

Newsletter



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Leaves to Spare

by Elizabeth A. Butts

"It's prayer circle time! It's prayer circle time. Time for saying 'thank you God.' It's prayer circle time." -- Every week I ended my Sunday School class with this song, followed by prayer. For the prayer time, I'd arrange my four-year-olds in a circle on the floor, join them, and have them bow their heads, fold their hands, and close their eyes. Then I would explain, "Now I'll start at this end and go around the circle. When I call your name, if you'd like to pray and thank Jesus for something, it will be your turn." Normally only a handful of children volunteered to pray. But during the fall quarter in 1994,

I had an unusually talkative, outgoing class. One Sunday, the pastor's son started praying...and praying...and praying...and praying...and praying. I started to think I might have to stop him. "What an awful thing to have to do," I thought, "but I can't let him go on forever." Just then, I caught a glimpse of Melissa Kendall, with a look on her face that very much resembled the kind of look a mother gets right before scolding her child. Before I could stop her, she blurted out, "Hey, buddy. Amen already." Not the way I would have stated it, but it worked. He promptly ended his prayer,

and we finished prayer circle time.

That was Melissa. She said what she thought, when she thought it, how she thought it. Some days she would bounce into the classroom full of happiness and energy; other days she would shuffle in, slump into her chair, and put her head down on the table. Some days she would freely tell me what was wrong-- "Miss Beth, my sister was mean to me this morning." Other days, she silently begged me with her actions to pry it out of her. One minute she was compliant and affectionate, the next outright defiant and hostile.

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Face of a Walk

by Reene Martin

I wander through town with holes in my shoes and a contented look on my face. Walking suits me. It is flexible with regard to time and weather. It does not require special skills, a wardrobe, or expensive equipment. My walk is a personal trainer and has evolved over the twelve years since I first took to the pavement.

Partners have joined in my walk, dropped out, moved away, or become sedentary. Paths have worn down, grown back, and disappeared all together. The walk has survived a room addition, new garage and office, four job changes, a

master's degree, a high school diploma, a GED, two teenage drivers, the death of two cats, the acquisition of three more, a 12-step program, George, Bill, Hillary, Monica, and George W. The walk has proven more stable than a bull market.

The latest addition came a year ago when a robust, young male became a walking partner. Jack walks fast and ladies can't help but comment on his warm, chocolate-colored eyes and sleek fit body. He is always smiling, eager to greet others, and disdainful of any distance less than four miles. Jack does not allow daily stress or weather to deter his quest for

fitness. The perfect partner and motivator. He is ready whenever I want to go and doesn't demand a biscuit while being fitted with his red leash and halter, but does appreciate one.

"Hi, Betty and May." We greet the elderly neighbor ladies as we exit the back alley. I admire their roses. They admire Jack. He becomes complacent and self assured with their praise. Their newest rose is named Henry Fonda. It is deep sungold yellow, bushy and low to the ground.

We take the first turn onto Second

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THE BEST TEACHERS OF WRITING ARE WRITERS THEMSELVES. THIS NEWSLETTER FEATURES WRITING BY 2001 WRITING INSTITUTE PARTICIPANTS

Car People

By Maryellen Kenney

We are not car people. We do not spend our weekends washing and waxing every inch of our beloved cars. To us, cars are necessities for getting from here to there. That is it. We have never had the money to luxuriate in a late model, loaded-down-with options, super automobile. The story of the cars that we have owned reads like a laundry list of old, high-mileage clunkers. To this day, we have only ever bought one new car and it was a big mistake.

It was in 1977. The first of our four children was a new baby and we knew we needed reliable, safe transportation. We purchased, right off the new-car lot, an Aspen station wagon. I remember the color. It was Mojave Beige. It quickly turned Mojave Rust. The quality of Chrysler Corporation products was at an all time low, and they had not yet obtained the federal buyout that allowed them to retool their machines and start producing better cars. The Aspen was just a car—four wheels and seats. There was no radio, no power brakes and nothing automatic. The interior was all plastic. We drove that poor rusting hulk for over ten years. We knew the next car would be another used one!

We were in need of another car for quite some time when my husband found it at a small corner used car lot. It was a Buick LeSabre Estate station wagon. I even liked the name. It sounded like royalty—foreign royalty. It had chocolate brown metal-flake paint with a chrome roof rack. There was not a scratch on it. There were wheel covers and the mileage was very low. However, it was the interior that beckoned me. There were wide, luxuriously upholstered, 60-40 seats in the front, a

roomy bench seat in the middle and the third seat faced the rear. It was so roomy and very, very quiet. It had every option the manufacturer could load onto that V-8 engine. We could all fit into it comfortably and still have room for a friend or two. The soft seats would make long trips easy, and the sound system was top notch. The suspension, brakes, insulation and towing package were the best. We could pull our camper with it! We snatched it up. When I drove that car I felt like Mrs. Rockefeller.

Sometime later, the children and I were enjoying a ride in the country. I decided to pull into a little winery that we had often passed but never visited. As I drove up the long driveway that meandered between grape arbors on the left and a wide expansive lawn on the right, I noticed something peculiar. The man mowing the lawn had abandoned his job and was motoring lickety split up the hill in our direction.



We arrived at the winery parking lot just as he did. He jumped off the big mower and started shouting as he walked around and around our car. "Lois. Lois come out here! Lois, come quickly! Stachie has come home!"

A woman came out of the winery building with wide eyes. "Look," he said, "It's her, isn't it?"

"Why, yes, I think so," she replied.

"Wait," he paused while he leaned over my car to look closer at the

place where the windshield wipers disappeared into the hood.

"Yep," he announced triumphantly. "It is her!"

So far neither one of them had spoken one word to my family and me or seemed to notice us at all.

"Oh, I'm very sorry," he apologized. "This used to be my car, and I loved it. We would go everywhere in this car."

My face must have still looked incredulous because he ran to the house that sat at the top of that wide lawn he had just been mowing. He returned in a flash with a photo album and laid it open on "Stachie's" hood. I saw typical family vacation photos. There were smiling, sun-tanned people gathered around this or that monument, building, or body of water. One thing set these photos apart from mine, and the difference dawned on me only gradually as he turned the plastic pages. At each new vacation destination, the car was included in the picture! It, too, seemed to be posing right along with the man, woman and children!

The hair on the back of my neck began to stand up. This was very weird. I began to study the man and his wife, trying all the while to keep up casual conversation. She was what I call a "beige" person. She hardly even spoke. Nothing remarkable there. In fact, she was not at all as excited or enthusiastic as her husband. I decided that the novelty of seeing the car again had already worn off for her. She realized that they no longer owned the car and after the initial surprise at the opportunity to see it again, she just wanted to get back into the air-conditioned winery sales room and paste labels on bottles. Obviously, she was not a car person! The man was another character all together. He kept looking at the car, sometimes bending over to see it from another angle. His

eyes had a very bright, almost feverish quality as they darted about. I had the distinct impression that he was drinking in the sight of his beloved Stachie and was definitely coveting her.

At first, I felt a little threatened by his vigor in examining my car, but slowly I could see that he truly regretted selling it. I must admit—it was the best car my family ever owned. It sure was a joy to drive and, obviously, he had not found a replacement for it. I found myself empathizing with the winemaker's plight but also steeling myself for an offer to purchase it. Thankfully that

At each new vacation destination, the car was included in the picture!

never came.

Finally, the children climbed possessively back into the car. I went into the winery to make a quick purchase from the beige wife who had drifted off disinterestedly sometime before.

As I slid behind the wheel of my station wagon and drove down the long drive, I waved to the winemaker. A feeling of great contentment swelled up inside of me. This was a great car and I loved owning it.

At the very next gas station, I pulled in and treated Stachie to a full tank of super premium gasoline. I was anticipating all the great travels in store for us.

No, we are not car people...really, we're not.

- Maryellen Kenney is an Elementary Staff Development administrator in the Upper Moreland School District

Pop-Pop's Rescue

by Diane Dougherty

Without a splash
you slip into the water
like an Olympic diver --
a perfect "10."

With a big splash
Pop-Pop barrels into the water
and scoops you off the bottom,
grabbing you by the straps of
your blue and white striped bikini.

Unaware of the drama outside,
I sit at the long table upstairs
reading about the Bush tax cut,
worrying about your future.

How quickly, how irrevocably
fate can change our lives.
I see it in the moisture in Pop-Pop's
eyes,
and the break in his voice
when he tells me what happened.

We all want to hold you--have to hold
you,
have to feel your heart beat and taste
the sweetness of your breath.

When it's my turn, I sit with you
wrapped in a towel on Uncle Ed's
canvas chair.
"Mom-Mom, I was all the way under
the water and I held my breath!"
You are happily and peacefully
unafraid.

Thank you, God, for this precious child,
this Madelyn Elizabeth Hicks
who gets to be three years old.



- Diane Dougherty, a retired high school English teacher, is a PAWLP Co-Director and Coordinator of the West Chester Writing Institute

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Street, past Quinney's, towards Monroe Street. I hold Jack tightly because sometimes a pet bunny is having a dinner of clover in the apartment courtyard. Jack considers any small creature fair game. We continue to Fourth Street. Frequently, Janice joins us. She is a ten-year veteran of the walk, a friend forever. We met at swim practice when we were eight, became summer friends, stayed in touch, moved to the same town as married ladies, and now experience the joys and commiseration of raising three teenagers. We share grief of losing mothers and agree that the walk is our affordable psychotherapist. Stroll left on Fourth and take another left onto Jackson Street. Jack is named for this Street because that is where Janice found him and convinced me life was incomplete without a companion that would guard me against old age and walking alone.

We saunter by the police station and recreation complex. It occupies an entire town block with a white, modern-looking building and two houses converted for community use. The town landscaped it with cherry and pear trees and left fields of open space. Kids play ball. Dogs catch Frisbees. The borough is generous with their new facility. It houses town meetings, provides a place to vote, and the oversized parking lot gives space to Hagan's Funeral Home when there is a spill of mourners. The center used to be a nursing home for elderly Jewish people. My children's Quaker teachers took them there once a week to play bingo with the residents. It helped to sharpen their math skills. I don't know whether the kids realize it also gave them a perspective on growing old, but I loved the stories they brought home. My boys discovered that people of all ages like to win!

Head down, on to Third Street. We meander out of town down an incredibly steep hill. It pulls on our legs and forces our knees to stiffen. We keep pace across a bridge, over Broomall's Lake Dam. The street has been closed for three years. Something about the spillway from the lake has become danger-

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ous, and there is contention between the borough and county on who is responsible. Residents of the street are delighted. They have reveled in the absence of traffic. The temperature drops as we near the base of the hill. We hesitate in the middle of the bridge.

One side of the road is a forested park, with a stream, sledding hill, and skating pond. It is always damp, heavily shaded, and smells of leaf mulch. I steer Jack clear of playing in the tick-infested brush. Weeds have sprouted from the cracks in the concrete pavement. Huge stone slabs are laid across to prevent cars from using the bridge. Kids have inched them aside so bike tires can fit through. An eight-foot chain-link fence, tenuously anchored by concrete block, protects pedestrians from the crumbling edge of the road. A waterfall surges down the other side of the fence. It gushes over during heavy rains or trickles in dry weather. Winter brings snowplows that push their loads to this abandoned street. The snow mountains grow ten feet tall.

We ... agree that the walk is our affordable psychotherapist.

On the other side of the bridge, sitting on the edge of the tree-lined lake, is a boathouse with an awning-covered deck. Three sprinklers keep the water in the lake circulating. Still, in hot weather, slimy, jade algae covers the surface and creeps toward the middle as fat carp skim the bottom. Fishermen balance on the bridge but signs warn them not to eat what they catch. Behind the lake is a swim club, invisible from May until December. When autumn claims the leaves, passers-by see sliding boards and blue concrete. Jack steps slightly livelier at the bottom of Third Street. He lifts his head and readies himself for the uphill climb.

We trudge out of Media and into the residential community of Upper Providence. Trees are our umbrella to High-

land Avenue and the cemetery. A new development mars the clearing next to the graveyard. It used to be a place to spot birds and chipmunks. Tangled weeds and dense underbrush were appropriate neighbors for the dead. Today, new homes rise: palatial, symmetrical, predictable, expensive. Jack, Janice and I have overseen the two-year building project. Now, families are barbecuing, erecting fences, installing sprinklers and warning their children, "Don't ride in the street!" The face of the walk changes. It is a time capsule.

Silently, I bid buried friends hello. I whisper word of concern and ask for advice. When we started this jaunt, I didn't recognize a single name on these cool, gray stones. Today, there are too many friends. Some have come, released from pain or old age, others unexpectedly, and my memory of them is incomplete. They are a presence for me, and occasionally I walk to a grave and mumble about my worldly anxieties. Jack loves the feel of the cemetery zoysia grass. He thrusts his nose on the ground and rubs it like he is washing his face. At one friend's grave Jack lies quietly, sprawled out in front of the bronze marker. He senses John loved dogs and must feel the scratch of a hand behind his ear.

We turn and start back. The trip home has more purpose. We walk on the safe side of the street. Wooded Way Drive, the Christmas tree farm, Azalea and Heather Lanes pass by. We wave to beeping cars. Janice and I are myopic. We don't know whether drivers are greeting us or sending a warning to get out of the way. Some stop to talk. The walk and twenty years in the same town have made us a fixture. We are a pair of old shoes. It is reassuring to see us together.

Jack keeps alert for Woody, Mandy, Sunny, Lucy, two different Jakes, Tandy, Ginger, and that black lab in the front window on Citron Street. Jack knows where each of his friends live. He pulls his leash and dances in a circle if they are out. Sometimes he growls and allows the white fur on the back of his neck to bristle.

We come into the stretch. Janice lingers at her turn on Fifth and Jackson. We are not yet talked out. The motion of our hands betrays our mood. Sometimes the conversation is fast, fiery and agitated. Sometimes it is complacent, gentle. We make an attempt to set a time for the next day, but it is not necessary. We will meet somewhere along the route and fall into step.

We cover the final distance towards Front Street past a newly renovated stone home. It is no longer a residence but a collection of businesses, tastefully housed. One displays no sign but has gone to great pains to make its entrance tranquil and inviting. It is an eye pleasing addition to the corner and attracts a steady stream of visitors in and out. Later, I discover it is the Delaware County Psychological Service.

Jack is starting to slow but not fade. He senses his neighborhood: the cloying smell of the library tulip tree, Cajun spice from the New Orleans Café, and fans encouraging players at the softball field. We turn into the alley and salute Betty and May one last time. They are eating ice cream cones and question Jack on his walk. They mention that their other new rose is Gary Cooper.

The walk remains loyal through progress reports, stressful jobs, losing teams, icy winters, and birthdays. It is a soldier. It cannot be measured in miles traveled, shoes worn thin, calories burned, or time past. It notices new structures and neighbors and more subtle changes - a shepherd's crook holding a basket of purple petunias, a wind chime going to rust. Jack presses his face against my thigh, the gate swings inward. I am home.



- Reene Martin is an Elementary Reading Specialist in the Ridley School District

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Many teachers considered Melissa a difficult student, one they'd rather do without, but somehow she stole a place in my heart. I think it was because I understood her. It wasn't that I fully understood the facts of her situation. All I really knew for sure was that she was in a foster home. It was that I fully understood what was in her heart. I knew what it was like to endure the kind of pain her eyes told me about,

...whatever I could give her was enough. She didn't need all of me -- just a leaf or two.

the kind of pain you can't really process or verbalize at that age. I knew what it was like to have the world fall apart underneath you, to feel abandoned and betrayed, to feel awkward and out of place, to know you will never feel "at home" again. When I looked into Melissa's eyes, I saw myself.

I knew that what Melissa needed more than anything else was love. And so I loved her when she obeyed and when she didn't; when she was cute and when she wasn't; when she talked and when she couldn't; when she loved me back and when she wouldn't. But I always felt like it wasn't enough; I wanted to give her so much more.

A couple of months later, a singing group I belonged to performed a mini-concert at the Sunday evening service. I could see Melissa Kendall in the audience, on the edge of her seat, beaming from ear to ear. She waved at me and then whispered to her foster mother, "That's my teacher." She was so proud that she knew someone on stage. During the intermission, she ran up and hugged me. She looked up at me with adoring eyes and said, "Your dress is sooo pretty." I remembered how much I adored older girls when I was her age.

After the show, our director gave each of us a rose. They were so beautiful. As I looked at my rose, an idea

popped into my head: "Wouldn't Melissa just be thrilled to have it." So that is exactly what I set out to do. As I looked for her, I thought about how happy she was going to be when I gave it to her; I couldn't wait to see the look in her eyes. However, I couldn't find her anywhere. After about 20 minutes of searching, I figured that her foster parents must have taken her home already. "Oh, well," I thought, "another time."

The next Sunday, I bumped into Melissa in the hallway. "Hi there," I said. "I couldn't find you after the concert last Sunday. I looked and looked, but I figured you must have gone home. I was so sad because I wanted to give you my rose."

"Oh," she said. "Do you still have it?"

"Oh, honey, flowers don't last very long. I'm sorry, but it already died a couple of days ago," I explained.

"Oh," she said, with her head drooping and shoulders sagging. She was so disappointed. But a second later her head popped up, and with wide-eyed hopefulness, she asked, "Do you have any leaves left?"

Eight years later, I remember that moment as clearly as if it happened yesterday. It was the moment I understood that whatever I could give her was enough. She didn't need all of me -- the whole flower -- just a leaf or two. Oftentimes, I am so overwhelmed by other people's needs that because I can't give them everything, I end up giving them nothing. But now, whenever I feel that way, I hear a little voice in my head whisper, "Do you have any leaves left?" Because that is all it really takes.



-Elizabeth Butts is an Assistant Professor at Delaware County Community College

Heartbeat

by Cynthia Hiryak

Dancing
Moving, arms extended,
toes pointed
Connecting life with
movement
Celebrating life

Moving, arms extended,
toes pointed
Changing form and shape
Celebrating life
Moving to the heartbeat
of life

Changing form and shape
Passion, full of fire
Moving to the heartbeat
of life

Passion full of fire
Connecting life with
movement
Moving to the heartbeat
of life
Dancing



- Cynthia Hiryak is an Elementary Reading Specialist in the Phoenixville Area School District

HARVEST

by Starr Troup

Grandma and Grandpa Weldon didn't really have a farm as I always think of a farm, spacious green fields needing noisy tractors to move the earth and rows upon rows of golden wheat growing all summer long. But they had a barn, red with large doors painted white, tarnished weather-vane on the roof, full of musty smells, shadowy hiding places, and secret litters of kittens. And they had corn.

Corn was a staple of our small community. There were roadside stands on every winding road -- handwritten signs, "\$1.00 a dozen." We ate corn fritters when Mom didn't feel like "really cooking." We had chicken-corn-soup church socials every weekend from August until the cold weather arrived and chicken-corn-soup from the freezer to warm us during the cold winter months. Late summer days were spent by many of the families in our town preparing corn in a variety of ways for the coming winter. As a child I never gave thought to where those delicious frozen bags came from or how they came to be. What child does?

Grandpa planted the small field behind his barn with corn seeds each spring. It wasn't a cornfield like others - a field that goes on and on, rolls of green melting into blue sky like waves on the ocean. It was a field that I could see from end to end, and in fact could run through from end to end without getting tired. It was a small field, or so I thought until my first harvest.

Mom and Aunt Jane had been planning this day for weeks. My mother had not grown up anywhere near a farm, but she put all of her energy into learning to fit in the com-

munity. Aunt Jane was her best friend and willing to teach, so they decided my younger brother and I would learn as well. Mom woke us very early that August day. It was still dark outside. We fumbled for our clothes and stumbled down the stairs. We ate a quick breakfast and climbed into the car.

Aunt Jane and her kids met us at Grandpa's barn. By then I was wide awake and jumped out of the car to talk to Linda. Linda was Aunt Jane's daughter and my bosom friend. I wanted to find out if any new kittens

I laid back and watched the clouds moving slowly over us and smiled. I liked being a farmer.

had been born, but Mom and Aunt Jane herded the five of us - Jane's three kids and my brother and me - to the field. I stopped, stood, and looked at that field with a new perspective. We were going to have to pick that corn! It didn't look so small anymore.

Mom handed me a brown burlap sack almost as big as I was. Linda and I would need to fill this, Mom explained. Linda would show me how.

So we began. We picked corn. Ear after ear, row upon row. The stalks crackled as we pulled the ears, two ears per stalk and only the ears with the brown-tipped silk showing from the top. It was monotonous work. We began with laughing and silliness, and even a song or two, but soon settled into a silent, tedious routine. We didn't speak, but the air around us did. I listened while I trudged up and down the rows - the quiet occasional conversation between the grownups; the footsteps, light and heavy, as we stepped on dried, fallen cornstalks; the blue jays scolding each other and us for disturbing their peace; and the cicadas, a comforting hum I always

associate with the end of summer. It was peaceful, it was lulling, and it was hard work.

As our bags filled, we dumped our treasure into the small wooden trailer attached to Grandpa's tractor. When the grownups decided we had enough, Grandpa drove down the road to Aunt Jane's house. Linda and I rode on the trailer. I laid back and watched the clouds moving slowly over us and smiled. I liked being a farmer.

When the corn was dumped near Aunt Jane's kitchen door, Mom told us to get to work. I looked at her, then at Aunt Jane. What was my mother talking about? What had we just been doing? Aunt Jane laughed. "We have to shuck it, Hon," she told me. That huge mountain of ears? She nodded with a smile and headed back into the kitchen.

This was a job that did require singing ... and silliness, and constant laughter, no doubt about it. So we sang. Linda and I shucked, and sang every silly song we could think of. "Puff the Magic Dragon" we bellowed while our brothers just rolled their eyes and made fun. We created a routine sitting there on that concrete step that afternoon. We got good at shucking! The husks were thrown to one side of the porch while the naked yellow cobs were piled in the metal tub on the other.

"You need a break," Aunt Jane smiled as she pushed open the screen door. She had a plate piled high with pink and green fruit. Watermelon! "Here you go, you hard-working huskers," she said. "Go spit the seeds over the fence to the cows."

The five of us leaped up and nearly knocked Aunt Jane to the ground trying to get to the melon. Spitting seeds was lots of fun and something Mom wouldn't let us do at home - we didn't have cows or a fence. We made a contest out of eating, boys against the

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girls, who could spit the farthest and who could land a seed on the cow's back. Of course the girls won.

We were weary and hot, and it was late afternoon when we wandered into the kitchen after we tired of spitting. Mom and Aunt Jane, their hair tied back in ponytails, were hustling about in clouds of steam. They were cooking all of the ears we had prepared. Four large metal pots were rumbling on the stove, stuffed with ears of corn and boiling water. The sink was filled with uncooked ears waiting their turn. And piled high in the middle of the kitchen table were the cooked ears ready to be cut and bagged for the freezer. My mother was standing at the table, knife, corn, and cutting board in front of her, slicing the kernels off the ears and filling freezer bags with the yellow, mushy mounds.

It smelled so good in that kitchen; it smelled of steam and corn cooking; it smelled of watermelon quarters left sitting on the counter; it smelled of sweat and hard work; and it smelled of harvest.

Aunt Jane and Mom worked into the evening, laughing, cooking and bagging our day's harvest. When they finished, we had hundreds of freezer bags filled with corn, half to go down the stairs to the cellar and into Aunt Jane's freezer, the other half to be carried in boxes to our car and then home to our freezer. It was a wonderful day, my day as a farmer. And the tasty rewards would be there all winter long.



- Starr Troup teaches fifth grade in the West Chester Area School District

I Come From...

by Lynne R. Dorfman

I come from Russian families who trained horses for the Czar. I come from a mother who read stories to me every night and over and over again until I could "read" them, too. "I sat by the lake, I looked at the sky ..."

I come from the long drives to visit family in Allentown where I always had to sit in the middle because I was the shortest even though I was the oldest. I come from family gatherings around my grandmother's table for Sunday dinners each week, Pennsylvania Dutch cooking and Passover Seders.

I come from long walks in the Pocono Mountains with my grandfather and shorter walks to the library on Wadsworth Avenue with my girlfriends on Saturday mornings. I come from basketball games with the boys in the alley that ran behind the brick twins of East Mount Airy. I come from long bike rides to the "Aggie" where we all had paperbag picnics by the pond.

I come from perpetually scraped knees and elbows from roller skating dashes and crashes. I come from Seuss, Frost, Sandburg, Ferlinghetti, and Hughes. I come from Silversteir and Prelutsky -- rhymes that play and replay in my head any time I want them to -- and from incredibly scary stories spilling from overactive imaginations belonging only to children who sat spellbound on cool stoops on hot Philadelphia summer nights.

I come from chalk dust and eraser marks, long chats with children, and endless hours bent over an unforgiving keyboard to hammer out stories, poems, reports, and e-mail while clumsy fingers try to find the right letters as quickly as possible without making too many mistakes.

I come from cheerful welcome and tearful good-byes as each class comes and goes, comes and goes. I come from the strength of friends, family and colleagues. I come from the children's love for learning. I come from all of you and none of you. I come from life all around me. I come from the energies and emotions that I give to the life that I am.

- Lynne Dorfman is a 2nd and 3rd grade extension teacher and a teacher-trainer in writing in the Upper Moreland School District. She is a PAWLP Co-Director and Coordinator of the West Chester Writing Institute.

Passages of Time

by Joy Vander Vliet

Our first home was a cute two-bedroom garden apartment on St. Andrews Boulevard. When Paul, my husband, moved from the rustic, spacious area of Fluvanna County, Virginia to a crowded suburb in New Jersey, I could sense his claustrophobia. He craved a space of his own. So before our son was born, the second bedroom of our apartment became Paul's work room.

Soon a heavy, darkly stained workbench dominated the room. The tiny bottles of paint, tapered paint brushes, x-acto knives, and model diagrams began to clutter the surface of the table. Models of P 51s, B 17s, and P 47s hung from the ceiling, suspended in flight. The room and his hobbies were his escape, and they connected Paul to the traditions he and his father had shared.

Within two years of the time we moved into the apartment, Paul's room was commandeered by a ten-pound wonder named Jacob. The first wave of the attack, even prior to the actual arrival of the invasion force, was the installation of a crib and changing table. A stronghold was quickly being established. Eventually, Matchbox cars and Tonka trucks attacked with a force no World War II invasion fleet could have matched. Paul's desk was dismantled; his space surrendered. Paul's boyhood passions would have to be placed on hold as he assumed the new role of father.

We moved two more times after leaving St. Andrews Boulevard. Jake was going on eight when we settled into the 100 year old Dutch Colonial house on Broad Street. At first Jake would not go near the attic. Originally, we had thought about making it into a playroom, but Jake wanted no part of the idea. He was petrified of going up those creaking stairs into that unknown territory. The attic had never been finished, but it did stretch the full length of the house. So since Jake had no interest in the space, we used it for storage, a sewing/craft room and even an exercise room over the years.

Over time Jake's fear of the attic disappeared, and many wild games of hide and seek were played in that space. Jake and

his friends came to view the room as a clubhouse of sorts. What a great way to escape the grown-ups. Then Jake turned sixteen, and he asked if he could move out of his current bedroom and relocate up to the attic. We thought it was a great idea. What teen-ager wouldn't love to have their own private space, away from the parental eye! So we agreed and began to help him make his move.

Jake and his Dad managed to get all his worldly possessions up the twisted stairs. The first thing they set up was the stereo with its four speakers, one in each corner of the attic. Soon we could hear his stereo in every corner of the house, let alone in the attic. Jake even convinced his father to help lug upstairs the ratty, ancient brown recliner that had once belonged to his grandfather. Finally, the move was complete.

We have come full circle as a family.

On Jake's first night in his new room we went upstairs with him to say his prayers together, just as we had done since the time we brought him home from the hospital as a baby. We kissed him and said good-night and made our way downstairs. Later, as I walked to our bedroom, I noticed the door to Jake's room was open. I started to tiptoe over to quietly close the door, as I had done so many nights, and then I remembered...he wasn't there.

As I walked into the empty room, it was literally and figuratively filled with echoes. Yet it was so quiet, I could hear my own breathing. I stood in the middle of the room, and my mind was flooded with memories: the giddy laughter during tickling episodes, the arguments over homework and chores, the tears shed over the loss of our beloved Boston terrier dog, Derby. So much had happened in this room over the past few years. I wanted him back, close to me, so I could pause at his door and listen for his rhythmic breathing and I would know that he was all right. Even though, in my mind, I knew he was in the room above me, my

heart knew better. This was Jake's first step away.

When Jake was eighteen, we moved to Pennsylvania. Jake's room was a very small space for such a big guy. The move was tough, but he tried to make it home. Pink Floyd posters hung on the walls. The quadrasonic stereo system was resurrected and installed. "You've got mail," resounded from his computer. Pictures of his Nana, who had left us only the year before, sat in the large window sill with a red marble apple, the reminder of a trip they had taken together. Just as his father had moved from his boyhood home and made his passage into adulthood in a strange new land, so would Jake come of age in a foreign place.

Three years later, it came time for Jake to move again. This time it would not be to a different room in our home. This time Jake was going on alone. The computer was unplugged; the posters taken down. All his worldly possessions packed up in a rented truck by Jake and his Dad. One morning he was still there and by night, he was gone. A different address, a different phone number, a separate life. An empty room again. A familiar echoing of silence.

Not immediately, but after some time, I began to see familiar objects appearing in Jake's old room. Tiny bottles of paint, small tapered brushes, model boxes spread atop a snack tray. New models spirited from the ceiling. A World War II trainer, a Corsair, and a P 51 had been rescued from the mothballs and were now in active service. Paul was once again finding a space.

When we left New Jersey to move to Pennsylvania, Paul left his wood working shop—his passion—behind. For three years he had been busy with his studies as a "mature" college student, but now that he had more down time, he was once again searching for a creative outlet. Jake's room was a constant reminder that another pas-

sage of life had occurred. Now, instead of Jake's stuff, Jake's pictures fill some of the empty space. The silence is empty—devoid of the life that Jake brought into this room and into our lives. Now, as Paul sits quietly working on his models, his classical music playing in the background, it is clear to see that we have come full circle as a family. The life that came in with such a force and changed our lives left with equal force and changed our lives again.

- Joy VanderVliet teaches High School English in the Council Rock School District



Birthdays

by Kimberly Stevenson

"Blow 'em out! Come on, Kimmer Wimmer, hurry up!" my (new) uncle Frank hollers to me as I simultaneously take a step back. The cake is aglow with 32 candles - too many for a child of six to quickly count or blow out. My stepfather beckons me to join him in making a wish while he blows out the candles on our birthday cake. That's right our birthday cake. Ever since he joined the family when I was four, my birthday party suddenly became our party since our birthdays were only one day apart. Birthday parties with my 'new' family were real parties. Vibrant and noisy. Like the kind you see on TV shows. Lots of people milling around, sipping on sherbet punch, and a LARGE stack of presents wrapped in brightly patterned paper, often with perfectly matched bows and ribbons. I remember feeling excited and

overwhelmed—all at the same time. I remember these parties fondly, and I know I have always been loved and accepted by my new relatives. But I also remember feelings of distance. After our families 'joined,' my actual day of birth, June 3rd, became less significant. Our birthdays were celebrated when it was most convenient for the majority.

Convenience or significance—both are worthy reasons to have a party. Yet, these two words sting as another wave of memories overflows. Flashes of my husband's family begin to flutter around in my mind. The many phone calls received over the years. Not the day before my birthday, or the day after my birthday, BUT ON MY BIRTHDAY!

Convenience or significance - both are worthy reasons to have a party.

Sometimes I'm there to receive the calls, and a conversation begins. All focused on my birthday and me! Other times, my expressionless, white answering machine receives the calls. Upon my return home, the red light is blinking. Blinking quietly but quickly as it counts to three or more, the number of calls it had to record while I was out. Urgently asking me to come on over for a listen. As I press the play key, I am immediately flooded with the short but ever-so-sweet messages. As I listen, I hear Susie (my sister-in-law) wishing me a happy day. Is that a smirk in her voice as she reminds me yet again I am six months older than she? Next is Rachel, my other sister-in-law. Her soft caring voice builds with excitement as she questions my machine: "Where are you? What are you doing? Hope you are having a great day!" Then she reminds me how much I am loved by her, the family and God. Next she puts my sweet-as-can-be niece, Tori, on the phone. Tori just turned three, and in her small, squeaky voice I hear the words: "Happy Bird-day

Aunt Tim." I chuckle and think about how she still can't quite pronounce the "K" in Kim and calls me Aunt Tim. It is especially adorable when she sees us both and says, "Hi Aunt Tim and Uncle Tim." Next on the machine are my mother and father-in-law. Whenever either of them talks on the machine, they speak slowly. It's as if they think you might walk in at any moment, hear their voices, and need just a second longer to pick up the phone. They trade the phone back and forth and talk about how happy they are to have me in the family and that they think of me/us often. Pop always gets back on to give a safety warning, --Don't leave any candles burning, unplug the coffee machine when you are done with it, make sure you have the front door locked before you go to bed -- and to make sure that I (or we) are being good.

I've experienced the extravagant and non-extravagant birthday parties. Both hold oceans full of memories. But I will say that as the years have gone by, (and, have they ever gone quickly), I feel at peace coming home on my birthday to see the red light blinking on my answering machine. Birthday celebrations with my in-laws are not a big whirlwind event, at least not in the material sense. But they are amazing, nonetheless. Who would think so much could be given and received through the crackling voice on a dull, white answering machine?



- Kimberly Stevenson is an Elementary Learning Support teacher in the Twin Valley School District

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