon, through Mary as interpreter, a meeting was arranged with the mayor of COLLIAS, followed by a meet-and-greet and a fine French dinner with the town council. There was lively dinner conversation, but no one of the town elders would admit knowing where the name COLLIAS came from. As true Frenchmen, they were certainly not ready to concede that their village might have been named after a family in ancient Central Greece!

To top off the visit, Harry Collias and Jim Collias were made honorary "*citoyens de la ville*" with certificates of proof (but no keys to the city!).

To this day, the certificate remains proudly mounted on Harry's office wall. After all, how many people do you know that have a town in France named after them?



Both photos supplied by the author

