

An impressionist painting of a forest path. The scene is dominated by warm, golden-yellow and brown tones, suggesting autumn foliage. The brushwork is visible and textured, with dappled light filtering through the trees. A path leads from the foreground into the distance, flanked by tall, slender trees. The overall mood is serene and atmospheric.

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Edith Wharton

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We are thankful to you.

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COVER ART BY LOUIS M. EILSHEMIUS,
“AUTUMN LANDSCAPE”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editor’s Note – *Matthew Johnson* 5

Creative Non-Fiction

Why I Write – *Elayne Clift* 6

Swimming the Caribbean – *Craig Moodie* 19

Walk – *Caryn Coyle* 61

Fiction

In Search of the Grizzly Frog – *Ricky Ginsburg* 9

Old Bones – *John Heard* 22

Safeharbour No More – *Michael Mulvey* 30

Sower of Stories – *Pat Ryan* 37

Music on the Border – *David Rosen* 49

Poetry

When We Were Ocean – *Judy Kaber* 14

Hit – *Rebecca D. Settle* 16

Life as it is – *Matthew Hall* 17

Sundae Vespers at the Kimball Farm – *Frank William Finney* 18

Closing the Vineyard House – *Jeff Bernstein* 27

To Honor a Wall – *John Grey* 28

Wistful Woe – *Sarah Calvin* 29

Good Brush – <i>Susan Cavanaugh</i>	45
Christina’s World – <i>LindaAnn LoSchiavo</i>	46
We inherited a hollow house – <i>Christina Bagni</i>	47
Get the Dustpan and Brush – <i>Emily Fabbriotti</i>	59
Survivor – <i>Charles Rammelkamp</i>	60

Interview

In Conversation with Elayne Clift	66
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Biographies

Contributor Biographies	70
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Editor's Note:

With December 21, 2023, being the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, and the start of a new season, this period is an appropriate time to reflect, as we're so close to entering a new year.

Along with the new season and the new year approaching, the arc of sunrises, slowly and steadily, reset, and over the upcoming weeks and months, they will get later and later until June. So despite the sun going down at 4:26 p.m. in Stratford, CT yesterday, very soon, they and the rest of the country and hemisphere will be exposed to more light.

Yet, despite more light in our future, there is darkness in our present time and on the horizon. There are separate conflicts in Europe and the Middle East where far too many lives have been taken, and there seems to be no end in sight to the bloodshed. In our own country, 2024 is looking to be a very politicized election year in a very divided nation. And of course, there are ongoing concerns of climate change, economic worries, the unhoused crisis, and countless other troubles.

Mighty causes are indeed calling us, as noted by scholar, writer, and activist, W.E.B. Du Bois. As a realist, these are issues that bring me great distress, and I imagine they trouble you as well, reader.

It certainly can be daunting to find the light in our modern times. But, as an optimist as well, I try to. Paraphrasing Maya Angelou, none of us can always control the events that happen, but we can all decide not to be reduced by them.

And despite the disorder I previously mentioned, there is plenty of light. According to the Amazon Conservation, a nonprofit organization, deforestation rates significantly dropped over the current year. Several countries, including Nepal, South Korea, and Peru, made progress in rights and protections for their LGBTQ+ communities. Renewable energies, technology, and medicine continue to advance to create a healthier and more sustainable future.

On this day, the shortest day of the year, there is light in the arts, and more specifically, the writers and contributors found within these pages of *Portrait of New England*. These pages are saturated with brilliant conversations, poems, and stories which I think you will greatly enjoy, as they were created by brilliant writers, and I very much enjoyed them.

Peace and Thank You,

Matthew

Why I Write

Elayne Clift

Driving north on Interstate 91 in Massachusetts years ago, as traffic thinned beyond Springfield, the air began to smell country clean. My shoulders came unglued from my ears, and I breathed deeply as I looked forward to a week at a writing retreat.

Four years later, having finished a book written at various locations, I moved to my adopted state of Vermont, a tranquil place of green mountains and good people, and I was excited about my new community. Washington, DC, my home for several decades, had made me feel deeply unsettled; it is not a place where it's easy to be yourself, free of judgments, expectations, and political favors. I had felt my writer's spirit slipping away from me.

Once away from that oppressive environment, I wrote prolifically. I reclaimed my writer's voice and felt I'd crawled back into my own skin. In the village where I lived for 23 years before moving to town a year ago, I often thought of a sign I'd seen when I opted for rural living. It said *Experience Deceleration*. I thought it was funny initially. Now I think it was a wicked good sign.

My lifestyle changed dramatically since moving to New England. To some, it might look like the transition was easy. It wasn't. For years, I had struggled with my professional identity in a town where identity is everything. I'd fantasized about where to go and what to do once my husband retired from a career solidly grounded in the nation's capital. I agonized over feeling marginal as a feminist and a truth-teller. I mourned the loss of my professional persona when my career floundered because I wanted to write. I thought about what I would do without meetings and conferences at which to see and be seen if we left the metropolis. I held onto the need to reinvent myself.

When my first book was published in 1991, I knew I could feel legitimate when I said I was a writer. That meant carving out time for my craft and reconciling some things: I had to come to grips with the fact that I was never going to be on Gloria Steinem's rolodex despite my years in the women's movement. Bella Abzug was not going to ask for my help. This realization made me reflect on my work and my life, which began when I moved to New York in 1963 at the age of twenty.

This reference is important because the sixties were a volatile time, and people in their twenties were dropping out like proverbial flies. Not me. I did the establishment thing: I became a secretary. I was not a civil rights activist; I did not engage in fierce debates about the Vietnam War. I simply enjoyed my freedom.

It's interesting to reflect upon that formative stage of my life now that I am officially an Elder. It was formative in a variety of ways. I became a card-carrying feminist and later finished my first college degree and later earned a master's degree. I traveled solo in Europe and later globally, and began to write about politics from a progressive perspective while producing lots of creative writing that led me to extensive publication.

I went on to work in public health, nationally and internationally, and I enjoyed an academic career, all of which provided me with myriad ideas for writing fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. Writing made me feel that at last, I could be unapologetically myself. Publishing made me believe that my voice mattered, especially when I began writing regular columns through the lens of gender, social justice, and human rights.

At last, my life seemed truly meaningful in new ways. As a writer (and teacher) nothing was more precious to me than receiving notes of gratitude for giving voice to others and for validating their own perspectives. I did get my share of hate mail, but it never got to me. What did touch me were the women who told me their stories, the men who thanked me for raising their awareness, the students who thanked me for teaching them how to write and think, and then became my friends.

It also felt great not to be crazed with the quest for achievement. I liked that slowly, I was learning laid-back living. Having a writing day was heavenly. I was reminded of that luxury every time a friend said, "I'd give anything to be doing that!"

Writing also gives me clarity about what I think and what I stand for. It tells me who I am. As writer Joan Didion once said, "How do I know what I think until I see what I write?" Like her, writing enables me to think clearly, to be thoughtful, and to be compassionate. As I share with others I know, or don't, I can enter honest dialogue in a variety of realms, including art,

literature, politics, and socio-cultural issues. I am not only a teacher and writer, I'm also a learner, and a much better person for it.

People often ask me why I chose Vermont. Then I wax eloquent about friendly people, progressive politics, community life, egalitarianism, and the charm of the place. "I always wanted to live where you had to beware of moose!" I tell them.

But the real reason is this: Here I can think. I can be. I can write. Here, life is real, and therefore I am real. I exist. I am not an image trying to fit into a mirage. What I have to say is valued, and when poetically put, appreciated. Here, amidst writers and artists, carpenters and plumbers, teachers and laborers, antique dealers and doctors, women who play in the snow with their children, and seniors who ski, I am at home. I am comfortable so I can speak comfortably. I found my voice. And when I watch the mist rising off a pond in the early light of day, like steam floating up from a morning cup of tea or listen to the rustle of leaves from the woods, like a symphony of trumpeting twigs and wind instruments, or drive a country lane in the periwinkle glow of dusk, that voice is legitimate and clear. When it speaks, there are people who listen. When it sings, I am heard. When it mourns, I receive comfort. When it jokes, there is laughter. When it is silent, there is safety.

That is why I am in Vermont as I begin the final stage of my journey, having voyaged from maiden to mother to crone. Finally, at last, I have jettisoned the detritus of expectation, the weight of achievement, the pain of betrayal, the burden of competition, the falseness of pretense, the danger of boredom, the blinding city lights. In their place, I welcome the genuine goodness of my neighbors, the beauty of the landscape, and the gentleness of the muse who never fails me. I experience deceleration, and it is wicked good.

In Search of the Grizzly Frog

Ricky Ginsburg

I grew up in a small town along the Androscoggin River that was menaced for several years by a one-hundred-pound Grizzly Frog. Now before you call bullshit, during the eighteen years I lived in Mount Pleasant, I killed two of them that were easily fifteen pounds. So a hundred-pounder isn't entirely out of the realm of possibility, especially when you consider the upstream pulp mill.

My dad, rest his soul, told me that he'd seen the hairy, web-footed carnivore from a distance during a hunting trip. He also claimed to have seen Jesus, Moses, and Mohammad, although not during the same drinking binge. Nonetheless, he was always sober while on the hunt, at least until he shot something.

During the early 1960s, when the local cannabis growers were still figuring out male and female plants, the massive Grizzly Frog was thought to be a pot-induced phantasm. Stoners would sit around their Coleman lanterns and relate tales of horror, all based around the frog and its insatiable need for fresh meat. In the beginning, it was small house pets – a gerbil whose cage had mysteriously opened in the middle of the night, was found, chewed into small pieces. A pet rabbit that had lived through four Easters without laying an egg was found dead, its lucky rear feet missing from the corpse.

As time marched forward, the size of the prey enlarged. One of my neighbors, a World War II veteran, began losing stray cats that he fed. A brown and white tabby was the first one to go, leaving only a few inches of bloody tail behind. The following night, his favorite calico was found headless just after midnight. Labor Day weekend, 1971, a family told park rangers that a huge hairy frog had leapt from some scrub alongside the river and hopped off with their picnic basket and over twenty pounds of fried chicken.

Things got much worse after that. A pack of hunters, approaching a deer one of their group had shot, were attacked by the largest Grizzly Frog any of them had ever seen. Apparently, it had reached the dead animal first and was busy chewing on its hindquarters. Two of the men fired at the frog, hitting it in one of its legs and grazing its head. They followed the frog's blood trail to the river's edge and were standing there scanning the opposite bank when the frog jumped out of a tree and bit one of the hunters in the shoulder before vanishing in the murky water.

I was scheduled to graduate from Mount Pleasant High School the following year and had yet to see the beast for myself. However, frog fever had reached a new peak in the summer of '72, and everyone was on alert. For the first time since my birth, there were more people walking around town with a pistol than a transistor radio. If you went anywhere near the river, which was easy to do since it flowed right through the center of town, you made sure your weapon was loaded and your pets stayed by your side.

One sunny afternoon in late July, the mayor was fishing a few yards into the river along with several, deep-pocket donors. They'd not had much luck pulling fish from the water and were talking about heading over to the tavern when one of them, a lobbyist for the pharmaceutical industry, was bitten in the left buttocks. The gigantic Grizzly Frog surfaced a few yards away from the screaming woman with a large chunk of her yellow and mauve dress in its mouth. The mayor swung at the frog with his fishing pole and missed. But he managed to hook the poor woman on her right butt cheek and tore off most of the remaining cloth of her dress.

On shore, the mayor's driver and bodyguard both took aim at the Grizzly Frog, but they couldn't fire without hitting one of the people in the water. A nearby cannabis farmer, who was tending his crop, heard the commotion and came charging through the trees with an Israeli Uzi in his hands. Not a fan of the mayor or his political party, he was about to open fire until the bodyguard tackled him and pulled the weapon from his hands. The frog got away.

The following day, at an emergency meeting of the town council, the mayor announced open season on Grizzly Frogs with a one-thousand dollar bounty on the big one's head. The council passed the ordinance without objection, adding that no hunting was allowed within fifty yards of the school, the church, and especially the tavern. Sporting goods stores, three counties away, sold out of ammunition that afternoon.

Gunfire was sporadic during the day, but as the sun set, the war began. Over the next five days, sixteen small Grizzly Frogs were shot, all less than ten pounds. Quite a few of the veteran's stray cats never returned for dinner and a small squeaky dog named Poof, that lived a mile away, from the river was also killed. The last shooting turned out to be the result of a long-standing feud between neighbors, but with the frenzy in full bloom, no charges were ever filed.

Several of my friends organized a frog-hunting party and invited me to come along one evening. I took my dad's shotgun, his red felt hat with the NRA sticker, and two bottles of whisky, just for good measure. One of the guys had so many guns with him that he clanked as we snuck through

the woods. Tall as he was, he nearly shot himself in the foot when he crashed into an oak tree in the dark. We hiked alongside the river from the interstate bridge down to the dam, drinking whisky and telling lies. Other than several hunting parties moving in the opposite direction, we saw nothing else alive. Truth be told, no one saw the carnivorous hundred-pound Grizzly Frog that night.

News of a dead horse south of town brought the hunters out early the next morning. At first glance, the wild mare appeared to have been struck by a small car or a motorcycle. The town's veterinarian inspected the carcass and found grizzly fur around the wound. The frog had upped the ante. Upon hearing the results of the informal autopsy, the mayor called the governor and requested the National Guard and Civil Air Patrol. However, he canceled the latter when he was informed that none of their aircraft were armed.

The governor, not believing in large carnivorous amphibians, refused to send the National Guard, but did offer a team from the state psychiatric hospital. The mayor's response was to place one of the town's four police cars on the ramp to and from the interstate. They'd find the beast and kill it, but only after sealing the one exit in and out of town so it couldn't escape. The officer who manned the post told arriving tourists and travelers that an epidemic was afoot in the town and it wasn't safe for anyone until they got it under control.

The second night found even more hunters in the forest and along the river. Again, several, small Grizzly Frogs were killed, some as small as squirrels, but one that was nearly forty pounds threw the hunters into a tizzy. Word of the big one spread quickly and a large group of hunters converged near the dam where the forty-pounder had been taken. Beer cans were popped. Wine bottles were uncorked. And the bloodlust for cold, green, furry frogs was about to get out of hand.

I was home when one of my buddies called and said they'd killed the large Grizzly Frog and he was headed over to see it. The dam, only a few hundred yards from my house, was lit up brighter than a rock concert and I ran to it, shotgun in hand, wearing only a t-shirt, bathing suit, and flip-flops. Low-hanging tree limbs grabbed at my shoulders as I ran through the woods. Dry twigs snapped under my feet. A nearly full moon lit the way. As I got closer to the river's edge, I shouted so that anyone with a gun would know I wasn't a killer frog coming out of the trees.

From off to my left came the sound of automatic weapons fire, and I ducked instinctively. As I came low through some young trees, my left foot and flip-flop parted ways and I tumbled sideways into some bushes. Had I

been standing, the Grizzly Frog that jumped out of a large oak would have landed on my back, its razor-sharp teeth having clear access to my neck. Instead, it missed me completely, careening off a large tree and rolling to a stop not more than ten feet in front of me.

Without hesitation, I pumped the shotgun and let loose the first of three, twelve-gauge rounds in the frog's direction. The muzzle flashes, as bright as oncoming headlights, combined with the roar of the shotgun's blasts to bring shouts and flashlight beams from all directions. For a few moments though, I was blind and deaf, standing there with the shotgun shoved hard into my shoulder.

My eyes adjusted before my hearing returned and I scanned left and right, looking for what I hoped was my thousand-dollar prize dead on the ground nearby. But as the bellowing of the shotgun finally faded to night noise, I could hear something large plowing through the underbrush in front of me. Hoping it was the Grizzly Frog, I pumped and fired again and again until the last of the shells flew out and over my shoulder.

A group of hunters came out of the woods behind me yelling, "Did you get him? Is it dead?" They panned with their flashlights, landing them on a trail of crushed underbrush that led to the river's edge. There were greenish blood spots every few feet, but not enough to make me think the beast was seriously wounded. One of the hunters claimed it was the wrong color for Grizzly Frog blood and that it was probably some other animal. No one else agreed.

Nearly two hundred Grizzly Frogs were killed that summer, enough so that the population never managed to sustain itself. By the time I graduated from law school, the Grizzly Frogs were extinct. No one ever found the carcass or bones of the big one although pets stopped disappearing and no one else was ever attacked.

But here's the thing. If you search through old issues of *Life Magazine* from around that time you'll eventually find an article about carnivorous amphibians. They don't mention the Grizzly Frog by name, but there's a grainy photograph on the last page. It's a picture of something that a fisherman off the South Jersey coast pulled from the depths of the Atlantic. The creature in the photo is larger than a breadbox and as green as the forest, but the details are indistinct.

I remember looking at it dozens of times when our copy arrived in the mail decades ago. Sad to say, the actual magazine is long gone, lost after too many moves. But the image has been saved in my permanent mental storage as clearly as my dad's face. It was big and absolutely not a fish. Must have weighed close to a hundred pounds the way the two fishermen

were straining to lift it. But the teeth looked too small in the photo and there was nothing that resembled fur, which I guess could have been wiped clean by the sea.

I'd like to think I killed it, or at least wounded it so badly that it eventually died far downstream. Maybe even drifting out into the ocean. If it was the one-hundred pound Grizzly Frog in that picture, it would be a hell of a great story. But like I said, it was an old grainy photo and now it's gone.

When We Were Ocean
Judy Kaber

When we were ocean
we groaned our vastness,

curled and spat,
wracked seaweed from its roots, smacked
beach, breakwater, wharf. When we were ocean

we understood the whispers of whales, stroked
spiny-backed wolffish in icy depths, bore
squid and sharks in our bellies, felt black
oil move in our guts. Sometimes

wind and waves would boil,
hurricanes rise, tear loose our thin-whiskered skin,
and carry it to the sky, marry it there

to gray clouds until,

raging, it fell back into the thrum and moan
of what we were. When we were ocean

we delivered ships from shore to shore,
lapped babies' feet, pushed into dark caves
where our heart beat and beat against
limestone walls.

Oh, we were restless then
always moving—full—

and the world dumped everything into us—
bath salts and bottles, diapers, plastic ducks,
powders and pills—

until even Poseidon cried, rose, chest full of rank and noise,
rockweed and lost nets hanging from
his shanks. When we were ocean

we thought we would always remember
the taste of salt, the tender feet of gull.

We didn't know about loss.
About the need

for lamentation,
for sorrow.

Hit

Rebecca D. Settle

Wind caressing the tufted fuzz of a fragile wing | here, the music of nature
is not a foreign thing | Feeling pollen against twig-thin legs |
proboscis curls, nectar of a flower grown from weeds | Fluttering through
air bitten with cold | crossing fields, resting on sun-warmed leaves or
bowers | Fierce currents, piercing lights, too-rapid movement | hit,
crumpled, soul torn from digits & form | Within a mere instant, gone |
quivering, twitching colors streaked across metal, then oblivion

Life as it is
Matthew Hall

Float butterfly float, the wind is there to guide you and the trees to hide you.

When you were a caterpillar, you would always watch the sun and when you first grew legs, towards the sun you would run.

But my fine butterfly friend life isn't all sun and green trees, soon you shall fall too.

I'm sorry my friend but there is nothing you can do, we all fall, we all lose color, trapped in life's complicated web, soon we will all smother and everything we thought was in color will turn into a monochrome dream.

My dear friend I'm sorry if this comes off as mean, but please realize life isn't as it seems, not everything is as shiny as it gleams.

It is hard to fly, and you can fall with ease but at least we'll be together,
caught in life's technicolor breeze.

Sundae Vespers at the Kimball Farm
Frank William Finney

Supplicants
in supple forms

chase fireflies
to countertops

where spoons
stir magic

in the dark
for tongues

too charmed
to speak.

Swimming the Caribbean

Craig Moodie

My mother adored Skaket Beach, a swath of silky sand backed by grassy dunes running along the crook of Cape Cod's elbow. At low tide, the waters of Cape Cod Bay can retreat to the horizon, creating one of the widest tidal flats on the planet—an expanse of exposed ridged sandy sea floor, tidal pools, and rivulets stretching almost beyond sight. Gangs of gulls and terns swirl in the sky above people ranging across the flats, some of them so far out toward the low sizzle of the tideline their figures shrink to specks in the vastness.

Walking there at low tide suspended between sand and sky in a sort of infinite levitation enraptured her. She would turn her gaze downward to absorb herself in the world at her feet. As she left a distinctive trail of footprints—each high-arched foot leaving a mark resembling a cashew—she took in the secret script of moonsnails and periwinkles, the texture of the scalloped sand, the music of saltwater rippling over multi-colored pebbles, the skreek and laughter of the seabirds, the scent of salt and sand and funk of rotting marine flora and fauna. The static hiss of the distant waveline called her outward...she moved across the flats in a trance, suspended between the sun and sky above and the inscrutable language of the byzantine seabed below.

Mom was a creature of air but also of water—a true amphibian. At flood tide, Namskaket Creek turned into a respectable saltwater river. It lay a mile or more from the crowds near the parking lot. Where the creek ran into the marsh, the beach bent and paralleled the creek. Walk another hundred yards and you'd reach a stretch of sand that was softer, whiter, more powdery—the place Mom dubbed “the Caribbean,” if only for its desert isle aura: Even in the heat of greenhead season, the water refused to lose all of its New England bite for all of its tropical clarity.

Not long ago in late May, my wife and I went to Skaket. We walked down the beach beneath scattering fog puffs and rounded the bend along the flooded Namskaket Creek, the tide high and near slack. A short saunter later, we reached the Caribbean.

I stop. My wife walks on, absorbed in looking for the gems of the beach—sea glass, alabaster stones, quahog shells with rims stained the purple-blue of a northern sky. The Wampanoag fashioned such shells into beads called wampum. My mother treasured these shells, too, and arranged selected specimens around her house—on a windowsill here, a coffee table there.

I picture Mom going about her Caribbean ritual. She would sun herself, then don her bathing cap—a salty Ester Williams—and immerse herself in the lapis lazuli and aquamarine water that was her favorite element. Leaving slender ribbons of a wake in the lens-clear water, she would swim laps in her graceful crawl, her shadow rippling over the scalloped sand and pebbles and grasses below.

The scent of *rosa rugosa* drifts past me from the dune. The sun breaks through the overcast, warm enough so I can shed my sweater. Across the flats, fog still shrouds Great Island in Wellfleet, blurs the walkers in the distance. I run my eyes along the outflowing creek, the tide now turning, the water winking in the smoky sunshine. A memory, unbidden, seizes me.

The year is 1969. I am thirteen. Mom and I are on *Carousel*, our family sailboat, a 35-foot Ohlson yawl. We're anchored in Sillery Bay off a deserted islet called Dobbins Island. The two of us have taken the boat from Annapolis up the Chesapeake to anchor here. This is the first time we have handled her without my father, who has only days before left my mother for a new life. My mother has adopted a posture of nonchalance. Even finding water flooding the cabin floor when we arrived at the marina and the general funereal mood leave her unfazed. After we eat dinner—her patented ham steaks with pineapple slices doused in rum and fried in a cast-iron skillet—she rhapsodizes about the molten sunset, naming the colors: flamingo, citron, vermilion. I'm relieved. She's herself. How did I expect her to act? Did I fear that she would shatter?

But after dark, the Coast Guard boards us: a spot inspection. Mom and I sit in the cockpit while Coasties crawl through the boat. A litany of infractions results. When they finally shove off, Mom climbs below. I remain topside under the stars. The boat nods on her anchor line—she, too, unfazed. I stretch out on the cushions and watch the wheel of the heavens turn. At first I think I hear a seabird somewhere off in the darkness—a hollow bleat. The source of the bleat, I realize, is not beyond us, but below. Mom has begun to weep, then sob. My skin crawls. I retreat to the transom and grip a shroud. I stare out at the galleon silhouette of Dobbins. I offer her no comfort. I beseech the stars, willing them to lift me, to sweep me into the silences of interstellar space.

A gurgling of water snaps me back. I gaze at the sunlight squiggling on the creek. Wait—why would I dredge this up out here, in her favorite spot in the universe? Why would the specter of a long-lost incident haunt me in my mother's private idyll? And did my memory serve me the truth—had I really been such a louse to shun her for what I perceived as weakness,

a weakness that exposed my own, that confirmed my fears? I pitied her. I hated pitying her.

She never bore me any ill will about it, none that I could detect. She transplanted us to the Cape from Pennsylvania not long after the Dobbins Island incident, there to begin a new life. She proved herself far from weak. Alone with a teenage son to support, she sold real estate, worked in high school administration, taught piano to keep us fed and housed, and filled those houses with music.

I shake my head. My skin still prickles with embarrassment when I picture myself begging the stars to take me where the sounds from below could never reach me.

Ahead, my wife bends down to examine something in the sand. I make my way toward her. Along the water's edge I spot a quahog shell—an unbroken gray and cream ovoid with a rim of dark purple and ink blue. I pluck it up and rest it in my palm.

I run my eyes along the glittering water to a sandspit where spears of jade green grass nod in the current. Around the spit a swimmer appears—my mother with her steady crawl. Drawing closer, she raises her head and treads water. She blinks the saltwater out of her eyes, puffs droplets from her lips, nods. Her smile comes to me across the water, her face shimmering with silver beads. Then she eases away with a scissors kick, resuming her crawl with an elegant stroke, swimming on, swimming outward.

Old Bones John Heard

Every school has its own culture which is often defined as the sum of the people and events which has shaped its reputation and history.

Miss Maxwell's School, west of Boston, was no exception. Founded in 1925 by a wealthy benefactor, the school provided an education for girls ages 10-14, some of whom were boarding students and others were day students.

In the front lobby of the school was a bust of Miss Lillian Maxwell and a plaque recognizing her vision and her money, which helped purchase nearly 100 acres of land next to the Charles River.

Other than the details on the plaque, very little was known of Miss Maxwell, and her mysterious background was part of the school's lore. Each year the fifth-grade girls did a skit imagining the founding of the school and the role played by Miss Maxwell. Grade six girls completed an art project depicting what the first day of school would have been like in 1925: student dress, food, and recreational activities.

Another peculiar figure that generations of girls fondly remembered was the school skeleton. Many science departments have a skeleton that is brought out only once or twice per year when teachers talk about the body's internal framework.

However, at Miss Maxwell's, the skeleton, who was called Old Bones, was pressed into service on a regular basis.

During orientation week, he was placed on a table in the front reception area, close to Miss Maxwell's bust, with a sign hung around his neck proclaiming "Welcome new students."

Just before the Christmas break, each class would adorn his frame with sparkly decorations of snowmen, reindeer, and Santa Claus. On Valentine's Day, someone would stick a big red heart on the inside of his ribcage, and on St. Patrick's Day, Mr. Atkins, the science teacher, would get in the spirit of things by wrapping his green scarf around the skeleton's very skinny neck.

Of course, Old Bones was in his element at Halloween. He was placed in the center of the stage for the annual Halloween Festival when classes competed for prizes for the scariest skit.

It was against this background, that Old Bones rested, for most of the year, by the big window in Mr. Atkins' science classroom. His neighbors on the long table were some potted plants and a large fish tank.

Each Saturday, the 8th-grade boarding girls had a morning of obligatory work. Some went to the library to re-shelve books and others spent time in the cafeteria, helping to prepare food for the weekend.

Jennifer Beekman was an 8th grader and one of the best students in the school. She had an engaging personality and a curious mind. Jennifer loved anything that had to do with science: the stars, the moon, the weather, the insects along the river, the spring flowers, and the winter frosts.

On Saturday mornings, it was Jennifer's job to clean the science lab.

This gave her an opportunity to be around the things that she enjoyed. Mr. Atkins' room was filled with plants, the tortoise terrarium, and a huge, stuffed owl. Jennifer spent a few minutes meticulously dusting the tall bamboo palm with its long, thin leaves.

From his place on the workbench – next to the goldfish – Old Bones looked down at Jennifer who was wearing her casual weekend clothes, with her long, brown hair tucked up in the back.

He was curious about her. She sat toward the front of the class. Jennifer asked Mr. Atkins good questions and she knew a thing or two about plants and flowers.

Not surprisingly, Old Bones developed a liking for certain students. Over the years, he had seen it all, most of the girls were serious students, some were frivolous and some were vindictive, as teenage girls can be, but generally, they were conscientious kids from good families.

However, he winced when he thought of that pudgy, red-headed devil of 15 years ago. The one that threw the encyclopedia to her friend sitting on the

aisle. She tossed it too high and too fast so the tome slid across the workbench and snapped off Old Bones' big right toe.

As a punishment, the girl had to come in after school, miss volleyball practice and, was made to glue the toe back on. Out of spite, he was certain, she took the bottle of glue and affixed his toe at an odd angle. Weeks passed by before the teacher noticed and then it was too late – the glue was solidly set so Old Bones would continue his journey through eternity with his toe bent awkwardly away from his foot.

But this Jennifer Beekman, he sensed, was different. She was interested in nature and took careful notes when Mr. Atkins was talking. She was at home in the science lab.

So, he supposed this was as good a time as any to have *The Talk*.

“Jennifer – might I have a word with you?”

Without missing a beat, Jennifer looked over and said, “Of course, Old Bones, there is no one else in the room today and I suppose you get tired of talking to the fish?”

“Oh, that’s the spirit, Jennifer! I don’t hear you using sarcasm in class. Did you know that humor and sarcasm are two sides of the same pancake? Now, I must speak to you about your future.”

“Don’t hold your breath, Old Bones. My future is set. In September I’ll be back in the public school – starting all over as a 9th grader in a big high school. I’ll have to deal with new teachers and – boys for the first time. I’m going to be miserable.”

“Now Jennifer. Don’t be so gloomy. Life is full of change and every change brings both negative and positive consequences. Remember the old saying – every cloud has a silver platter. You just have to learn to recognize one or the other and deal with it. I’m sure that you’ll be fine in your new school.”

“That’s easy for you to say, Old Bones. My new classmates will make fun of my private school background. They’ll think my family is rich, which we are not. The teachers won’t individualize their instruction like they do here. I’ll be a number – not a name. Maybe that’s my new school’s motto?”

“you’re just a number – not a name,
you’re just a number – not a name.”

“Come on, Jennifer. It won’t be that bad,” said the skeleton. “You have an engaging personality and you are respectful of your friends and teachers. Look, there will be many more opportunities for you in a larger school. Like the plants you love, you will blossom.”

“Well, you’re quite the talker, Old Bones. How can a skeleton – or anyone for that matter – make predictions? Look outside, the weather forecast said it would be sunny today and now it’s snowing.”

“Trifling issues, my dear, trifling. As you might know, Jennifer, I like my solitude. I only talk to special students and then only once every five years. So, speaking doesn’t come easy and I only parcel out bits of wisdom here and there.”

Jennifer went over to Old Bones and squeezed his small hand. “But were you a good student?” she asked.

“I was not,” replied the skeleton. “It was all that tedious memorization that put me off my education. We had to memorize the names of the Roman emperors and the longest rivers in the world. We even had to memorize the names of the capitals of the US states – and there were only 24 of them when I was alive. When I left school at age twelve, I worked on my father’s farm which kept me busy for the next 55 years. I learned about the land, the crops, the seasons, the stars, the animals, hunting and fishing, food production, and basic economics. I learned some philosophy along the way, too. Forget what’s in the books, Jennifer. Just remember, ‘a stitch in nine, saves time’.”

Old Bones was getting tired and very confused, jumbling his favorite sayings.

Jennifer rolled her eyes, and said, “Thank you for these wise words. I’ll take them to heart but now I must go and finish my English paper. And, Old Bones, a question – what happened to your big toe?” And with that, the skeleton went silent.

In the cafeteria, Jennifer made herself a cup of hot chocolate. She opened her notebook and stared at her essay. The 8th-grade class, in their last year, had an assignment to write about the value of an education at Miss Maxwell's but Jennifer was stuck and felt like the topic was too adult and too boring.

And then there was the conversation she had just had. No one would believe that she talked to the skeleton.

But here's an idea, Jennifer thought, and she wrote down the following:

Skeletons remind us that what's on the inside matters most. External appearances... well, they don't count. In our school, Old Bones is a dusty skeleton but he represents our school culture. He's always there when you need him. He is a silent witness to our achievements. If he could talk, we'd probably learn that he was a person of great wisdom and kindness. If he could talk, we might hear him say, 'Life is full of change and every change brings both negative and positive consequences. You just have to learn to recognize one or the other, and deal with it.'

Jennifer closed her notebook and smiled. She looked out at the garden. It was still snowing but, in a few weeks, the lilac bushes along the Charles River would be in full bloom. Jennifer would be going off to a new school soon, however, the spirit of Old Bones would be with her.

Closing the Vineyard House

Jeff Bernstein

involved Dad's special protocol—
bolt each of two doors (although
old-timers in those Up-Island woods
never bothered locking up), tightly
secure the wall of western-facing
glass sliders that he opened each day
to screens, allowing ocean breezes
slicing across the Sound
to perfume our afternoons until
evening fog climbed the bluffs
from the rocky beach below,
wraithlike fingers stealing across
beach plums and meandering paths.

To Honor A Wall

John Grey

Every so often,
in this New Hampshire forest,
I come across the remnants of
an old stone wall.

Some farmer pieced
this all together,
maybe a hundred years ago,
to keep his sheep in
and predators out.

There was surely no need
to look far for rocks.
The soil here
grows them in abundance.
It was crops that had
a hard time of it in these parts.

The wall has crumbled
from the heavy weather here.
The roots of trees,
the thick brush,
have breached it over time.
Some critter,
probably a groundhog,
has dug a tunnel under it.

But I don't see the wall
as a testament to failure.
No, endeavor is its watchword.
That's why I pick up a fallen stone
and squeeze into back into place
as best I can.
I would never honor defeat
in such a way.

Wistful Woe
Sarah Calvin

*Pallid skies, never dry,
match the absence in mine lover's eyes.*

Grey spectral shadows linger above
the coarse tips of the pine;
The woeful wind, unrequited,
answers in a mournful whine.
Fog coats the tips of distant blue mountains in
a wedding layer of white;
Its heavy shroud hides true intentions,
yet reflects all recessed light.
Rain tumbles
ceaselessly down
A grey dreariness,
all around.

Safeharbour No More

Michael Mulvey

At what point does childhood end? Can it be marked by a definitive point in time, or is it something that fades away gradually, as naivete and hope yield to the painful realities of the world?

8:57 a.m.

Adam, Miranda, and their fellow pre-Calc students exchange confused looks with each other. They all stare at the one large, desktop computer in the room, waiting for an image to load. Long passing seconds transpire before a picture finally appears. Like the future image that will cover newspapers and magazines, and serve as the backdrop for evening news stories, the World Trade Center's North Tower bellows hell-like flames from a gaping hole in its side. The students' shocked faces are as frozen as the terrifying image on the screen. The teacher's gasp breaks the stillness, exclaiming, "Oh, dear God," before silence again pervades the classroom. The dismissal bell sounds several moments later, shaking everyone back to reality. No one says a word. They respond to the bell robotically, leaving the classroom in an orderly fashion. They all silently pray for the image on their classroom's computer monitor to be a dream or mistake, hoping a return to normalcy awaits them in the hallway. That prayer goes unanswered as the loud, crying voices of terrified students and calls for order from terrified school administrators fill the air. The safety of the small classroom yields to the mass panic unfolding before their eyes, and the image from their classroom's monitor will remain burned into their collective memory forever.

Adam looks toward Miranda until she looks back at him. He then glances down the hall toward the double exit doors and back toward her. His gesture indicates a plan to leave campus, and Miranda nods in approval. No one notices them leave the building – students and adults are rapidly coming and going, asking for information about friends, parents...anything. Safeharbour High School, a public school of over 2000 students, is typically a well-organized model of success among the many affluent, suburban southwestern Connecticut communities surrounding it. Now, however, it bulges with anxiety and fear. Being so close to New York City – roughly fifty-five miles – many relatives and friends commute to lower Manhattan every day. The school's network, so severely overwhelmed, can barely upload images and it contributes to the mass

confusion. The few students with flip-phone cellular technology impatiently press keys, the lucky ones hearing a busy signal or an, “all circuits are busy,” message. Media everywhere grinds to a halt as people’s appetite for information outpaces their capacity to be fed in a way never before experienced by the relatively young internet culture of the early 21st century. The iPod is still a month from its first release. A smartphone platform does not exist, and six years will pass until the first iPhone. People only know enough to be afraid. No one is ready for what lies ahead, just as no one was prepared for what already happened.

Miranda gently rubs her exposed arms as she steps quickly toward the student section of the parking lot. A police car passes by as an assistant principal waves frantically toward the vehicle. He stands on his tiptoes, unbuttoned blue blazer flopping while his white shirt stretches away from his pants. He hopes the extra inch of height and emphatic body motions will make the law enforcement officer see him more quickly and arrive that much sooner, as if the officer can make this situation any better.

Adam sees the small bumps covering Miranda’s arms, so he affectionately drapes his sweatshirt over Miranda’s shoulders as they walk through the main entrance courtyard and into the parking lot. His sweatshirt states, “COLLEGE,” in broad block letters akin to the famous National Lampoon Movie, but whatever humor Adam found in parading that around school feels gone forever. Even the ritual of sneaking off campus does not carry any concern or fear this morning. The reality and magnitude of what happened slowly penetrate his teenage naivete, and he realizes that no one cares if he leaves or not because something so much more important is happening. Walking quickly with Miranda, neither notice the American flag waving above them, and their limited understanding of grief makes them ill-prepared for the many days this flag will fly at half-mast in the weeks to come.

The numerous landscape and construction vehicles that typically work laboriously on fall mornings have stopped as the crews listen to news of the attack via AM and FM radio. They hover around their trucks hoping for more information while simultaneously being overwhelmed with what they are hearing. There are moments of very strange quiet, as even the radio announcers and DJs, not knowing what to say, can only repeat what they have said numerous times before. Everyone is so dumbstruck by this event, though, that hearing over and over again that a plane hit the World Trade Center sounds like new information each time. The air around them smells oddly crisp and clean in contrast to the smoke being described rising from the tower.

Miranda and Adam easily locate their friend's car: a brand new and obviously top-of-the-line Ford Explorer. Charlie waves discreetly at them from the lowered window before opening the door and beginning to say something. However, his mouth simply hangs open as he looks strangely at them until they are close enough to speak to him without shouting. He closes his door, forgetting in the shock of the moment that his window is already open and he doesn't need to open his door.

After closing his door and composing himself, Charlie communicates through the open window to quietly inform them of the second plane hitting the South Tower. He had a dentist appointment that morning and decided to wait until second period's completion before starting school that day, or maybe it was something about a math test he hadn't studied for. Fake excuses no longer seem necessary, and Charlie plans on seeing the Twin Towers for himself from the ninth green at the Sasco Country Club. On clear mornings, Charlie recalls, you can see the New York City skyline. Adam and Miranda nod that they want to join him. The tenor of Charlie's voice wavers in an unfamiliar way. Speaking about the attack begins the process of making it real to him. Charlie is the only son of a family with not only family wealth, but money flowing rather freely, as his father's financial services business reaps the rewards from the recent tax cuts and historically low-interest rates. He typically speaks with the tinge of a yachtsman about to set sail on a sunset cruise with a massive vessel behind him, his body naturally posturing toward the horizon. No one quite understands why Charlie does not attend one of the area's more elite, private schools. A large, taxpayer-funded local high school seems not to quite fit the grandeur of his aura. However, that voice of untouchable wealth is not heard by Adam or Miranda. Instead, they hear the tone of a child, too old to still be afraid of the dark, wanting to sleep in the same bed as his parents.

The ensuing car ride becomes uncomfortably long at times, like the slow, scratchy blink of a dry and bloodshot eye. The day would become one of opposites: firefighters charging into chaos while the masses flee, people trying to escape by jumping with no hope of survival, military planes with visible air-to-air missiles circling civilian areas while all commercial air travel is grounded, a massacre of innocence with very little human remains.

Childhood ends for Adam, Miranda, and Charlie as they pull into the Sasco Country Club parking lot. In truth, their childhood should have ended already. The quaint suburb, however, continues to hold them in its safe and affluent grasp, refusing to let go. They find themselves beginning their senior years in high school, the final of four, "very serious years," designed to maximize GPAs and pad resumes in hopes of successfully

marketing themselves to prestigious colleges and universities. The road ahead should contain very clearly defined steps: one more attempt to improve SAT scores, attention to writing stellar college essays, and studying hard to achieve high first-quarter and second-quarter grades. But the part of them that associates their place in life with joy, enthusiasm, hope – that feels gone forever. The fingers of Safeharbour’s safe and affluent grasp loosen, causing Adam, Miranda, and Charlie to begin slipping through the gaps.

Until today, Sasco Country Club usually evoked fond memories and a sense of place for them. Charlie grew up at this Club, basking in its white privilege. That meant learning golf and tennis, swimming lessons, *au pairs* with funny accents, having to say, “luncheon,” when around his grandparents or certain older members of the club, getting dirt stains all over his dress-up clothes, a first kiss sneaked under the tablecloth of the seafood section of Sunday Brunch. He feels the entire place embrace him like an overprotective parent, always keeping him from harm, never making him feel anything but optimism about the world. The smells of the hot dogs and hamburgers from the grills, the colors of the grass and leaves from the early spring to the late fall, the sounds of splashing in a pool or a one-handed backhand or a 275-yard drive create a sequence of images which provide comfort in uncomfortable situations.

Miranda spent the preceding three summers babysitting twins of wealthy members of the Club. To her, the Club simply means free food, a great place to get sun, and the opportunity to drive the wealthy family’s silver Mercedes-Benz, carrying a list price of a cool \$87,000. She brags to her friends that she never feels nervous driving that car, and none of them understand why. Miranda’s mother is black, and her father is white, so she doesn’t fit the mold of an elitist, WASP club like this. But Miranda’s confidence doesn’t suffer as a result. The father of the twins, she babysits and possesses a level of financial security that even rivals Charlie’s family, and his force-field-like elitism protects her as well. She carries the father’s business card in case she is pulled over by the police: *show this to anyone who gives you a hard time, he likes to tell her, and I will have them fired if they do anything stupid.* He is the powerful father she lacks; a blessed replacement in her mind for the abusive one that always seems resentful of both her and her mother’s skin color.

The Club, as it is called, is also adjacent to a small section of public beach. The private and public beaches are separated by a 25-yard strip of reeds and wetlands on property belonging to the Club. The Club uses this space as a natural barrier to keep the non-member, “town-folk,” away from

their private beach. Miranda's mother used to take her to the, "public option," frequently over the summers of Miranda's early childhood. The proximity of the parking lot to the sand made the beach perfect for bringing young children. Before the babysitting job at the Club, Miranda would use that beach to enjoy the sun while distancing herself from the meat market the main town beach devolves into over the summer. She also likes to catch one of the caddy's eyes as he lugs two golf bags from the seventh green to the eighth tee. The innocent exchanging of glances began a romance the previous summer that somehow endured both of their junior years. Their relationship turned serious only nine days ago after their evening rendezvous on the gentle hillside of the ninth green. With the Lower Manhattan skyline distant but visible, they held each other closely. Expressions of, "I love you," followed the physical encounter, making them both think their relationship was strong enough to survive through college.

Adam is the caddy Miranda fell for. As of 2001, he had spent six consecutive summers carrying one or two golf bags around the course for nine or eighteen holes, sometimes twice in one day. At this relatively small and exclusive club, Adam feels strange that this place is his as much as it is the full-paying members. He plays golf here for free, on Mondays, when the course is officially closed for weekly maintenance. His father recently began joking that Adam could be the family's sponsor if they ever decided to join. Adam's father is a lawyer who is finishing a very slow progression from poorly paid public defender to joining Harris, Marshall, & Burns, the oldest and most reputable firm in Safeharbour, which makes the jests possible.

As they exit Charlie's Ford Explorer, their instinctive responses kick in. Charlie always feels like he should head toward the first tee, stretch a little, and hope no one hears the glass beer bottles knock together in his golf bag. Miranda instinctively checks the length of her shorts after having been yelled at for wearing a scandalous outfit by a 90-something two years ago when bringing the twins to a junior golf clinic. Adam always feels like it is 6:05 in the morning, and he needs to write his name on the caddy list quickly and then find a good spot for a nap. All three pause to absorb the moment, as what's normal slips away.

The Sasco Country Club golf course sits on the north side of the Long Island Sound. The scene across the Sound hypnotizes them as they walk across the parking lot and toward the ninth green. They do not notice the grandiose clubhouse that overlooks the eighteenth green as they walk past the Club's iconic flagpole and the nearby spotlight which illuminates the American flag every night, all year long. Instead, their eyes move onto the scene unfolding in the distance. They avoid the greenside bunker,

accelerate their pace down the hill of the eighteenth fairway, and then run through the rough to the ninth green. The eye-catching mansions, one of them, a massive Georgian colonial which is framed by two more built with weathered but sturdy red brick, do not even make the three glance their way. The usually overpowering opulence seems meaningless. The mesmerizing topography seems equally worthless. The Sasco Country Club is designed as a classic, "links course." The layout flows seamlessly with the terrain by sloping from the parking lot and clubhouse to the Long Island Sound below. The natural beauty of the terraced landscape causes one's view to look past the golf course, across the Sound, and to the skyline of New York City in the distance.

All that matters is the smoke, rising into the clear blue sky.

Their pace slows as they ascend the small hill that leads to the elevated ninth green. For some strange reason, owing to the power of golf etiquette, both Charlie and Adam walk along the fringe rather than walking directly across the beautifully cut and manicured green. Miranda quickly corrects her steps and follows them. The ninth green is normally a, "fore caddy," location; caddies rest for a second while the golfers walk up the hill to the tenth tee. From the side of the ninth green, caddies watch tee shots of the golfers as they land on the tenth fairway down the hill below. Never did Adam think he would witness hell unfold from this place, especially after the ecstasy felt here just nine days ago.

They stand shoulder to shoulder in silence, watching smoke rise from the two buildings before fading and becoming one with the sky. The rising smoke becomes their focus to the point that they feel engulfed by it and cannot understand why the air around them smells so crisp and so clean rather than acrid like lower Manhattan. Here, the salt from the Long Island Sound mixes so perfectly with the morning breeze.

They simultaneously grasp the safety brought by the fifty-five miles separating them from what is already being called a terrorist act. They hear no screams, feel no heat emanating from the building, and do not feel trapped as panic increases quickly from a simmer to a boil. Still, sweat forms along their spines and along their hairlines as a reddish heat overtakes their cheeks. Miranda reaches for Adam's hand, and their sweaty palms connect. In any other place, both would have shuddered from the feel of the other's cold sweat. However, it provides as close to a sense of comfort as possible. Charlie's eyes wander down from the elevated ninth green and rest for a moment on the club's tennis facility, pool, and beach area. As his stare centers again on the smoking Twin Towers, he wonders if this club, too, will burn.

The few minutes pass as hours among the three unlikely friends: one a member of the .01%, one whose family enthusiastically climbs the socio-economic ladder, and one in a soon-to-be-broken home. At 9:58 a.m., time essentially stops. The South Tower collapses, sending a massive cloud skyward, and Charlie, Miranda, and Adam watch the eruption engulf all they can see of lower Manhattan. While they can only see the mushroom cloud, they are unaware that behind the smoke, the building has collapsed. They echo the teacher from earlier in the morning, whispering a collective, “Oh, dear God,” into the crisp air as their childhood ends in a silent horror that reverberates around the world.

Sower of Stories

Pat Ryan

I'm expecting trouble. Nothing is the same as last year, when I was 10. Outside, the air feels like March, though September is just ending. Inside my house, the light bounces around the room, up and down the walls. Darkness comes too soon. Way before Halloween, my evenings of playing outdoors are over.

Listen! Boreas, the god of the north wind, has stormed down from Canada. The big, bearded guy is pulling the dead leaves into dust whirlpools that rise up, suck in wood smoke from the chimneys, grow fatter, and smash against the sky. I believe in Boreas. He is a mythological truth. More than that, I believe in omens.

.....

In the night the killer frost arrived.

"This is nothing," Grandma says to Mom and me. "During the war — the first one, the one the newspapers said would definitely be the last one — President Wilson ordered us to conserve coal, even up here in our little town. Well, Ned dear, your grandfather and I wanted to get married real bad and couldn't wait for the war to end, so we held our wedding reception in the frigid church basement. December 1918 it was, on one of those Heatless Mondays. Papa said it was better than a Sweetless Saturday."

"Sweetless Saturday," I repeat with alarm. "I hope President Kennedy doesn't hear about that."

I love Grandma's stories because they're all about us, though they're full of make-believe. "No matter," she says. "I make up the details." When I ask if it's OK to do that, she says, "That's how history works. You put the higgledy-piggledy pieces together like a jigsaw puzzle until you make the big picture." According to Grandma, someday I'll be the maker of our big family picture.

.....

In January, the morning after a blizzard walloped us with two feet of snow, Grandma looks out the window and sees a man shoveling our sidewalk.

"Who's that out there?" she asks, sounding frightened.

"You know him, that's our next-door neighbor," I say. It's odd how familiar faces have become strangers to her.

“That’s Red Fred,” I reminded her. “Ruined by the drink, you said, though we usually give him a nip of brandy when he finishes shoveling.”

“Is it cold out there?” she asks. I tell her yes, and that it’s January. She says to “fill a glass of that stuff for him if it’s what I always do.”

Then she pulls her afghan tight around her shoulders and says, “Better give me a glass too, I’m bone cold.” Because of her cold bones, our house is so hot that Mom and I have to step outside to gulp cool air into our lungs.

.....

Finally, spring returns, and it’s warming up again. Every day after school, as soon as I open our front door, there’s Grandma, waiting for me. “Let’s go gallivanting,” she says. We get along fine, as if we’re the same age. We walk downstreet to Liggett’s drugstore, where we sit at the soda fountain and sample the fare (Grandma’s words) before moving on to Grant’s five and dime.

On the way home, we stop at the A&P and buy a tin of Maxwell House coffee for her and the groceries on Mom’s list. Afterward, we dawdle about until Mom returns from her job at the telephone company.

More and more, I have to help Grandma with the stories — like the one about Aunt Aurora discovering that the high school algebra teacher was a Nazi soldier who escaped from prison camp and how she captured him — and fill in the missing pieces. I saw a movie like that.

.....

It’s June, and school is out. I want to run outdoors and explore like we used to. But Grandma is silent, almost shy. She is not telling any stories. Her past vanished, in a flash, like my devil’s-eye shooter that was stolen right out of my alley bag when I wasn’t looking.

I pour her a cup of coffee and try. “Tell me about my father in the war, you know how it goes,” I prompted her. “The night patrol on the Arno River — in an inflatable raft — punctured by enemy fire — he was shot and ... didn’t make it. He was heroic.”

“Is that what happened? I can’t put that many words together anymore,” Grandma says. She sees me frown and adds, “Unless the words have music with ’em.”

So in the evenings, we sing the funny Jimmy Durante songs she taught me. (I had never heard of him.) We strut around the parlor, belting out “The Song’s Gotta Come From the Heart.” Grandma told me she dated

Mr. Durante when she was “a budding beauty.” I thought she was lying, but in a box in the attic, I found an old-fashioned Valentine’s card that had a photograph of a couple dated 1912. Her name was written in ink at the top, and at the bottom, it was signed, “From my heart, Love, Jimmy.”

Every sunny summer afternoon, I hang out at the tobacco farm. Since I’m still too young to work, I helped my uncle around the barns and carried water to the pickers. They tell stories too — “all far-fetched,” my uncle says.

In the evenings, Grandma and I sit on the porch until 8 p.m., when the whistle blows at the old Powertown cotton mill where she worked a long time ago. She says, “That’s your curfew, Ned.” Then I say, “Good night, Mrs. Calabash,” like Mr. Durante used to do on his show. Mrs. Calabash was his mystery woman.

.....

By mid-August, the days are humid and rainy. With the windows closed, the house is stifling. I run outdoors barefoot, but the rain is hot on my skin. Grandma is bored and wants to gallivant. I have orders to stay home, but I say OK. What can go wrong? We hop on the county bus, ride to the end of the Cutlery Falls line, and stroll up and down. We get home late — tired and hungry. Mom shouts at us and cries about how worried she was. Then she cries about how she keeps losing the people she loves. As a result of all that crying, we’re grounded.

Now Grandma and I have to stay home together, but I can’t say we like each other’s company any longer. Just the opposite. She’s not herself. She barely seems to know who I am, and calls me “boy” or “you there.” I guess when her memory moved out of her head, a witchy woman moved right in. At night, she clomps around in her orthopedic “space shoes,” singing, “Inka Dinka Doo.”

Our house is one of the oldest on Spruce Street; it has creaks and wheezes inside the walls and floors, especially from the attic. I hear Grandma up there. I don’t know what she’s doing and don’t dare ask her. Despite the heat, she comes down wearing an old raccoon coat she found in a trunk. As she parades along the hall, she leaves a trail of fur tufts behind her. The coat is shedding, like a real animal. “The King of Prussia gave me this coat,” she says.

She catches me pushing a heavy table in front of the attic door. “Watch it, boy, this is my house,” she says, adjusting her new scary face: squinty eyes and clenched teeth. Pointing a crooked finger at me, she says, “I rule this roost.”

In our roost, there's one more female. There's Queenie, Grandma's Siamese cat, whose leaps and razor-sharp claws are like Tyrone Power's lunges and lightning-fast sword in, *The Mark of Zorro*. Queenie is allowed outdoors only if Grandma attaches a jeweled cat collar and walks her on a velvet leash.

I make fun of her walking a cat as if it were a dog. "You're on a leash too," Grandma mocks, adding, "and so am I." She walks away singing a strange song:

*"She's only a bird in a gilded cage,
A beautiful sight to see,
You may think she's happy and free from care,
She's not, though she seems to be."*

I ask Mom to explain what's happening, and she says that Grandma is "a bit addled," but still loves me. I don't believe it. That Sunday, Mom organized a birthday party for me. She carries in a chocolate cake with 12 candles and sings, "Happy Birthday, Dear Ned," in a sweet voice.

"When were *you* born, Grandma?" I ask her.

She purses her lips and says, "1492, ha!" Later on, she steals the \$5 bill from my birthday card, though she denies it.

That night, I dream that I'm locked in the attic, with no exit. I stumble around until I see the pieces of fur on the floor, and I follow them like Hansel and Gretel's breadcrumbs, along a narrow corridor that ends at a door. A sign on the door reads:

The Dead Grandma Museum

ENTER

Inside, a bow and arrow hung on the wall next to a raccoon coat with a raccoon's head peeking out of the collar, staring at me. I'm shaking so hard I wake myself up. Though I want to hide under the covers, I have to pee real bad and brave the dark hallway to the bathroom.

Hurrying back to my room, I see Mom's light on and run into her bedroom. "I had the creepiest dream," I cry, but she keeps humming along with her Johnny Mathis record. "Chances are," she sings, taking a couple of wobbly waltz steps. When she turns to me, her cheeks are flushed.

"You two are driving me crazy with your grumping and thumping, and singing and sulking ... and nightmares," she says, with a slight slur. "I

wish you'd both grow up." Then she picks up three of "the greenies" — the pills scattered all over her top bureau drawer — and gulps them down.

The phone company gives the green pills free to the operators, "at certain times of the month," Mom once explained (or tried to), so they stay calm and don't have to leave the switchboard with cramps. In the good old days, Grandma and I used to filch a couple. "Ma Bell's tranquilizers," she called them. "Don't worry, it's hunky-dory," Grandma said. "Everything in this house is mine. My legacy."

What is *my* legacy? Does somebody have to die before I inherit it?

.....

September: One more Labor Day arrives, and one more school year is about to begin. On the first day of school, I'm usually excited about seeing my friends, but this year I'm sad. I can't figure out why until I remember how Grandma used to wait for me to come home from school. Her voice echoes in my head: "Let's go gallivanting." Strange to think that only one year has passed, and now I wish I could get away from Grandma, her blood-thirsty cat, and her stupid legacy. I'm too old to run away from home, but I hate them all, and I hate this house.

"Hey there, Mr. Gloom-and-Doom," Mom greets me at breakfast.

"Reminds me of the funeral parlor crepehanger," Grandma adds.

"You're not looking so sunny side up yourself, Grandma," I say. I know that Mom banned her from the five-and-dime because she did a runner and spent the stolen birthday money on My Sin perfume. Now her one escape is into the backyard with her cat.

On the way out, she says, "C'mon, Queenie, we're getting out of this birdcage," and slams the back door.

Queenie the Royal Feline is the only happy creature in the house. I tell the kids at school that our cat stalked and killed a baby bird that fell from its nest in the branches of the 90-foot fir tree. All the while, I say, Grandma held the cat's leash and talked to a neighbor. No one believes me. Queenie and Meanie, I call them (to myself).

Grandma calls me "the clumsy boy." She's right. Maybe it's because I'm growing taller, but solid ground seems farther away. I never pass a hassock or table leg without tripping. How can I be the Man of the House if the rooms and I are at odds? I swear that the furniture moves itself around. Mom says it's because I need glasses.

One afternoon while Grandma is napping, I ride my bicycle up to the north part of town where the houses are shaded by sycamore trees, and the driveways circle past sloping lawns to meet the front doors.

I bike past the bridle paths and the tennis courts with girls in short white skirts, beyond the vacant spaces, until I reach the cemetery. Stone saints and angels stand on top of gravestones, eyes gazing upward.

“You’re an unfriendly bunch,” I say to the statues as I walk across the grass between the rows, over to my father’s grave — a simple white stone with a flag. Returning to my bike, I trip over a cast-iron sculpture of a cat, buried in the moss in front of a woman’s grave. A chill passes through me, but I keep going. “Sorry, cat,” I say, “I’m not superstitious.” That is not true.

I hop on my bike and speed down to the south end of town, to Cheapside, where the brick tenements and boarding houses were built ages ago for the workers in the tool factories and the cotton and paper mills. Since Grandma’s time, the tenements have been fixed up. A brand-new sign on Main Street advertises the “all-renovated, all-electric Precision Works Apartments.” I’m sure Grandma would snort at that. She says she lost her hearing working on the rickety machines in the mill. She lost her eyesight crying when her son went to war. Over the years, pieces of my grandmother have fallen away.

.....

The last day of September was also the last time Grandmother and I were in the house together. We were both down in the dumps and snatched some greenies to make us feel better. A little while later, Grandma, wearing a flowered muumuu dress, went out with Queenie for their backyard laps.

I settled down at the kitchen table to finish reading the latest issue of *Amazing Stories*. Suddenly a screech made me drop everything and run outside.

“Queenie slipped out of her collar and climbed up the tree,” Grandma shouted. “Quick boy, the ladder.” She pointed to the shed. “Get a move on!”

I dragged the ladder over to the fir tree and peered up into the branches. Queenie was barely visible clinging to a thin limb, sky high.

“Climb up,” Grandma said.

“No way, Grandma, she’ll claw me to pieces.”

She pleaded, ordered, and swore at me.

I didn’t budge.

Firing one more curse, she started up the ladder herself, telling me to hold the sides. I held tight with both hands.

Standing on the top step, Grandma reached out toward Queenie. I looked up at her. “Careful, Grandma,” I called.

She looked down at me. “You nasty boy!” she yelled. “Stop looking up my dress. Go away!”

I obeyed. I ran off.

Did I shake the ladder as I ran away? I really don’t know. I didn’t turn around. My face was red hot. I didn’t stop until I was in the house and looked out the window. She was on the ground. I don’t know if she screamed. She must have screamed. It all seemed to have happened somewhere far away while I watched from high above the treetops, higher than birds fly. They say I called the ambulance and was holding her hand when it arrived. The larger body landed on top of the smaller one. The fall was fatal for both woman and beast.

The next day, a policeman questioned me. I didn’t lie, but he wanted facts I couldn’t give. He glanced at my folded hands, looked over my head, out the window, and then put away his pencil and notebook. After he left, I went into Mom’s bedroom and opened her bureau drawer: No more greenies. I retreated to the porch and sat in Grandma’s chair. I rocked faster and faster, almost tipping over.

Mom came out. “Little do you realize how much you resemble her,” she said and went back indoors.

.....

The morning of Grandma’s funeral, the pallbearers had to carry her casket up the front steps of the church. Grandma once told me that she had given the priest specific orders. “I’ll be observing,” she said she had warned him. “You better not shove me in through the back door.”

I watched them heave-ho the casket up the steep steps. Now I own this piece of the picture, this story of how we got where we are — right up the church steps and through the front door.

A day after the burial, I went down to the cellar and put a garden spade into a burlap bag. I added the Maxwell House tin with Queenie’s ashes, then I waited until dusk. Outside, the western sky was streaked with the colors of New England squash — hubbard, buttercup, red kuri — all at once, I felt happy and whistled as I biked up the hill.

I could see the oxbow of the river where the waters had once been overflowing with salmon. I knew the names the Indians had given the mountains and rocks. Across the river from the graveyard lay the spirits

beneath Sachem's head and the Giant Beaver's broken back. A soft breeze promised an Indian summer.

I turned onto the dirt path to the cemetery. I was shouting out — to the gravestones, to the trees? — slices of the stories: Heatless Mondays, Aurora the Nazi hunter, the clanging mill machines, the mysterious Mrs. Calabash, my father far away in an Italian river.

Parking my bike, I followed the row to the family plot. "Hello, Grandma," I said. "I thought you'd want your spirits about you."

Kneeling down in front of her stone marker, I dug a hole in the loose topsoil. I placed Queenie's tin in the hole and laid Jimmy Durante's Valentine's card on top. I replaced the dirt carefully and stood up. It was getting dark. Boreas, the god of the north wind, was on his way.

Good Brush
Susan Cavanaugh

A winter hike in the pines. First date, good plan
for a Sunday complete with snow flurries.
After the hike, he offered me waffles
in the warmth of his adequate kitchen.
While I considered this, he hunted
his cupboards for shoe polish. "I could
do your boots," he said. Boots
I didn't find in need of a shine.
"I have a good brush,"
he said to my back.

Christina's World
LindaAnn LoSchiavo

— — *Inspired by the painting by Andrew Wyeth, 1948*

Gray's horizon surprised Maine's June landscape,
A painter's sorry weather, overcast.
Christina, clothed in pink, dark hair wind-blown,
Averted gaze, is cleanly carved from light.

Determination fuels her crawl — — effort
Propelled by palms towards buildings drab as mud.

Disabled, her slim body yearns to move.
Her insides hum dark liquid language, force
That silences the traffic of violins.

His brushstrokes shifted weight, immortalized
Christina as triumphant — — luminous.

We inherited a hollow house
Christina Bagni

Peeling walls painted blood red
 pure white
 justice blue

We wander the halls thinking not of possibility
 but of cost
 liability
 disappointment

and what used to be.

There were parties here. Glitter New Years, Baby Showers, Celebrations
where champagne flowed into uranium glasses and everything glowed in
the dark.

There was a murder in the basement. More than one. Covered up. Open
secret.

There were children, who grew up and raised children of their own. Each
wanting to improve the house, because good bones, solid foundation,
decent structure. Value.

It's worth something. It's worth saving. And can you imagine what it looked
like, back when it was beautiful?

And so it was restored, and repaired, and the old lead piping was ignored,
rusting beneath the original hardwood floors. Money was raised and things
were replaced, Theseus's Colonial, until only those deep-buried bones were
original.

The task of our family, always, always, keep the house standing, and keep it
looking good. And so we did.

Until one generation—us. We the children
enter into the stripped-down house—

—the furniture was spirited away before we got the key—

and say, good bones be damned
call the wrecking ball.

Music on the Border

David Rosen

On the wharf where the Canadian ferry docks in summer, a solitary, red-bodied gas pump stands at attention in the snow, like a Mountie on faithful watch. A month ago, on the last day of the season, the sun, already weak, mainland men stacked the floats in the now ice-crusting sedge. The summer boat took the final remnant of reluctant tourists and the air sharpened. Now constant winter mists blur the further shore. A quarter mile out, the pines and the town's few roofs across the water wear thick white sleeves and caps.

Of course, one can still reach the mainland, over a bridge into the United States, then thirty miles up icy roads through Maine woods, twisting dangerously around the bay's ledges and then another bridge. Even in summer, the trip has little to recommend it.

For six cold months, we live like anchorites. We hunker down by the fire and ply some craft—make candles, weave, cane, quilt, carve. It mollifies the solitude that could drive us crazy.

But my hell is different. I make music. And music requires company.

In the cold after the winter solstice zippers up the river with ice, I cross the bridge to the old American grange and beat my bodhran. In the hall, sturdy with thick hundred-year-old hand-hewn planks, my mate O'Donovan saws the fiddle and Moody blows the pipe while roughshod souls foot it to our tunes. We warm our bones on a frigid night. In that whirl, O'Donovan, Moody, and I lose the sense of what is music and what is us. We find what that Welsh poet calls the green fuse that drives all. That stuff comes alive and moves through music even in winter's dead. In such moments, we are one: players, music, dancers, all.

I drive my VW Bug across our bridge, the light snow falling in the beams of the lampposts. The fellow on the American side says, "Going to raise some hell, Fergus?" grinning and laughing with me. I nod and give him a thumbs-up.

Coming back late, good old Brown, our guard, kindly reminds me I owe the Queen an hour, the clock being sixty minutes ahead across the bridge, as if the St. Croix rolled the time forward, and as if I had not lived on this isle my whole blessed life.

"You wear the Yanks down?" Brown asks.

"Did my best," I say. "But look." I poke my tipper out my sleeve like it was my hand. "Those damn fool dancers wore *me* to my bone." Brown and I guffaw.

What pleasure, sweat and ale, smell of smoke, rhythms drumming in my head, to soak in a hot shower, and then to sit in my rocker and rub the drumhead with some dubbin, feeling the skin soften and relax, its heartbeat under my fingertips slow, gentle, and happy as I tap. Then I slip between the sheets and sleep easy, a smile bowing my lips and sweet tunes piping my brain.

So the day the fellow guarding the American side of the bridge tells me I needed a card, I am shocked. I never needed a card to play my drum on their side. I have lived next door for forty years. But now I need a permit just to be who I am or else I may not visit the old grange.

I have tried to figure how it went. The way I see it, it started with that Swan's Island fellow. He was no devil nor even some rich laird. He just came from away, which in these parts is mystery enough.

He turns up one night, wearing silk and linen, looking all the gentlemen. He dances like a heathen horse, his golden mane flouncing as he frisks. The folks liked him. I did too.

When the evening ends, he asks if we would fancy playing up his part of the coast.

Sure, we say. The name of your troupe? he asks. We have none.

"Live Music," says O'Donovan, always quick. It's the words on the poster hanging on the grange hall door. He tips Moody and me the wink.

You cannot travel through the world without a name. That name was a lark is all. But still a name, which can pin you down and tag you.

We pack into Moody's Jeep, our destination Thomaston. Some bar we did not know, but we could find on the few streets in such a town. We park in front of the dilapidated brick building with large, soaped windows and a sign promising Irish clogging airs from a group called, Live Music. Of course, we each take a picture with one of us after the other standing next to the sign and grinning like the Lord's fools we are.

The room is mostly big and bare with a scuffed hard floor. At the far end stands a bar. A few tables against the wall opposite the door. With just our instruments and bottles of the local brew to feed our spirit, we race off like three cats chasing a rat. People turned up and danced.

At two, when the smell of alcohol, sweat, and tobacco becomes toxic, we case our instruments. The blond bloke in the silk shirt takes a collection and crushes some paper into our fists.

We return the next weekend, the one after that, and so on. Then, someone who knows someone who works in or owns an Irish pub in Portland's old port, says we should play there as well.

"But sure," says Moody.

And so we do that too and begin to travel and be noticed. So we spend the winter, spring, and summer stitching the state together with our tunes.

Near the end of October, the boys and I go down to Mount Desert Island. Autumn leaves rainbow the hills and wood smoke incenses the air. Soon mid-solstice will freeze the last of late fall's veil to unmask the bones of winter. It is an awe-inspiring seasonal cusp, and music with the whirl of dance goes well with the falling leaves, crisp days, and warm grog. The evening brings us all joy and I feel truly happy.

My friend Brown, however, does not share my joy when I return.

When I get to the bridge, he does not wave me through his post. He makes me pull ahead and park my bug next to the little shed that serves as his office. He gets out of his box and asks me to go inside. This worries me. Although I may seem rough and tumble and tough because of my unkempt red gorse hair and bushel beard, trouble and I have never mixed, unless it had a harp on its label. The only wildness I have I put into my tipper when I thrum.

I step into the shed and look out the window, expecting Brown to be ripping the top off my bodhran to discover what I might be transporting inside the rim. I could feel my gorge rise.

Brown enters, breath steaming from the cold. "Where were you last night?" he asks.

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph," I say. "You know where I was and what I was doing."

"Don't get upset with me, Fergus," he says. "I'm just trying to do my duty here."

"I wasn't about anything wrong, Brown," I say, "unless playing my music is wrong."

"Well, that's the point, isn't it?"

"Bleeding Jesus," I say. "What's wrong with playing music?"

"Nothing, if they didn't pay you."

"Of course, they didn't pay me. I never take a cent. I mean, we get beer and snacks and sometimes they pass a bucket. But we don't get paid. Not proper paid."

"But they give you money," Brown says, his eyes all grave under his bushy brows.

"Well, they might give me something, but that hardly covers gas. What are you getting at?"

"It's against the law for an alien to get paid, unless he's got the right paperwork," Brown says. He perches on his desk, crosses one leg over the other, and looks down at me. "And, Fergus, I am betting you don't."

"What are you talking about, man?" I say, sitting up so I can eye him straight. "I said, I don't get paid."

"You don't have a license, a green card, or a permit. If the Yanks catch you getting paid, they can throw you out of their country for good and all." Brown has moved from gravity to sympathy. He shakes his head from side to side and clucks like an old aunty.

I point to the bridge. "But that's their country right over there, Brown. I can see it from here. And when the ferries don't run that's the only way we can get to the rest of our own bleeding country. That would be too cruel!"

"You've got that right," Brown says sadly. "All of it."

There are music lovers in this world and there are reasonable folks in the world, and I consider I belong to the ranks of both. But others have minds so filled with the details of the details, the fine points in the fine print, and the nit-picking through the hair-splitting that they cannot see reason nor feel music. Being dead to pleasure and to thought, these folks set themselves to making life miserable for others.

If you are the observant sort, you would see that those who guard the borders have a life where the only thing that keeps it interesting is reading the rulebook and exercising its power. If you are a generous sort, you might forgive them for what they cannot help, but woe be to the unfortunate creature who stumbles into their rule-infected attention.

Next day, I phone Moody and O'Donovan to tell them that my gallivanting days on their side of the bridge are done.

Moody says "Well, you can still come have a beer, can't ya?"

"We'll find out," I says.

I pull up to the guard box on the American side. The sentry leaves his cubicle and takes a leisurely stroll around the bug, with his thumbs in the

belt loops. He stops and raps on the back window. "I'd leave that home, Fergus," he says, pointing to my bodhran.

"I'm taking her to a friend's house for a beer," I say.

He thinks about it, gets an I-don't-like-it-at-all look, and shakes his head. But he steps back and waves me through.

"So what's the law?," I ask Moody and O'Donovan.

The double doors of Moody's barn are swung wide with a view of pastures sloping down to water. The pot-bellied stove works mightily to keep us warm in the chill from the bay where an orange moon slowly rises.

"I don't give a flying frigate," says Moody. "But I do know a tune to cheer a soul."

The music rises with the moon and carries off all woes. The dark-haired night with her sparkling eyes wraps us. Her own sweet voice is our music.

Then folks come. The barn bounces with stomping and dancing. The beams shake with merriment—all on Sunday e'en, with work and the devil to pay the next morning.

"They can't put music behind bars," O'Donovan shouts o'er the din.

"They cannot do that," Moody agrees.

As my tipper rolls the drumhead and my hand caresses the skin, I feel my heart swell because I know that like the birds, music soars free and freely roosts in every place without knowing its name or caring. And as the tree opens its arms to the returning birds, so music gathers to its heart every forlorn and wandering wayfarer within its ken.

The moon has gone to rest when I pack my bug and take the lonely way back to my side of the bridge. Brown is gone. The Sunday night stranger in the box waves me through without nod, smile, or question. I sleep well and ready for the next five days working in my wee shop where in the season, I sell crafts the island women make with yarn, cotton, dried sea lavender, and such like stuff. I arranged the stock with nothing to look forward to at the tail end of the week.

Tuesday, Moody calls to remind me that Live Music is playing at the grange on Saturday.

"Can't," I say.

"Can," the obstinate old fool says.

We do that dance a bit. I can be obstinate as well.

"Can't," I say. "They'll take everything away, my freedom."

Then O'Donovan, the clever one, calls. "Leave your drum at home, Fergus," he says, "and just have a beer and a dance with us."

"That would drive me mad unless I had my drum and tipper."

And that was that.

Of course, it wasn't.

They keep after me until Saturday morning, when I am nearing wit's end. That's when the calling stops. So, I have to call O'Donovan and say, "After all your badgering, you win. But," I add, "I may come straight home again."

"Fair enough," says O'Donovan.

The American guard fellow leaves his box to look into the back bench of my bug. He sees nothing. "Smart man," he says, and waves me through.

In the grange, I refuse to dance although I beat the table with my bottle.

The boys join me after the set.

"Don't brutalize the furniture, Fergus," says Moody. "They never teach you manners at home?"

"What do you expect?" I say. "They cut a limb from my body."

"You're in a hard situation," says O'Donovan.

O'Donovan tips the wink to Moody. They invite me to amble to the utility closet.

Lord, resting against the wall is a lovely new bodhran with a new cipin.

"What they don't know won't hurt you," says O'Donovan.

"Why did you wait to show me?" I ask, perhaps a bit impatiently.

"You can't appreciate a resurrection without a death," says Moody, the corners of his lips turned up in a sly grin and eyes twinkling.

I tap her, rub her, wet her down. The dancers cheer when they see me mount the stage holding my new drum aloft.

I pour rhythms into the songs. I feel the leap of feet answering the leap of my tipper. The old Grange pounds like a youthful heart.

When we stand in the gravel lot loaded with midnight mist, I shake my companion's hands and I kiss the drum, which I entrust to O'Donovan. "Rub her with oil and keep her in a warm place," I instruct him.

He nods.

I keep the beater in my pocket to have a piece of the drum connected to me.

From then on, my old drum rested next to my chair. Every place I went, my new American drum appeared. I refused all money and rarely accepted a bit of food or even tasted a sip of lager from the hands of a well-wisher. Music and freedom both.

Everything goes fine. And Brown becomes friendly again.

Then one day, Brown, with a long face, stops my car coming home.

I roll down my window. It is one of those nights in early March when you can smell spring in the raw evening air and feel its fingers along your skin.

“What ails you?” I say, fearing bad news. “You look like a squirrel died in the attic and your job was to fetch it out.”

“This gives me no pleasure,” he says, “but a guard on t’other side put this in my hands.”

Brown shoves through my window a folded local paper that lines rubbish bins across the river. I open it. A large picture fills the page—me and my mates playing above a dozen frenzied hoofers and a caption saying, “Live Music at the grange hall every Saturday.” Some lug-headed layabout, in search of lucre for his next cappuccino, decided to sell our story. The sight steals my ticking heart, in its place, a little gray buzzing like a fly rumbles my guts.

“Is there aught I can do?” I ask.

“Stay home. Because with or without drums, the Yanks are going to want to know what you are doing and where you are going. And if they find that you so much as hummed along with a tune in any public place, you could lose your right to cross this bridge into the U.S.”

Most folks can stay alive all right, but without that green juice that makes you jump, what’s the point? As the March promise of spring met the shilly-shally of April and snow returned, I got so desperate that I joined a so-called traditional folk group on the island for a while. But you can't pretend an egg is an oyster, even if they both have a shell. If it ain't the real thing, it's shite.

One fine day in early May, when the river was rinsing the last gray ice out of her locks and every kink and corner, Moody calls.

“There’s a benefit at the Congregational Church over in Machias for a family burned out of their trailer,” he says. “Saw it in the IGA and thought I’d call.”

“And why are you calling me?” I ask.

“Well, it’s a good cause.”

“No doubt,” I say.

“Man, it’s a benefit. They want musicians. Surely no one can object to you donating your music to help these unfortunate creatures.”

"Moody," I say, "I believe they could."

“Is anyone going to clip your wings for doing charity work? Be reasonable, Fergus.”

I am far from a reasonable man by all accounts, and that may be why I truly thought he had a point. Surely, people go to jail for taking, not for giving. And giving to Yanks, their own people? What objection could there be?

On the Saturday of the benefit, I roll up to the guardhouse on the Yankee side. The duty officer looks into the back of my bug. It’s empty but he still shakes his head in disapproval.

“Where are you going?” he asks.

"To a benefit. Some of your folks sadly lost their home in a fire and need a place to live and clothes and the like. Certainly, I can help."

The officer tells me to wait in his little shack while he talks to someone who knows more about the rules than he does. It is a dreary wait. The shed holds nothing to read or even look at, except some warnings about drugs and explosives and the like. The only seats in the office are metal folding chairs that are chilled because the heat has been shut off, with it being officially spring. I suppose if you are the type of person who needs to wait in the customs agent's shed, you are the type of person who deserves to freeze.

Eventually, a different officer visits, a large man, with a pockmarked jaw that must have been hell to shave. He informs me that I can go to the concert.

“Benefit,” I correct him.

“You can go to the benefit, but you may not play because any time you make music, you are depriving American musicians of livelihood.”

"For the bloody sake of our bloody Savior," I say and not softly, mind you. "Are you saying that by beating my drum, I am taking away something from someone else? It’s music, man, music. Don't you understand? I bet you listen to stations from my bleeding country. Aren't you violating your own laws with your ears that should be filled with one of your stations?"

"I understand you're upset," the gentleman says, "but I am just telling you the law. I didn't make the law, and I am not going to dispute with you

whether it is a good law or not. My job is to enforce the law. The law says you won't play today. If you want to play, you will need to have a permit."

"Can I cross the border?" I ask. "Can I cross the bleeding border?"

"You are free to go," he says, "but I advise you not to play your drum today."

"Thank you," I say. I drive my bug to the end of the bridge and park. I am panting and the blood drums my chest and ears. I looked in the rearview, half expecting to see the border patrol chasing after me. All I see is the mild, ironic blue of heaven. When I catch my breath, I drive up the street that skirts the town and onto the narrow two-lane highway going west. I look back several times as if someone might be following.

"Let them arrest me," I say to my boys when I arrive. "I'd like to see the headline, 'Musician arrested for helping desperate family.'"

When the emcee introduces us, we get a standing ovation with stomping and whistling. The ringleaders are, of course, the grange-hall crowd. They have gotten to their feet expecting to be dancing. And they are not wrong. We light into the first tune and our fingers fly. The three of us weave a strong airy braid of fine music; me tapping the intricate rhythm and massaging a sweet tone from my drum. It is good to play, to feel the drum's response under my fingertips and the music running through my body. We play three songs and two encores and then give up the stage.

I have never played in anything that was so like a concert hall in my life. It was thrilling. The afternoon raised over 1800 dollars for the family.

That night I cross back onto the island without any problem.

Most big events seem to come without fanfare. They take place in some out-of-the-way, inconsequential spot, as if the world and all its creatures were embarrassed and turned away. Death, which seems such a large monument placed at the boundary of life, when it comes, is often just a wee thing. There are few grand exits. Most folks I have known slipped away, usually in a bed alone, a few times with family members or friends to see them go. And when the moment came, even those who were gathered missed the big event because it was difficult to detect in the slow race exactly when the tape was finally breasted.

And so the death of my music came in a plain envelope with a cellophane window and two black lines of a return address. It informed me that I had violated some provisions of some rule and that now I was excluded from entry into that piece of land that lay across a bridge spanning three hundred feet of water.

Now I could sit in my shack and bang my drum all winter long,
without the prospect of leaving the island, except in summer.

Of course, I could close my shop, move to the mainland, and abandon
the women who make things of wool and cotton and sea lavender.

When I dream, it is not of my escape. It is of the night when my music
escapes. In this vision, Moody and O'Donovan come to their end of the
bridge and I come to mine. As the moon rises, we play, and as the music
becomes more furious, people from here and from there gather on the
bridge and dance, above the water, in no country at all, in the place where
music is free.

Get the Dustpan and Brush
Emily Fabbriotti

I wrote a poem about that man.
Then I cut it to pieces
and let them fall upon the floor.

His heavy yellow tape measure landed with a thud and made a dent in my linoleum.

A bottle of champagne rolled under the couch, the foam inside fizzing and threatening to explode.

That deep, scratchy, champion's laugh blew up into the air and echoed in my halls.

Two dark beasts tumbled down and then scampered about the carpet.

One ran and hid under my guest bed.

The other is still biting at my ankles.

A scrap is stuck to my palm,

with some unfinished lines:

What makes a person bend and break?

(scribble, scratch) heartache.

Survivor
Charles Rammelkamp

When I read about my former colleague Ruth's death,
I remembered her telling me about her mother's worries
because her poops were so thin, and I'd marveled
how only a mother could confide such a thing
to her daughter; probably not even to her doctor,
since it sounded absurd, maybe paranoid.
But Ruth was worried about her mom, too.
That was more than a decade before Ruth's death;
we'd worked in the same group at the company,
data processing, until I was laid off, got a job elsewhere.
Then a few years later we found ourselves
working for the same company again,
but we were in different groups.
Then Ruth retired – she was ten years older than me.
I wasn't invited to her retirement party –
we'd lost touch over the years, though always cordial
when we met by the photocopiers or the vending machines.
A few years after that, I read the news of her death
in the company's HR newsletter.
She was survived by her husband, a son,
and her mother.

Walk

Caryn Coyle

I moved to Massachusetts after I sold my house in Maryland. The winter after my move, I walked with Annie, my Labrador mix, in the snow; my L.L. Bean boots leaving tracks next to hers. On one February afternoon, the temperature was surprisingly above average. I drove to Nahant Beach with her.

Dogs were allowed on the beach from October to April. There were several people with theirs. I guided Annie out of the car, clipped on her leash and she led me to the beach path from the asphalt lot, over the wooden boards, to the sand. It was low tide, I wondered what she would do, since this was the only time she ever got to the beach. The wind was strong. Annie's head was up, and her tail wagged. She circled back from the wet sand and found a dry spot to lie down, paws in front of her. Her nose was up, sniffing the air. I crouched next to her, stroking her head and we stayed there for several minutes. Content.

For the last two of my forty-three-year career in Maryland, my office was in a corner of a garage. It was a drafty, mouse-infested shell of concrete, built more than a half-century ago. I hated it. I shared a toilet with the maintenance crew.

I kept the door to my office closed because I could. That might have been the only thing about the job I liked.

I panicked when I was told I was being transferred to the garage and immediately began calculating my escape. My retirement. The person who had been working in the job they assigned to me had been fired for theft. No one wanted the job.

I managed all the marketing and edited the employee newsletter in my previous position at the agency. The newsletter was discontinued, after more than half a century, when I was removed from my office. I was sent to the garage where I parked cars. Pumped gas. I oversaw the maintenance contract.

Each night, after work, Annie would greet me at my back door. I would smile, bend down, and kiss her on the top of her skull. She'd give me her

paw and I would crouch in front of her, talking to her; I would stroke the white hair on her back. Then, I'd stand, pull her harness off the hook by the back door and slip it over her head. Each of her front paws, which she lifted for me, were guided through the loops and I'd click the harness shut on her back.

Outside, Annie would lead me down our front path. She would walk on my right, always, keeping me in the sight of the eye she had left. She knew our route by touch, though. Using her paws to feel the sidewalk, she'd step back on it if she touched the grass of a neighbor's lawn.

When I retired from the agency, I sold my house and moved, with Annie, back to the North Shore of Massachusetts. I hadn't lived there for fifty years.

By April, tulips had sprouted in my new neighborhood. A batch, blooming across the street, was on an island with the street sign. They were a delightful variety of colors, and it was glorious.

The weather turned summer hot in the mid-Atlantic by April. Tulips bloomed much earlier than they do here.

One chilly, April afternoon, Annie was pacing and panting. I could always tell when she was in pain. Fourteen-years old with one eye, her left one, she had a pink nose and the tiny ears of a pit bull. Half a dozen years before, she kept following me; standing by me, pacing and panting. I knew she expected me to fix the cloudy film that had covered her right eye. I took her to the vet and she lost the eye.

For a while, Annie napped on her bed next to me.

When she woke, she went right back to pacing and panting. I noticed a growth on her stomach. It was covered in her fine, white hair. The white hair I found behind the television stand, my bedroom dresser, the bookshelves.

I called the vet and they directed me to a veterinary referral hospital in Woburn.

Of course, I got lost trying to find it and the hospital staff was so kind to me, talking to me as I held my iPhone, illegally, and drove. Poor Annie panted and panted in the back seat. It was awful.

They thought her tumor was cancerous, but it would be so hard on her to test for it, to operate. They allowed me to say goodbye and hold her one last time.

When I got home, I was numb. But I managed to take a shower and wash my hair. I called my sister-in-law. I looked like hell in my Facetime image. Stringy wet hair, bright red face.

“Oh, Caryn,” she said.

It was hard to speak. She understood. She just let me cry.

The crying ended – thankfully – four days later. I noticed that I was humming to myself again. I felt less awful. A ghost of Annie kept haunting me, though. She used to sleep at my feet on the rug in the living room. For four days, I thought I could glimpse her on the floor. But of course, she wasn't there.

When the veterinary hospital sent me her paw print, ten days had passed. It had been long enough that I didn't fall apart. I opened the envelope and knew; the worst was over.

I kept walking. Long walks, like the ones Annie and I used to take, until she got so old, she could only make it around the block.

I walked on the bike path, behind the post office, across the street. The tulips were still blooming on the intersection's island. Forsythia was trying to bloom, too, but it was still winter in May.

A year later, I sit on a wrought iron chair on the deck of my new home, the top floor of a nineteenth-century, three-story house in downtown Marblehead. I left the apartment I shared with Annie, which held such sadness, and have started anew, in a place with which I am getting reacquainted.

It is less than a mile from here to the elementary school where I attended pre-primary, first, second, and third grade. The school no longer exists; the tan brick building is a community center, now. The old convent, next door to the school, is an office building with space available.

The school's and convent's front yards are parking lots. I remember the door on the school building's lower right entrance was the one my brother, sister, and I would swing open each morning. Sister Superior always stood, or perhaps she sat at the top of the stairs, greeting each of us as we climbed the steps toward her.

"Good morning, Sister Superior," we would say.

At the back of the building was another asphalt lot where we played during recess. As I walk on it, I remember it as much larger. There are tennis courts just beyond the blacktop, which is another parking lot, now. I follow the path around the tennis courts, gazing back at my old school. It is shaped like an "L," two stories. I think of the overcrowded classrooms in which forty or more of us would sit, trying to grasp phonics. I remember learning to read as one of my greatest pleasures; it still is.

Across Atlantic Avenue from my old school, is the Catholic Church I attended. I received my first holy communion there. I do not have any desire to enter it, though. I wonder if curiosity will get the better of me one day and I will go in, if only to see it again. Not today.

Each morning, I now walk to Crocker Park to watch the boats in the harbor. I seek the lighthouse at the end of Marblehead's neck. And I have met several dogs -- Jasper, Sadie, Misty, Rip, Lucy -- and their owners. Birdy, a sweet Cocker Spaniel, always seems so happy to see me. Her owner, Bridgette, and I recently attended a jazz concert at The Marblehead Arts Association (without Birdy, of course). My walks are fruitful, I am meeting people and making friends.

If I am on the dock of Crocker Park at 8 a.m., I can see the cannon's smoke from the shot launched each morning by the Eastern Yacht Club, across the harbor from me. On another block in the opposite direction, Abbot Hall rings out at the top of each hour from its bell tower.

When the weather cools, I find my windbreaker, again. I have to shield my eyes from the sun that lights a wide path on the harbor.

There are less boats docked every day now. The water laps gently onto the boulders beneath me. In the middle of the harbor, a small motorboat makes hardly any noise as it goes by me. Two people are on it, one at the stern. The other, at the bow, is pulling lobsters out of a trap. He hands some to the person at the stern and though I can't see the portside of the boat, he appears to throw what must be considered undersized lobsters back into the harbor.

The sun sets earlier each day, now. I walk the half mile along Front Street to Fort Sewall where I stand in front of the mound that houses the fort. There is a dungeon, here, built into the earth. It has no windows. I cannot see its entrance from the wrought iron bars protecting the open door outside. I wouldn't even know it was there if I hadn't seen a plaque that described it. The plaque mentioned British or French soldiers may have been held there.

Fort Sewall is named for a chief justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, whose great-grandfather was one of the judges of the Salem Witch Trials. Judge Samuel Sewall was the only one who regretted condemning the people who were hung in 1692.

The wind is stronger at Fort Sewall, high above the harbor. The waterscape never fails to thrill me and I think of Annie with less sorrow, now. Every dog I meet cheers me. Millie is a charming, light brown spotted dog, who might give me a kiss if I lean down to say "hello" to her.

I continue to walk along the salt-scented, uneven streets of Marblehead. Pulling on my hiking shoes, I descend the steps from my condo to whatever awaits.

In Conversation with Elayne Clift

MJ: Can you tell us about your journey of finding your writing voice in Vermont? What inspired you to explore this topic in your power piece?

EC: I began to develop my writer's voice before I moved to Vermont. I started writing creatively in the late 1980s and was successful in having poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction published from then on. I honed my skills by attending and then teaching at venues like the International Women's Writing Guild annual writing retreat, and by spending time in Vermont at the Vermont Studio Center. Before moving to Vermont in 1998 I came to the state to have dedicated writing time, which helped me strengthen my writer's voice (a process that continues). The tranquility I experienced here offered me a respite from the pressures of work stress and family life and that opened me up to new ideas and writing goals. This essay is based on one I wrote on my website soon after moving to Vermont.

MJ: You talk about serving as a teacher and feeling a strong connection to the Vermont community once you relocated to the state. Is there a specific moment or experience (or two) that had a significant impact on your writing process as you moved from "oppressive" Washington D.C. to Vermont?

EC: There wasn't a specific moment that had a significant impact on my writing, but I was so much happier here, after several career crises in Washington, D.C., where personal politics can play a big part in one's life there. I felt very welcomed in Vermont for what I could bring to the activities I engaged in, (e.g., serving on the Vermont Women's Fund, the State Commission on Women, and the State Nursing Board as a consumer advocate) and I quickly had several rewarding college and university teaching positions. I made good friends quickly too so all around there was a sense of relief and a much better quality of life which freed me to be creative and to contribute to my community, both locally and in the state.

MJ: What makes Vermont a unique and inspiring place for writers? How does it differ from other locations you've written about, such as in Washington D.C. and your various travels abroad?

EC: My first response to this question is the beauty of the state, its tranquility, and friendliness, in my experience, but I think every writer

needs to address that question in terms of their personal experience here. Maybe my response is a starting place for all of us. When I travel my writing is inspired by the people I meet and the shared experiences with them. It's a kind of happy writing that hones my writing skills, moves me, and gives me great ideas for stories, essays, and poetry. I have traveled not just for pleasure but also for work, and I've also gone abroad as a volunteer doula and women's health advocate, which is deeply rewarding and inspirational.

MJ: How did putting your thoughts about Vermont as part of the, "Why I Write" series, help you reflect on your writing journey and connections with other writers?

EC: I think my responses above largely answer that question. I would add that I am lucky that southern Vermont is host to many wonderful writers who are not competitive and who support each other's work. (I am a member of WriteAction here in Brattleboro.)

MJ: You say in your piece that your voice did not immediately come to you. What advice would you give to aspiring writers who are struggling to find their unique writing voice?

EC: My writer's voice has developed over time, and I think that's true of all writers. Mine is often associated with my regular columns which are quite political these days but my readers and writing students often comment on how I've expressed myself. My travel writing garners comments like, "You make me feel like I was right there with you." Sometimes my voice is poignant, sometimes humorous, always honest. I think what we want to write about tells us what tone is needed in a particular piece, and we get better at that as we continue to develop as writers, as we do with all the elements of memorable writing.

MJ: Since you've lived in Vermont, how do you think your writing voice has evolved and changed through the years? Have you noticed any changes in your style or approach?

EC: I wouldn't say it's changed, but rather it has expanded and deepened. I think it is a matter of time and maturation as a writer more than being in Vermont, although as I've said, moving here certainly contributed to my creativity and sense of self as a writer. And, of course, it has offered new

ideas. For example, I never wrote about nature before coming here, but since being here a lot of my poetry has been about that. And I think I'm better at setting the scene and being more observant about my surroundings no matter where I am.

MJ: Are there any future writing projects or themes you are excited to explore based on your experiences in Vermont?

EC: Well, I did a book called "Love Letters to Vermont: A New England Journal" which includes essays and poetry after living here two years and I wrote several published short stories that were based in Vermont, so I think I've crossed that milestone. My biggest goal right now is to return to editing my one novel – a contemporary retelling of *The Scarlet Letter* - which I know needs work. It's something I've worked on – off and on – for more years than I care to admit! But I know I can make it stronger now.

MJ: What are you currently reading?

EC: I am always reading both fiction and non-fiction. Lately I've read, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, which is now a popular film, and also quite a few historical novels relating to the Holocaust and to women's resistance in WWII. I'm about to start a new book, *The Sisterhood: How a Network of Black Women Writers Changed American Culture*. I read a lot of works by feminist writers, and not long ago I read, *Lady Justice* by Dahlia Gathwick. But not all my reading is so serious. I just read what I call a respite novel, *The Excitements*, about two British sisters in their 90s who are wonderfully outrageous; it was a real hoot!

MJ: Are you currently working on any projects? Are there any future writing projects or themes you are looking to explore based on your experiences in Vermont? Where can people view your latest works and publications?

EC: I'm always writing monthly columns, reviewing books for the *NY Journal of Books* (online), and contributing to the New England regional art magazine, *Artscope* (I have an exhibition review coming out in the Jan/Feb issue and another in March/April). And I just started a new short story. I never know what will pop up to inspire me but once an idea surfaces I can't ignore it. But no long-term projects in the works except for the novel revision. People can read my columns on my blog – www.elayne-

clift.com/blog or on Daily Kos. Some of my books are now out of print but some libraries and bookstores in NH and VT might still have copies. Several of my titles are on my website. Two of my books were published by Braugher Books and interested readers can order from them (print on demand). The titles are, *Around the World in 50 Years: Travel Tales of a Not So Innocent Abroad*, and *Children of the Chalet: New and Selected Short Stories* – which won first prize/fiction from Greyden Press some years ago.

Contributor Biographies

Christina Bagni's creative work has been published in *The Santa Fe Literary Review*, *Writers Resist*, and *the Still of Winter Anthology*, among others. She's a professional book editor with a love of mythology and buying too many books to ever actually read. She lives in Massachusetts. Her first novel was published this spring—*My Only Real Friend is the Easter Bunny at the Mall* (Deep Hearts YA, 2023). Find more about her here: linktr.ee/christinabagni

A lifelong New Englander, **Jeff Bernstein** watches the seasons slowly turn from a hillside in Central Vermont. Poetry is his favorite and earliest art form (he can't draw a whit or hold a tune). He would most have liked to have been, like Thoreau, "an inspector of snow-storms and rain-storms... [a] surveyor, if not of highways, then of forest paths and all across-lot routes." He is the author of two chapbooks and a full-length collection, *Nightfall, Full of Light*, published by Turning Point; his new collection, *The Ancient Ways*, will be published by Aldrich Books in 2024.

Sarah A. Calvin is a Vermont-based writer, poet, and playwright. Her play, *Dick and Kitty, or All in Good Times*, was a 2020 semifinalist in Hollywood's the Young Playwright's Festival. She is an occasional features contributor to the Killington Mountain Times in Killington, VT. Sarah is also on the editorial team of *Pamplermousse Magazine* at Vermont State University, where she is a creative writing major. Follow her on Instagram @misscalvinwrites!

Susan Cavanaugh retired in 2020 from a 30-year career in the health insurance industry, where she was an advocate for health care reform. This award-winning poet's early work appeared in *Yankee*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and *Smartish Pace*. Her chapbook, *The Good Sense of a Bird*, was published by Still Waters Press, Galloway, NJ. Cavanaugh's recent poems appear in *Exit 13*, *New Jersey Bards Poetry Review*, *Beach Badge*, and Wild Librarian Press's 2023 anthology, *Wild Crone Wisdom*. A native of Southbridge, MA, Cavanaugh is an active member of her writing community.

An award-winning writer and journalist, **Elayne Clift's** work has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Salon.com*, and numerous

magazines, periodicals and anthologies. A regular columnist for several New England newspapers and reviewer for *The New York Journal of Books*, she is *the* author of three memoirs, two books of poetry, three short story collections, and three edited anthologies. Her poem, "I Listen and My Heart is Breaking," was performed by the world-renowned a cappella group, [Sweet Honey n the Rock](#).

www.elayne-clift.com

Caryn Coyle's work has appeared in more than four dozen literary publications and she has won awards from the Maryland Writer's Association, *the New Millennium*, *Delmarva Review*, the Missouri Writer's Guild, and Pennsylvania's Hidden River Arts. An editor at the literary journal, *Loch Raven Review*, she lives in Marblehead, Massachusetts.

Emily Fabbriotti lives in the South Shore of Massachusetts with her handsome husband and their sweet blue heeler. They spend summers pulling up lobsters on their boat and winters hiking the crisp state forests. She was previously published in *Thoreau's Rooster* (2011) and *Portrait of New England* (2019, 2022, 2023). Emily works on a collection of poems and short stories whenever she can.

Frank William Finney is a poet from Massachusetts who taught literature in Thailand for 25 years. He is the author of *The Folding of the Wings* (FLP Books, 2022), and other collections. His poems have appeared in *Door is a Jar*, *long con magazine*, *Portrait of New England*, *The Tonic*, and elsewhere. He is a Joint Winner of *The Letter Review Prize for Poetry* (May-June 2023).

Social media links:

[Frank William Finney | Directory of Writers from Poets & Writers \(pw.org\)](#)

[Frank William Finney, Jr - United States | Professional Profile | LinkedIn](#)

[Frank William Finney | Facebook](#)

[Frank William Finney II \(@fwfinney\) • Instagram photos and videos](#)

Ricky Ginsburg is one of those writers who sees a flock of birds heading south for the winter and wonders what they talk about on their journey. His portfolio consists of nearly 400 short stories, more than half of which have found their way into various magazines, both paper and electronic, and 10

novels, half by Black Rose Writing and the other half self-published. While much of his writing has elements of magical realism and humor, he also has a serious side, but keeps it in a small plexiglass box under his desk.

<http://www.fawnridge.com>

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *New World Writing*, *California Quarterly* and *Lost Pilots*. His latest books, *Between Two Fires*, *Covert*, and *Memory Outside The Head*, are all available through Amazon. Work upcoming in the *Seventh Quarry*, *La Presa* and *Doubly Mad*.

Matthew Hall is a man with dreams based in Ansonia, CT. Originally, from Bridgeport CT, he found love for writing in his early years at Zion Lutheran School and his love for writing grew as he got older. You can reach Matthew at, @math.hugh on Instagram.

John E. Heard grew up in a small town west of Boston, close to the Charles River. He spent the better part of his career in the field of international education. He and his wife Susan lived in London, The Hague and Istanbul. He also served as a consultant for a global education organization and visited numerous schools in the United States, Europe, and Latin America. Although he currently resides in Southwest Florida, he returns to New England each autumn to smell the beans and taste the cod.

Judy Kaber is the author of the chapbook, *A Pandemic Alphabet*. Her poems have appeared in journals such as *Poet Lore*, *december*, and *Spillway*. Judy won the 2023 Maine Poetry Contest and was a finalist for a 2022 Maine Literary Award. She is a past poet laureate of Belfast, Maine.

Native New Yorker **LindaAnn LoSchiavo** (she/her), a four-time nominee for The Pushcart Prize, has also been nominated for Best of the Net, Balcones Poetry Prize, a Firecracker Award, the Rhysling Award, and Dwarf Stars.

Titles for 2022: *Women Who Were Warned* (Cerasus Poetry) and *Messengers of the Macabre: Hallowe'en Poems* (Audience Askew).
Forthcoming in 2023: *Apprenticed to the Night* (UniVerse Press), *Felones de Se: Poems about Suicide* (Ukiyoto Publishing), and *Vampire Ventures*

(Alien Buddha Press).

Forthcoming in 2025: *Eros and His Entourage* (Naked Cat Press).

She is a member of SFPA, The British Fantasy Society, and The Dramatists Guild.

Originally from Fairfield, CT, **Michael Mulvey** is a happily married father of four currently residing in Jacksonville, Florida. Mike had two short pieces, “Worst Enemy” and “What Sound Does an Empty Nest Make,” published in the Florida Writers Association April 2022 and August 2022 Newsletters. His short story, “Replacement Theory,” appeared in the winter issue of *TheBeZine*. He can be found online at www.mulveywrites.com.

Charles Rammelkamp is Prose Editor for BrickHouse Books in Baltimore. His poetry collection, *A Magician Among the Spirits*, poems about Harry Houdini, is a 2022 Blue Light Press Poetry winner. Another poetry collection entitled, *Transcendence*, has also recently been published by BlazeVOX Books and a collection of flash fiction, *Presto*, has just been published by Bamboo Dart Press. A collection of poems and flash called, *See What I Mean?*, was recently published by Kelsay Books.

David Rosen teaches English. He began his teaching career at the University of Maine at Machias and lived for over twenty years in Maine, calling Trescott, Machiasport, Machias, and Portland home. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/drdavidrosen>

Pat Ryan’s short stories have been published in the literary journals *Chautauqua*, *American Writers Review*, *The Ghost Story*, *The Hopper*, *Cleaver Magazine*, *Minerva Rising*, and the *London Independent Story Prize Anthology*. Her reviews and articles on movies, music, and literature have appeared in numerous publications, including *The New York Times*, where she was an editor in the Culture Department. She lives in Deerfield, Mass., and is a member of the Massachusetts Cultural Council of Deerfield and president of Deerfield for Responsible Development.

Rebecca D. Settle is a California transplant, now living and writing in northern Vermont. She explores issues relating to gender-based violence, families, and relationships with nature in her poetry.

About The Portrait of New England

Portrait of New England is a regional-based literary magazine, accepting poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction submissions from writers with ties to New England (for example: former resident, current resident, attended school in the region).

After being on hiatus for several years, the magazine relaunched in December of 2022.

Submissions open back up between March 1, 2024-May 31, 2024 for Issue Five.

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