Victoria Revisited

by Kimberly Riley

Have you ever had the experience of discovering an entirely new side to someone familiar? There you are, talking or watching the person you thought you knew well, when she (or he) says or does something that introduces you to an entirely unknown dimension of her (or his) personality. The possibility of having such an encounter is one pleasure of studying history. You read a little deeper into a historical figure's letters or diaries or you pick up a new biography, even though you are thinking there cannot be anything really new written on such a familiar subject, and you find yourself surprised by the range and depth of human character and experience.

Queen Victoria, Britain's longest reigning monarch, is a perfect example. Victoria seems to embody all the repressions of the long era that took her name. But what do we really know about her? The 1997 movie Mrs. Brown made famous Victoria's extended mourning for her husband, Albert, who tragically died at age forty-two from typhoid fever; it also made famous her partial emotional recovery through the highly unconventional relationship she had with the couple's Scottish groom, John Brown. But even this fascinating episode doesn't really change our fundamental impression. She still seems to possess a rigid and publicly uncompromising personality. John Brown seems an exception in an otherwise conventional life. But was he?

Victoria was, in fact, unusual in many of her attitudes and actions. In today's business parlance, she would be seen as an “early adopter,” a person who leads by experimenting with new technologies or cultural practices. Victoria was science and technology's best friend at a time when the queen's choices and habits were influential not just in Great Britain but throughout the empire. She was among the first to ride Britain's new train system; she served Indian foods at evening meals—despite protests from friends and family; she installed running water and flush toilets in her official residences; and she used chloroform as a pain reliever during childbirth. When criticized by many clergymen for promoting a drug that took away the childbirth pain meted to womankind as part of God's

Continued on page 2
punishment of Eve, she laughed… Referring to chloroform as a “blessed” substance, she dismissed all objections.

Victoria also stood behind Albert's efforts to organize and fund the now-famous Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851, the world's first international exhibition, wherein the latest scientific ideas, inventions, cultural artifacts, and novel amusements were gathered for public display. Conservative critics feared that an exhibition of its size, held in a public place such as Hyde Park, would attract social radicals and agitators. Victoria refused to cave to that argument and backed her husband's desire to bring the exhibit to as many people as possible. And people did come from all over England, many traveling for the first time to experience this new kind of public education. Given that, by 1851, there had been several attempts on Victoria's life, her support for the exhibition, as well as her continued public appearances, is bolder than it might otherwise seem.

While she is not known for her progressive politics, Victoria was the first reigning British monarch to show active concern for the horrific conditions experienced by common British soldiers deployed in Britain's foreign wars. During the Crimean War, she and Albert read daily reports and, for hours on end, she and her ladies knitted socks for the soldiers. Hearing that a young aristocratic woman had decided to lead a party of thirty-eight volunteers to work in the dirty, overcrowded, and undersupplied British hospital at Scutari, she used her influence to ensure that the young Florence Nightingale's reports on conditions were heard and acted upon in London.

After the war, she supported Nightingale's efforts to establish professional nursing training at St. Thomas Hospital, London, awarding her the Royal Red Cross in 1883. In 1856, Victoria had been moved by stories heard from the Crimea and had created the Victoria Cross, a military decoration for bravery. It was the first medal in British history to be awarded to common soldiers as well as to officers.

Although Queen Victoria represented an ancient institution, she thought of herself as a progressive and she used her position to promote causes considered liberal in her time.

But, in the end, it is difficult not to come back to her personal life. Over her long life, Victoria was a prolific diarist and letter writer, which has allowed us to know far more about her thoughts and feelings than we know of most public figures. And, too, there is something mesmerizing about Victoria's protracted grief. Perhaps circumstances influenced the depth of her experience.

At the time of Albert's last illness, no one knew his state of mind better than Victoria. He was overburdened with work, saddened by recent deaths of two close relatives, and embarrassed by newspaper reports of his eldest son's continuing affair with an Irish actress. In an agitated state of mind, Albert traveled to Cambridge to plead with his son, the Prince of Wales and future King of Great Britain, to break off the embarrassing affair. He arrived late, the weather was wet, and father and son walked and argued for hours until they were both soaked and exhausted. Albert fell ill, but returned home to Windsor Castle only to die soon after, surrounded by Victoria and five of their nine children.

Victoria wore mourning for the rest of her life. Each morning Albert's shaving kit was brought into her room, and each evening Albert's dressing gown was laid out on her bed, just as it had been when Albert was alive. At night she slept with a plaster cast of Albert's hand. Modern consensus would likely cause us to frown on this kind of expression. We want to “move on” from uncomfortable or tragic events.
People who grieve, and they are all around us, are often marginalized, even forgotten, in a culture intent on entertainment and success. Yet Victoria’s grief, if we allow ourselves to seriously contemplate it, is perhaps a more natural response to significant loss. Her reactions may appear antiquated, yet there is something quietly heroic about her refusal to be bullied by friends, family, and political advisors: she refused to deny the personal. She refused to conform. Like that friend we thought we knew, Victoria surprises us and that opens our minds to a wider expression of feelings, thoughts, and actions.

**Triple Coupons!**

*by Jacob Radin*

Once a week, *The Baltimore Sun*, which is normally thinned down to two sections, is thick with retail advertising. This excess bulk is usually disposed of by a quick trip to the trash room, but last week something caught my eye. The grocery where I shop was offering a special deal—a step beyond double coupons—*triple* coupons: any coupon under $1 would be tripled at the cash register.

One fifty-cent coupon would deduct $1.50 from my grocery bill. How could I lose?

On my next trip to the grocery I brought along the fifty-cent coupon for Paul Newman’s salad dressing, ordinarily a $2 item, and a second coupon to be applied to the cost of a box of protein bars.

As I head for the check-out I survey the congestion. Lane 2 is manned by a slow cashier. No way. I want to find the fastest lane. Lane 3 has only two customers, but their baskets are full to the brim. Lane 4, the express lane, has a limit of twenty items per customer and only two customers are in line. As I move into lane 4, I take note of Mr. Baseball Cap, who joins lane 3. I am confident that I will beat him to the finish line.

In my lane, the first customer’s groceries are laid out on the conveyer belt. They are double the limit of twenty. The customer carries on a conversation with the cashier and takes frequent swigs from the bottled water she has not yet paid for. I notice that Mr. Baseball Cap in lane 3 has moved one step closer to the cashier. I am falling behind.

The talkative water drinker departs, and the customer ahead of me advances. She empties her basket of its twenty or so items, which are rung up, and then opens her handbag. She pulls out a fistful of coupons. I count the bleeping as they are scanned—*eighteen*. But there is a problem. Two coupons fail the test.

The customer paws through her grocery bags to retrieve the two items. She pulls them out and the coupons are validated. In the meantime, Mr. Baseball Cap has disappeared through the exit door. I have lost the race.

My turn at the cash register...“This is a heavy coupon day,” I sympathetically remark. The cashier barely bothers to give me a smile. I give her my two coupons, which she holds loosely in her left hand as she scans my purchases. Seeing how casually she treats my coupons, I suggest, “I’ll be glad to hold them for you until you are ready.” She shakes her head. The bagger transfers the bags to my basket. I swipe my credit card. At last, I am on my way.

A few steps and I hear the bagger shout, “Mister, come back. Cashier didn’t ring up your coupons.”

“T’ll wait while she rings them up now.”

“She can’t do that after you’ve finished. You have to go to customer service. Sorry.”
The cashier sticks the coupons in my hand. I wheel my cart over to customer service where two customers are in line ahead of me. (When the check-out lanes are jammed, the service desk will check you out, as a convenience.) The first person is checking out about eight items. Two or three items, maybe, but eight?

The next customer, an orthodox Jew—wide-brimmed black hat, white shirt, black suit, black coat—is quick. He is only buying a lottery ticket.

I present my two coupons. “Cashier forgot to give me credit for these. Do you need my credit card? The items were charged on it.”

“I can give you cash.”

I walk away, clutching my hard-earned savings of three dollars.

Making a Dream Come True

by Alexander Estrin

In 1953, after the death of Joseph Stalin, a woman from New York visited Moscow searching for her relatives. As she looked at names up and down a line of mailboxes, she saw the name Estrin (Эстрин). The visitor had a friend named Estrin in New York. She rang the bell, and a woman, Mina Estrin, answered.

Upon the visitor’s return to New York, Mina Estrin’s address was given (with Mina’s approval) to my aunt, Eda Estrin, and a correspondence began.

The story of two brothers emerged. One brother, my grandfather, left Russia in 1920. The other brother stayed. That brother’s son, Boris, had married Mina; and Mina and Boris had a son, Yakov (Yasha). Yasha was my second cousin. As luck would have it, I would get to meet Mina and Yasha.

In 1972, the U.S. Information Agency sent a year-long exhibit, “Research and Development U.S.A.,” to six Soviet cities as part of President Nixon’s visit to the U.S.S.R. I was selected as one of twenty Russian-speaking Americans to work as a guide during the first six months of the exhibit. Russian was my first language, the one I spoke growing up. My wife, Judy, our two daughters, who were then eighteen months and three- and a-half years old, and I spent two months in each of three cities: Tbilisi, Moscow, and Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad).

During our time in Moscow, we visited Mina, and then met Yasha, as well as his wife, Genia, and their daughter, Tanya. Yasha was born in 1923. In World War II, he was a paratrooper with the Soviet Army and made several combat jumps against the Nazis on the Moscow front. Later he was a combat engineer, law student, and professional chess teacher and coach at the Moscow Sports Club. In the early 1960s he turned to correspondence chess and in 1966 became an international correspondence chess grandmaster. From 1972 to 1976, he reigned as the seventh world champion of the International Correspondence Chess Federation.

Yasha told me that he had a dream to visit the United States. I told him that I would do the paperwork for the State Department and the Soviet Embassy to invite him to the U.S., and that he would have to get clearance from the Soviet government to come. This was during the Cold War, and few Russians were permitted to come to the U.S. However, perhaps because of his chess status, he did get permission.

In 1975, I met him at Dulles Airport and took him to our home in Columbia, Maryland. He stayed with us for about ten days and then
spent another ten days in Manhattan with our Aunt Eda. While Yasha was in Maryland, he played in the Johns Hopkins Open at the Student Union on the Homewood Campus. He tied for first prize. At a Catonsville Chess Club match he simultaneously took on thirty challengers, winning eighteen, drawing eleven, and losing two. As Yasha spoke only Russian and German, I served as his interpreter at these events.

Yasha and I went to visit the chess columnist for *The Washington Post*, Lubomir Kavalek, at his home in Reston, Virginia. At a bookstore in Rockville, which specialized in Russian-language books, Yasha bought several books by Russian authors banned in Russia and he voraciously read them at our home. We also visited a Baltimore seller of chess books, and Yasha found a “bunch” of books that he wanted. As payment, he promised to send the manuscript for a new book within six months. The book, *The Traxler Counterattack (The Wilkes-Barre Variation) Two Knights Defense*, was published by Chess Enterprises in 1977 and a revised version appeared in 1978.


From 1966 to 1983, Yasha would publish eight books on chess. He was an expert on the Two Knights Defense and had the second-largest library of chess books in the U.S.S.R.

After his return to Moscow, Edna continued her correspondence with the family. In 1987, a letter from Yasha’s wife told us that he had died of cancer at age sixty-four. I was very sad to receive this news. But I was glad that I had helped to make his dream of visiting the United States come true. I do regret that he didn’t live to see the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990, or to have the opportunity to travel and meet chess players around the world, or to play chess on the computer.

“A Day of Infamy

*by Janet George*

“There’s a nip in the air,” my father would say. “It’ll be winter soon.” As soon as he said it, I felt it: the cold on my nose and ears, the damp under my feet as we rambled on one of our Sunday outings through Carroll Park. Some of the trees were bare, and the leaves were hard to kick, just lying there in damp clumps.

We made our usual rounds—I mentally naming the trees, as my father had taught me, and he unlocking memories from every stone and hillock, savoring them in silence. He had played there as a child and would never tire of our leisurely tramps. When my pockets were full of horse chestnuts and acorns, and my hands were reeking with the pungent stickiness of walnut hulls, we went to my grandfather’s house, which faced the park.

Greetings and hugs all around, and then I hurried up the stairs to play “music” and drown out anything that might spoil the day. I was nine years old and didn’t want to hear another adult discussion about war. “Is there going to be war?” was all anybody asked or talked about. To me, war was a game I played with cards or something unpleasant that happened in other countries.
Upstairs, in the music room, there were the drums,
marimbas, trumpet, saxophone, and, I think, enough
instruments for an orchestra. Everyone in my father’s
family played at least two instruments. I set about
trying those that I had never touched before. I left
the clarinet and English horn alone because the reeds
smelled funny, but reached for the trombone, which I
had to lay across a chair to play. Every time I stopped
making sounds, I could hear talk of the war.

Darkness came quickly, and we got ready to leave.
But not before we had a bite to eat and some hot
chocolate. Then we caught the trolley for home. The
trolley rocked and rattled and nearly put me to sleep.
I loved these Sundays. I thought everything was
perfect until we got home. Then, before my father had
time to take the keys out of his pocket, the door flew
open and I saw my mother’s face, strained by some
new and terrible emotion. Her fear washed over me
like cold rain.

“It’s war!” she said, and now it was real, not just talk.
The arch-shaped, little radio was playing and a man’s
voice was saying something about people dying and
ships being destroyed. The Japanese had bombed
Pearl Harbor.

“What was Pearl Harbor?...Where was Pearl Harbor?...
How was this war?” No one seemed to have time for
my questions, and I didn’t learn much about war’s
meaning. What I knew was that going to the park
would never be the same again, and winter would
come soon.

Movie Memories
by Helen Szymkowiak

The Avenue Theater was located on Milton Avenue
in the northeastern part of Baltimore, about three
blocks from my home. It was a small theater with
a ticket booth out front between two sets of doors.
My nemesis, who presided over the window, was a
plumpish lady who was what we then
called “a peroxide blonde.” Her hair,
held in place by
visible bobby pins,
was arranged in two
rolls on top of her
head. In the window
of the ticket booth
was a sign in art deco
lettering: Babes in
arms not admitted.
All others must pay.

I was only ten or
eleven, but tall for my
age, and I couldn’t
wait to turn twelve even though it would cost me.
When I turned twelve, the lady in the ticket booth
wouldn’t have any reason to challenge me about my
age. I’d be paying the adult price.

The difference in the ticket price was six cents for
an adult, and in the early 1940s that was important,
perhaps the difference between having candy for the
show, or of having to scrounge around in the kitchen
at home for some sort of snack to bring along. On one
memorable occasion I went to the movies with olives,
wrapped in a twist of waxed paper, which, of course,
leaked onto my lap, and I had to walk home reeking
of olive brine, and with an embarrassing wet stain on
my skirt.

Once inside, my friends and I moved through a small
foyer where there was no popcorn or candy counter
and into the theater, which was pitch black until our
eyes became accustomed to the light from a candy
dispensing machine. The candy machine had a blue
mirror with an art deco design etched in the glass. It
was fun to see our faces loom out of the dark from the
blue mirror. The candy cost a nickel and was always
stale: Tootsie Rolls that were like rocks, Boston Baked
Beans with peanuts that had gone bad, and Jujyfruits
that were meant to be gummy but were hard. Jujy-
fruits, pronounced “juicyfruits” by everybody, were
my favorite. I always held each Jujyfruit up to the
screen to see its color. I favored the green mint and the licorice. A bad box had too many lemon yellows.

The usher, who wore a uniform, used a flashlight to patrol the two aisles, making sure that no one put his or her feet on the seat back in front of them, and guarding the back door, lest anyone sneak in.

My friends and I had catholic tastes in film subjects. We sat through everything and enjoyed it: the feature film, the selected short subjects, the newsreel, the previews of coming attractions, and, if we were very fortunate, a cartoon.

In summer, The Avenue was our refuge against the heat. It was just about the only air-conditioned building in the area, and it was always a blow to leave the theater—where we might shiver in Arctic cold for two hours—to be met outside by a blast of heat. By the time we arrived home, we were hot and sweaty and the only breeze was made by a small electric fan. It became the custom to put a small block of ice in a pan in front of the fan to make the breeze cooler, but the result was not too successful.

The Avenue Theater, which is stucco in a vaguely Southwestern mission style, is now a spiritual temple, rather than a Hollywood one. It has been reincarnated as a church.

The Journey
by Mimi Meltzer

The river…the end or the beginning? A friend pointed a finger to freedom, to security, to Papa, and to love long-awaited—and then Mama's inner light, burgeoning with hope, was blown out by bandits preying upon desperate families fleeing oppression. How had it happened so fast?

The year was 1912. Russia was in turmoil and the war with Germany was a disaster. Papa had planned to leave Russia for six years, and now was the time to make his move. He was in the Russian army and sure to be sent to the front as cannon fodder. The decision was made to desert. It was not going to be easy, but the end would be worth it...a new life free from fear. The problem was his one-year-old child and Mama, who was in a late pregnancy and couldn't travel the rough and secret escape.

A new plan...They sold whatever they could to finance Papa's escape. When Papa got to America, he would send for Mama. In the meantime, Mama would live with her sister.

Dreams, dreams... Fate, in its willful way, took charge and pushed their future to a distant future. Papa arrived in America, got a job, and World War I broke out. Russia convulsed with unrest, violence, and revolution. Anarchy prevailed. Now there was no way to get Mama out. Papa couldn't send the papers and money for her. He joined the U.S. Army and she joined a fight with her children for survival.

My aunt was a baker, and Mama helped her with the baking and the taking of baked goods to the railway station where she sold them to soldiers and travelers (while my aunt looked after the children, hers and Mama's). Life was difficult, uncertain from day to day, but the routine dulled the pain of separation and Mama was able to feed and care for her children.

At last, the war was over, and Papa was able to carry out their plan; he sent money and papers for Mamma's passage. Most important, he sent his address. This, as it would turn out, was the easy part of the plan.

In Russia, chaos was the order of the day; governments changed by the hour. To be smuggled out of the country, connections were needed. The local shul (house of worship) was the center of operations. With the shul's help, a wagoner heading for Romania was found; he was looking for a small family to fill out his wagon. The fee was settled upon, and then it was time to leave.

It was January, and the river they would cross into Romania, the Dnieper, was sure to be frozen. Food was packed, papers bundled together, clothing gathered, and money counted and stored by the
wagoner in the false bottom of the wagon. Then, for extra security, Mama covered some gold rubles with cloth and sewed them onto my one sister’s coat as buttons. My sisters, Bess and Sara, were five and six.

Tearful goodbyes…Would my mamma and aunt see each other again? Would the trip be safe? Would my aunt ever get word that Mama was with Papa?

Off they went. Two days of hard wagon travel over frozen muddy roads, and then the river was in sight. But in the forest—out of sight—awaited a band of robbers. Shots were fired and everyone was ordered out of the wagon—children on one side, adults on the other. The wagon’s false floor was ripped open and emptied, papers torn and scattered, valuables taken. And then the bandits departed, taking with them all my mother’s hopes—Papa’s address had been scattered to the winds.

To continue across the river, more money was needed. Mama offered her secret gold rubles—the buttons—to the driver, who then took the group to Romania and left them in the first town they came to. The townspeople had heard the commotion—the gunshots—and figured out what had happened. When the battered group arrived in town, the townspeople fed and sheltered them for the night.

Mama’s next decision was more difficult. You see, she was completely illiterate, no education whatsoever. She had not even been able to read the paper with Papa’s address. She did not know where to go or how to contact him, and now she didn’t even have the paper for someone to contact him and to let him know where she was.

She decided to work until she had gathered enough money to bribe her way back home. Each day she left the children in the apartment with another family and sadly went off to work at a bakery. One day when a neighbor stopped her to ask why she was so sad and worked so hard, Mama did something she had never done before: she told her story. The neighbor then called his wife, who had an aunt living in New York. The aunt knew everybody and the neighbors felt sure the aunt could find my father.

A letter and a small picture of Mama and my two sisters were soon sent off to New York, with this piece of information: Mama knew that Papa drove a chicken truck to the kosher markets.

Mamma’s neighbors were right. Their aunt found my father, presented him with my mother’s letter, and within a month, Papa arrived at Ellis Island to pick up my sisters, whose heads were shorn, and my mother—a 90-pound pillar of strength.

Music is the Language of Our Souls

by Jerry Mandelberg

She was wheeled to my presentation on the Big Bands Era as the sweet tones of “Stardust” drifted through the crowded room of nursing home residents. She was detached—distant. Wherever she was, she was not with us in that room.

As the smooth and mellow sounds of Tommy Dorsey’s trombone oozed around us, her eyes began to mist. She was no longer staring vacantly. I saw a faint smile. In time with the music, her body began to sway back and forth in the chair. She heard it. She remembered it. She was enjoying it.

I’ve seen similar things at performances of classical music, opera, and jazz. All of us are affected by music, regardless of age. Personal experience tells me that as
we move through the decades of our later years, we tend to lose bits of information here and there. But let me play a song you like—“I’ll Never Smile Again,” almost any song by Cole Porter, or one from your favorite Broadway show—and, I’ll bet you, the words will just spill out of your mouth.

I am enchanted with the ability of music to reach deep into us more easily and far better than the spoken word. And the spiritual uplifting one feels is beyond description. Music is, I believe, the first—and best—international language. It is understood by almost everyone. And what of its healing qualities?

“Music has touched the human soul across all boundaries of time, space, and genre,” says Dr. Balfour M. Mount, professor of palliative medicine at McGill University. Indeed, the healing power of music has been documented for millennia. Dr. Mount quotes from the Bible when he speaks of two of the legendary kings of Israel:

> And whenever the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

Saul’s experience is echoed in our daily lives, which led dramatist William Congreve (1670–1729) to observe, “Music has charms to soothe the savage breast,” and cellist Yo-Yo Ma to comment, “Healing? I think that is what music is all about. Don’t you?”

The Contest

_by Nancy M. Schultz_

“Please, Mom, I promise that I’ll eat the cereal this time.” It was 1948. The Tom Mix Radio Show had just signed off at 6 p.m. “I only need to send in one box top to enter the Who’s-It Man Mystery Voice Contest.”

Sighing, my mother probably remembered all the uneaten boxes of Cream of Wheat and jars of Ovaltine she'd bought as a result of similar pleas. But in a week, the box top bearing my name was winging its way to the Ralston Purina Company.

As a faithful listener to Tom Mix, I marveled as day after day contestants (whose box top inscriptions, like mine, were drawn at the show’s end by the velvet-toned announcer) could not correctly identify the Who’s-It Man when they were called. _Anyone could figure out who he is_, I thought in frustration. _They said his last name starts with the opposite of high, and part of his name is the first president’s name. The answer is George Lowther, the writer of the show!_

The contest grew daily in prizes. However, even at ten years of age, I knew it did me little good to anguish about the contest. The odds were against my name ever being chosen from that huge pot of box tops in Radio Land.

But one afternoon, a few days later, just after I’d gotten my after-school cookies and milk, I received a strange phone call from Chicago. (Long-distance calls were unheard of in my house.) I still recall the nasal voice that said “Nancy,” and that informed me that I would be called by the Tom Mix Show at 5:45 p.m. that very afternoon.

“You must be there to take the call,” Miss Nose Person asserted.

Lightening bolts lit the room. “Don’t worry!” I sputtered. They had picked me. I would have my fifteen minutes of fame! My stomach dropped like a roller coaster’s first plunge.
My father, hastily summoned from work, scrawled the name George Lowther on index cards as I dictated it. He then taped the cards in several places above the phone. I had begun to worry that I would be speechless when the time came. Undoubtedly, he had a lot of faith in me, as he had never once heard the great cowboy’s radio show. Several radios were brought to the living room (we probably had two or three) and tuned to the right station.

Lacking the myriad communication devices replete in homes today, only my immediate family knew about my upcoming opportunity for celebrity. It was difficult enough to withstand the hovering and angst of my parents and grandmother.

When the call from Chicago came at the appointed time, I was told to stand-by. Unbelievably, the sounds of the Tom Mix Show could be heard through our phone! Near the end, the velvet-toned announcer came on. He asked if I was Nancy, and my knees became jelly. My father, who was by my side, propped me up. The smooth voice intoned, one by one, the list of prizes that had built up over the weeks. Spots appeared before my eyes. My nervous father kept tapping the index cards and clutching me under the arms.

“So, young lady, you can have all these if you know who the Who’s-It Man is. What is your answer?”

All aspects of the aphasia I feared vanished as I clearly pronounced, “George Lowther.” The pause that followed was an hour long. He asked me to repeat my answer. “George Lowther,” I said.

“Well…you are exactly right!”

In a few weeks the longed-for prizes started to arrive—things that in 1948 would satisfy any child’s dreams: a Schwinn bike with all the bells and whistles, a movie camera, a wooden outdoor gymnasium, a collection of storybook dolls, a custom-fit cowgirl outfit—complete with boots, spurs, and six guns, a year’s pass to the movie theatre of my choice, a radio-phonograph player, and a watch. All these were dispatched to my house almost immediately. I was chubby (an adjective that seems to have disappeared from today’s language), and I welcomed prizes of food. I received a year’s supply of Circus salted peanuts as well as monthly shipments of various Mars candy bars. This meant that every month boxes containing twenty-four cans of peanuts and twenty-four chocolate bars arrived at our house. My mother and grandmother surveyed with a critical eye the stacks of peanut cans accumulating in our kitchen—and out came the meat grinder. Suddenly we had a continuous supply of fresh (salted) peanut butter. Spread on slabs of white bread, its taste was exquisite!

Naturally, by winning the contest, my status at school elevated considerably. Incredulous classmates congratulated me right away; however, I soon learned that few girls my age were actually among the show’s listeners. Nonetheless, the good nun who taught my fifth-grade class allowed me to share the candy bars once every month. I proudly walked along the rows of
The last prize was to be a cocker spaniel puppy, “the pick of the litter” from Purina Kennels. All of the correspondence from Ralston had been directed to me—no one had ever asked my parents if they wanted this dog—but enough time had elapsed that I doubted that the promised puppy was still in the bargain. Then, one day as I opened our front door, I spied a huge crate in the hall where the delivery man had deposited it. A black furry cocker puppy lay inside. A year’s supply of Purina Dog Chow came with him, but he learned to disdain the dog chow in favor of table scraps. That little dog was my heart’s delight for many years to come.

My brief and shining moment center stage remains a fond memory… And I thank goodness that my lucky break came in the era that it did. Today’s standards likely would have disrupted much of the unfolding of this happy childhood drama.

Coming Events at Osher

December 25, 2009
Annual Osher Christmas Trip to Chicago Stockyards: Chartered school bus has seats for 30, plus space for eight standees. $250 fee covers all expenses, and includes a box lunch for both days. Reserve your place with $225 deposit. Pay $25 balance when boarding.

January 20, 2010
Testimonial Dinner for Peter Angelos: Speak up for this team owner who spares no expense to make the Orioles a winning team. Cocktails (cash bar) at 5 p.m., dinner, 7 p.m., and speeches, 9 p.m. Location TBA.

February 22, 2010
Fund-raising Luncheon for Ray Lewis: Help out this Ravens linebacker who didn’t get a pay raise this year and has a family to support. Congregate in church lot at tail of pick-up truck. Location and start time TBA.

April 13, 2010
Osher Night at Orioles Park: Special group rate means Osher members pay only $150 a seat, which covers the bus ride. This early in the season, our Birds may even be in first place. Reservations recommended.

May 10, 2010
Osher Faculty/Student Lacrosse Game: Palevsky’s Panthers (faculty) verses Mandelberg’s Monsters (students) at 2 p.m., location TBA. Ambulance will be on standby.
OSHER at JHU Journal

OSHER at JHU Journal, the newsletter of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Johns Hopkins University, is published under the auspices of the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences two times per academic year.

Johns Hopkins University, Osher at JHU, 6740 Alexander Bell Drive, Columbia, MD 21046-2100, 410-516-9719.

NOTICE
The Osher Journal is published for the entire Osher at JHU community. Articles from all members are welcome, subject to editorial review. To submit a story or article, send it by email to Leightmj@aol.com, or by hard copy to the above address.

OSHER at JHU Staff
Kathy Porsella
Director

Susan Howard
Program Coordinator

Wafa Sturdivant
Program Coordinator

OSHER at JHU Journal Staff
Janet George, Co-Chair
Leight Johnson, Co-Chair
Kathy Porsella
Kathy Raymond
Wafa Sturdivant

Advisory Board
Baltimore/Columbia
Marcia Amith
Bill Brustad
Alan Coxhead
Janet George
Linda Graham
Leight Johnson
Marianne Jones
John Ramsay

Montgomery County
Michael Stevens, Chair
Patricia Gruber, Vice Chair
Sondra Baxt, Past Chair
Martin Adler
Manny Ballenzweig
Lee Blue
Deborah Bottinick
Selwyn Bottinick
Patricia Gibson
Jane Jasper
Bernard Lipsky
Mimie Meltzer
Harvey Milens
Virginia Murphy
Ellen Neches
Ann Parr
Beverly Scharff
Virginia Schultz
Rochelle Siegel
Marshall Sneideman
Ann Sokatch
Phyllis Sonen
Martin Stein
Michael Wallace
Alan White
Shirley Wolock

Committee Chairs
Baltimore/Columbia
Curriculum – Open
Hospitality – Marcia Amith
Journal – Janet George and Leight Johnson
Membership – Linda Graham
Travel – Open
Volunteer – Bill Brustad and Alan Coxhead

Montgomery County
Curriculum – Martin Adler
Development – Manny Ballenzweig
Hospitality – Virginia Murphy and Beverly Scharff
Membership – Jane Jasper and Martin Stein, and Lee Blue
Travel – Shirley Wolock
Update – Bernie Lipsky, Martin Stein
Volunteer – Mimie Meltzer and Harvey Milens