The Last One

by Ellen B. Cutler

I got up early the first morning in the quiet French village where we were staying. I clattered down three flights of stairs and went outside in search of still-warm baguettes and sliced saucissions for sandwiches, plus a few odds and ends. I stopped in a tobacconist’s shop up the street to buy a newspaper. A headline on the front page read Chute du Dollar, so I folded the paper and stuck it under my arm. I already knew that my cache of American currency was worth less every day. It was Friday, March 14, 2008.

Back at the tiny apartment, I brewed a pot of tea and sat down to read. My heart sank. Below the fold was a smaller headline: Lazare Ponticelli, le dernier poilu français est mort (Lazare Ponticelli, the last poilu [French WWI soldier], has died). Lazare Ponticelli was born December 7, 1897.

We don’t seem to think much about World War I, the “war to end all wars,” any more. At the beginning of the war, few soldiers were issued metal helmets; in addition, they soon would have to defend themselves from chemical weapons and bombs dropped from airplanes. Back then, troops still stormed from the trenches across No Man’s Land armed with revolvers and bayonets. Tens of thousands of them were so physically annihilated that their families had nothing, not even fragments, to mourn over and to bury. Over 65 million soldiers were mobilized; over 8.5 million of them died; about 3 million dead were bodies without names and names without bodies.

The First World War shaped the twentieth century, geographically and politically. It molded the minds of the men and women who articulated the values that subsequent generations embraced or rejected. Punitive reparations exacted from Germany by the Allies led to the outbreak of World War II. Arbitrary borders assigned to Middle Eastern nations by Western governments are central to the conflicts in that region today.
My mother’s father, Jerome Preston, volunteered for the fledgling American Ambulance Field Service in the first days of 1917, barely past his eighteenth birthday. Officially, the United States was still neutral. By the time the first members of the American Expeditionary Force arrived in France on June 13, 1917, Jerome had been risking his life for two months, evacuating wounded poilus from the Verdun sector. His letters were replete with the kind of news intended to soothe his family’s fears but his diaries included disturbing details. He was awarded a croix de guerre for his valor in saving dozens of soldiers during a gas attack gone terribly wrong. Jerome had gone to France a generous-natured boy with rather narrow-minded notions of right and wrong. He turned into a young man who realized that social constructs of morality were secondary to the matter of doing good. He spent the rest of his very long life — he died in 1995 at the age of 96 — doing immeasurable good and struggling to express to his grandchildren why goodness mattered.

My father’s father, David Sanford Cutler, was a frail young man, and it is surprising not only that he was accepted to officer training school in Plattsburgh, New York, but that he passed all the physicals. He was commissioned a lieutenant, and he and his company landed in England the first week of October 1917. By the end of the month they were settled in “a small French village in France,” Liffol-le-Grand in the Vosges. Until recently, all I knew was that David had been on the Western Front and was gassed during combat. He died in 1926 from a staph infection when his sons were two and four. When in 2007 I discovered a cache of letters he wrote home from France, the grandfather whom I never knew and the father my father did not remember suddenly became very real. His duties seemed focused on supplies and administration: supplies that were rarely where they should have been when they were needed and administration that seemed scripted by the Keystone Kops.

Both my grandfathers accepted the concept of a just war and knew that the tragedy of conflict extended into every level of society. Both also believed that the end of the war meant the most to those who had sons and husbands and fathers return to them when it was over. On November 27, 1918, David wrote to his family:

Do you remember one of the posters I sent… “Debout dans les tranchées, il rêve etc [Standing in the trenches, he dreams…]? Well, I’ve seen him standing there, and a few days ago I saw him living his dream of victory… This particular night we sat at a table near a great big black fireplace and the good lady cooked us a meal. And at the side of the fireplace sat her husband—a poilu—and you can’t picture the look of supreme satisfaction and content that they both wore. “C’est fini” and what it means to them. This man stated simply that he had been in it three years. And he was back at his fireside at peace.

Lazare Ponticelli, the last poilu, had seemed destined for oblivion. His childhood had been one of extraordinary hardship and sorrow. Born in Italy, he had made his way to Paris alone as a nine-year-old orphan. In 1914, he enlisted in the French Foreign Legion and fought, among other places, in the lines around Verdun. When Italy joined the fray in 1915, Ponticelli was forced from the French into the Italian army. He spent the remainder of the war in the region of the Tyrol and was badly wounded. After liberation, he returned to France, married, and raised a family. He finally earned French citizenship in 1939 on the eve of World War II, when he was turned away from military service because of his age. The business he founded and passed on to his sons is today a 480 million-euro concern (about $75.5 million) with 3,800 employees. Had this story been set in America, it would have been the quintessential story of immigration and the American Dream.

Before he died, Ponticelli was outspoken in his rejection of any national mourning of his death. As he said (my translation), “It is an insult to all the others, the dead who were never honored as they deserved.” Until the very end of his life, he spoke about his experiences, especially to school children. As he said, “To children, I say to them and I repeat to them: do not make war.”
Erich Kästner, who died on January 1, 2008, was believed to be the last veteran of the German Imperial Army. Franz Kunstler, “the emperor’s last soldier,” passed away on May 27, 2008. He had fought in the Austro-Hungarian army. As of this writing, Frank Woodruff Buckles, born February 1, 1901, is the last member of the American Expeditionary Forces to have been in Europe. England's Henry John “Harry” Patch is the last survivor of trench warfare; he was born on June 17, 1898.

Our political, social, and familial present extends from our past and shapes our future even as we try to grasp the intended and unintended consequences of our choices. On Veteran's Day, I cannot help but remember Jerome and David and be aware of their gifts to me. This year I will be thinking of Lazare Ponticelli, as well. He was le der des ders. I hope that the death of “the last of the last” will never mean we forget their legacy of courage and loss or their pure, shining hopes.

And I wish that there would never again be a first.

The Gutter Man
by Martha McCoy

Mr. Harold pounds his fist on the front door. Planting his combat boots firmly apart, he tilts his weathered face upward and looks at the clear, blue September sky. A fine day for gutter-cleaning. His khaki shirt, tucked into low-riding jeans, stretches to cover a large stomach held tenuously in check by a wide leather belt. The bottom shirt button has escaped from its buttonhole, unable to contain the wealth of such girth.

He removes his blue Champion ball cap, brushes his thinning hair straight back, and waits. My husband opens the door and without preamble, Mr. Harold asks in a hoarse voice, “Do you want your gutters cleaned this year?” “I guess so, if the price is right,” replies my husband.

Mr. Harold extracts a bulging wallet out of his rear pocket. Extraneous slips of paper, a toothpick, candy wrapper, and corners of dollar bills protrude from the edges of their leather confines. He removes his business log—a thick, folded wad of handwritten papers that chronicle the complete history of his gutter-cleaning business. After consulting his records, he hands the account page of his past work for us to my husband who studies the paper carefully, asks a few questions, and then returns the ledger to its owner.

Folding the papers and stuffing them back in his wallet, Mr. Harold looks up once again at our gutters. He thinks for a moment, shakes his head as if to clear the calculations and leans forward. Sun-bleached eyes glinting, he announces, “I'll do it for $30.” He then folds his arms across his fine stomach, steps back, and confidently waits.

“Sold,” replies my husband. The two men lock eyes and shake hands. The deal is done.

This ritual continued for 15 years; the price remained the same as did the negotiating process. I called it the “Dance of the Autumn Eaves.”

This September, Clarence, Mr. Harold’s son came to our house. He told us that his father had died and handed us his obituary. As we read it, we realized that our 53-year-old “gutter-man” also was a retired Baltimore County Parks and Recreation employee, active firefighter, avid fisherman, and dedicated family man. We will miss him.
Wednesdays with Molly  
by Leight Johnson

Granted, there have only been two of them, but it only took that long for Molly Williamson to make a lasting impression on those of us who heard her lectures.

Appearing in Columbia for the first two weeks of the fall semester, she spoke first about the United Nations where she served in the United States delegation under the Ford and Carter administrations. She gave us an insider’s look at the goings on there and a new appreciation of the work done by that organization, much of which does not make headlines.

The second week’s talk was about Israel and its relationship with the Arab world. Again, she spoke with authority, having served as consul general in Jerusalem in the early 1990s.

Pretty impressive credentials, I would say, and that’s only the tip of the iceberg. A career diplomat, she has served in key positions (e.g., deputy assistant secretary) in the U.S. Departments of Defense, State, Commerce, and Energy. In the Commerce Department job she was responsible for the Middle East, South Asia, Oceania, and Africa, advancing trade relations with 86 countries and a trade portfolio valued at over $120 billion a year.

How does a nice California girl get mixed up with such august company? Believe it or not, she did it on a dare. After college at UCLA and the University of Maryland, she took the Department of State foreign service exam with no expectation of passing it. But pass it she did and moved on to the next step, the oral assessment, which weeds out all but a few. In that year only 200 of more than 20,000 applicants were accepted. As one of the chosen, she rose through the system to the personal rank of career minister, equivalent to the military rank of three-star general.

All this took her far afield from the kind of career her parents had envisioned for her. Her father had wanted her not only to become a doctor, but specifically a neurosurgeon. Instead, she earned bachelor and master degrees, both from Maryland, in interdisciplinary studies—not the route to a medical career.

Recently retired from government work, Molly says she is finally learning to cook. As for other interests, she has had a long and abiding love of old movies, specifically musicals, more specifically musicals with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, Gene Kelly, and Busby Berkeley. She says, “I have a collection, and secretly think about being able someday to invite folks over for ‘Lunch and Movies with Molly.’” Put me on that list, please.

New Mother-in-Law: Lesson I  
by Laura Black

It was the first phone conversation. Gingerly, I selected each word, rolled it around my tongue, gently tossed it out and anxiously awaited the effect.

I was now a mother-in-law. Late night television scenes appeared in my head. I flashed back to my father, taking his mother-in-law to the airport, sending her back to New York. The car ride to the airport, with my father belting out, “Hate to see you go, hate to see you go. Hope to heck you never come back, hate to see you go.”

I reflected upon my attitude toward my own mothers-in-law. (Yes, that is plural —two.) I see myself, looking each in the eye, making sure they knew where the power lies, who has control.

Now, how to impart my considerable wisdom, my experience? How best to bestow upon my daughter-in-law my treasures, my pearls? Yet, how could I risk offending her?
She now has the control.

Sweating, I observe our conversation approaching its end. “Good-bye, talk to you soon,” I cautiously squeak. “Good-bye, I love you,” she replies. “I love you.”

She gives it so freely, so easily. “I love you.” Words I was never able to utter. Words I stingily reserved for my husband and children. Yet, there are so many others I love.

Lesson I: My daughter-in-law has taught me to say, “I love you.”

The Late Night Show
by Jacob Radin

Sleep does not come easily on this Friday night.

Tomorrow will be the fourth anniversary, the yahrzeit, of the death of Peggy, my wife of 60 years. I plan to be at Beth El Synagogue on Saturday morning to recite the mourner’s prayer, the Kaddish.

At 4:10 I am wide awake. What will I do in the next three hours? While I toss restlessly, trying to fill the void, I envision the discomfort ahead. I am not a member of the congregation and I will be alone. For a variety of reasons — among them my unfamiliarity with the rituals — I never feel comfortable participating in the services.

I resort to Dr. Andrew Weil’s deep-breathing exercises to induce sleep. Tongue against palate, inhale deeply through the mouth five seconds, hold for five seconds, then very slowly exhale down to the diaphragm.

Calm begins to settle in, and I remember that my neighbor and family friend for more than 50 years, Esther, is a member of the congregation. Sometimes I see her, dressed in Saturday morning finery, leaving for services. I will call her.

Slowly my subconscious takes over, and the late-night, early-morning show begins. It is irrational, unexpected, terrifying. It is the only show I can watch with my eyes closed and actually “see” the participants.

The Dream: Peggy and I are walking in a crowded street. In the distance we see Esther. She is dressed in a flowing black evening gown. We weave through the crowd toward her. I ask if she will attend services this morning and whether I can join her. “Certainly,” she says. “We can leave at 9:45.”

I am sitting in my car with Peggy and Esther, anxious to get back to my apartment. On one leg I am wearing a tall, glossy black boot that extends to my thigh. Peggy says to Esther, “That’s what you get when you let a man shop for himself. I think that boot is hideous.” I agree.

The car is parked somewhere. The streets are covered with snow. I am feverishly walking alone up one street and down another in my new black boot searching for the car. I can’t find it, and the time is getting late.

Now I am behind the wheel again, driving furiously so that I will arrive in time. I see a group of black children in the street. I jam on the brakes and watch helplessly as the car skids in the snow. Inches from the children, the car comes to a stop.

Terrified and shaken by the close call, I open my eyes. It is 6:50. I have plenty of time to get ready before I pick up Esther at 9:45. No! Wait a minute! That was in the dream. I still have to call her.

I think about the dream…Some of the symbolism can be traced to the emotionally charged situation, but the black boot? Is there a psychoanalyst in the house?
Harness, carabiner, Munter hitch, rappelling were all words whose meaning and use became familiar to my husband and me in the mid-1960s.

The Colorado Mountain Club had provided our family with many opportunities for hiking, backpacking, downhill and cross-country skiing and with classes on survival methods in the high mountains. We became such avid consumers of the club’s outdoor activities that we were asked to lead some of the hikes and campouts. And, as leaders, we were urged to take the club’s class in rock climbing.

The course was popular with teenagers who seemed eager to throw themselves from cliffs and a few of us older folks aged about 30–50. We were separated into small groups, each assigned to a leader. Naturally, the oldsters were grouped together so as not to hold back the teenagers. Our three daughters, however, were excluded, as the class was limited to those 18 and older.

Every Saturday our group gathered at a different rock formation in the mountains to practice free climbing. With instruction from our leader, we learned to find hand and toeholds. How I envied the tall lanky fellows who only needed to locate a few holds to reach the top of the rock. My route was more circuitous as I searched for ledges and crevices within my reach.

We also learned how to choose ropes (less than 2% stretch under load of 200 pounds, multi-strand core within an abrasion-resistant woven sheath); how to tie knots (Munter hitch); how to put on the harness (worn to secure the descender); how to control the descender (device that allows the rope to be paid out in a controlled fashion by the person controlling it). The concluding session of the class would allow us to demonstrate our knowledge and skill by, one at a time, rappelling down a cliff.

On that last day, our group was assembled at the top of the chosen cliff. Peering between the large rocks, we could glimpse the rocky terrain far below. To make this session as safe as possible, each of us in turn would be belayed by a man (wearing a harness, carabiner, and rope) who was seated with his feet braced against the rocks and with his rope attached to the person descending. Should the person have trouble with his rope, the belayer could control the descent with his rope.

We had all heard stories of mishaps that had occurred on descents—hair getting twisted into the carabiner and the knife used to cut the hair away also cutting the rope, resulting in sudden death from the fall—or the rope getting stuck in a crack of a rock so that no movement was possible, which could result in death by starvation.

Our instructor looked at our nervous group. “All right—who is going first?”

A hesitant but determined woman stepped forward. “I’ll go.” She grasped her belay rope attached to her carabiner, and backed off the rock, lowering herself into the abyss.

I felt relieved—everything was going smoothly. But suddenly a hand appeared on the rock and then another hand. She had hauled herself back up the rope. The instructor helped her over the rock to the ground. “I couldn’t do it,” she gasped.
Now the group was jittery. But the instructor calmed us, explaining that even if we goofed up on our descent, the man with the belay rope would get us safely down.

When it was my turn, I found that — while sitting in my harness and letting out the rope — I could aid the descent by walking a few steps down the huge rock. Soon the rock face ended and I was hanging in the harness. I can still recall my feeling of exhilaration and weightlessness as I lowered myself to the shale.

That was my first and last descent. But what a great experience!

Afterward, rather than invest in expensive rock-climbing equipment, we preferred to continue club trips with our daughters.

Soap Opera
by Leight Johnson

“Leight, I have a special case for you, if you’re willing to travel to Arbutus to take it on. The patient is an elderly woman with cancer, nothing unusual about that. It’s her family that has special problems, but I think you can handle it.”

This was the volunteer coordinator talking, the one who schedules volunteer visits to hospice patients. After ten years of doing this, I figured I had seen all the problems I was likely to run into, so how hard could this one be? I was about to learn.

The woman who let me in was Helen, the patient’s daughter, an attractive woman of about 40. We sat in the living room and she proceeded to fill me in on the family situation, the telling of which took nearly an hour.

She was estranged from her second husband, who no longer lived there but dropped around occasionally.

Her older daughter, a high-school student, was pregnant. On one of his visits, the husband — clearly a man to be avoided — had kicked his pregnant step-daughter in the belly.

Her younger daughter was severely retarded and stayed home all day watching television.

Her mother had been brought from her own home to live with Helen and her daughters and was quartered in the basement of the house in a hospital bed.

Helen was a waitress in a nearby restaurant and worried about losing her job because she had been taking so much time off to care for her mother.

By the end of this recital Helen was in tears, so I went over and put my arms around her and had the sudden thought, All I need is for the husband to walk in right now!

Fortunately he didn’t, but I reminded Helen of my mission. I was there to visit her mother while Helen went shopping. We went downstairs and met her mother (elderly—that is, my age), who turned out to be the only normal person in the household. We had a nice conversation while the retarded daughter sat on the bed and surfed TV channels.

After a while the patient’s brother arrived to take over the vigil and told me to go on home. I never went back.
The Victrola

by Lillian Davis

It stood in our dining room at 403 N. Collington Avenue, a dark wood cabinet with two sets of doors and a domed cover that opened to reveal a flat disc. A needle protruded from the end of a metal arm above the disc. When the needle was placed on the revolving disc wonderful music would fill the room.

That was our Victrola, the trade name given to the phonograph by the RCA Victor Company.

Among my earliest memories is my father coming home almost every Saturday night with a new record. We would gather around and listen to everything from opera to cantorial chants to Yiddish theatre tunes. If I was teased at school by the boy in the next seat, I could always come home and lose myself in song. There was always music in our house and always someone singing a tune. The music of Enrico Caruso and Alma Gluck to Moishe Oisher and Molly Picon brought our family together.

When I was a teenager, I found a whole new use for the phonograph. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the era of Frank Sinatra and the big bands, my girlfriends and I discovered it was more fun to dance with boys than to dance with each other. My house became the obvious place for a party. The dining room table got shoved into the kitchen, and with the additional space—and music coming from the Victrola—Voila! —we had our dance hall.

Our most memorable party occurred on December 7, 1941. The dining room table had been moved and my friends and I were making refreshments when Pauline barged in with an unbelievable announcement. “I just heard it on the radio,” she blurted nervously. “The Japanese are bombing Pearl Harbor.”

Mayhem erupted in the kitchen as a knife dropped on the floor. Everyone began jabbering at the same time. “How could this happen?”

“The Japanese ambassador was meeting in Washington with the President.”

“It can’t be true.”

“Should we call off the party?”

“How will we get in touch with everybody?”

Finally, someone turned on the radio. The terrible news was confirmed. To break the tension, I remember putting a record on the phonograph. Somehow we calmed down, and with the realization that some of the boys coming to our party would probably join the army and possibly never come back, we decided to go ahead and have the party. I suppose I could fake the details, say it was a great party, but all I can really remember is winding up the Victrola and dancing to the music.

Time moved on. In many homes electronic phonographs replaced Victrolas, but my parents continued to keep ours. We continued to store the records in the bottom compartment and, from time to time, we would play some of the old recordings, even though they sounded tinny, strained, and dated.

My sisters and I grew up, got married, and had children of our own. As our children grew they learned to wind the revolving disc, and they laughed at the garbled sounds as the record slowly unwound. “It sounds like someone passing gas,” they sheepishly offered.

When my parents died in 1966, I could not part with the old Victrola. So we put it in our bedroom in the house.
on Cedar Lane. There someone in the family would occasionally play a record for old times sake. Then our first grandchild, Jacob, was born in 1981, followed by Becky, Isaac, Sara, and Avi. One of their favorite things to do was jump on our bed with total delight and abandon as I played Benny Goodman’s recording of “In the Mood.” I got caught one day by Mort, my everlovin’ spouse, “Are you crazy, letting the kids jump on our bed that way? They’ll break all the springs.” I just smiled, inwardly happy to see them having such a good time.

Mort must have caught Victrola fever because one day he invited his employees to come upstairs to see this new invention that could play music without electricity. He couldn’t believe their excitement at the discovery. Eventually we remodeled our bedroom and had to find a new home for Old Vic. This time our daughter Marsha came to the rescue and gave the Victrola a place in her new family room. Shortly after a particularly bad thunderstorm, she called to give a report: “Guess what, Mom? We had no electricity last night, and to entertain the kids, we played records on the Victrola, and the kids had a ball dancing around.”

I was delighted to hear this news.

After I retired in 1997, I became a docent at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History. One of my duties was to explain the display on the music cart. I especially enjoyed asking the museum visitors, “Where is the volume control?” You can imagine the startled expressions on their faces when I merely opened and closed the two top doors.

So I think today’s kids can have their iPods and earphones, their rap music and outrageous lyrics, but they will never have the kinds of fond memories I have of the old Victrola and the way it brought so many people together.

It Gets Cold around Midnight
by Albert Berney

About a decade ago, a friend and I wanted to see what the world looked like between Norway and the North Pole. We flew into Oslo and just had time to visit Vigoland Park where all the sculptures of Thorvaldsen are displayed. Then we flew to Bergen where we joined the ship that had been a Russian ice-breaker. I wanted the cheapest cabin and luckily got it. It was on the lowest deck and there was much less turbulence than on the higher decks. It was a comfortable ship with excellent meals served three times a day. We sailed north and two days later at midnight the sun was still shining. We were told we were at the Arctic Circle and we were invited to take a swim. About six or seven of us accepted the invitation and I am still cold thinking about it. I stayed in about 22 seconds and felt heroic.

The next night we were exploring islands on the ship’s Zodiads. Around midnight another boat approached us and it had the ship’s chef and his staff. They offered us a midnight snack of hamburgers and beer. I could not resist even though I had given up eating meat, and have not eaten a hamburger since that night. The next day we arrived at the tiny town of Longyearbyen. It had a deli we visited. It had almost but not quite a dozen small bottles of liquor. I quickly invested a dollar and bought a miniature of Pure Maryland Rye, which I still have.

It was a memorable trip.

Albert Berney was an active member of Osher at JHU from fall 1991 until his death on February 12, 2008. He was the first chair of our Baltimore Advisory Board as well as chair of our Travel Committee for many years.
A Birthday Letter to FRAK

by Wayne Faulkner

I didn’t really think it would happen. We already had two girls, Laurie and Kate — and a friend had predicted that we would have a family of girls. But in the gray dawn of a new day on May 1, 1960, a nurse entered the waiting room at Holy Cross Hospital in Teaneck, New Jersey, pulled back the receiving blanket to reveal a red, wrinkled, long, baby. She nodded to me and said, “You have a son.”

We moved to Chicago and got a black lab puppy. Though Caesar grew a lot faster, you had a companion in each other. Our apartment had a long hall with a linoleum floor. You would crawl as fast as you could down its length. Caesar would sit, poised, waiting. When you reached the end, he would go bounding down its length after you, grab you by your diaper, and drag you back along the slick linoleum while you crowed with delight. You would crawl the length again, Caesar would repeat. Neither of you seemed to tire of the game.

One evening Mary took off your diaper to give you your bath and gave a cry of surprise: “Caesar bit Frank.” The inside of the diaper was bloody, but why didn’t you cry? Was it that much fun? Were you that stoic? Where was the bite mark? Then from the diaper came a small tooth. Caesar had shed a baby tooth during the game!

Mary and I watched TV on a couch. The dog sprawled on the floor in front of us. You crawled over, and by kneeling on the dog you could grab the cushion. Then, pulling yourself up, you would jump up and down. On Caesar. The dog would raise his head, scoot over a few inches and subside on the floor again. You couldn’t hurt him.

We bought a house. I got a swing set and slide and Dad and I fenced in the backyard. Although Caesar could jump as high as the fence, he never did. Instead, he would jump on the gate until he had popped the spring latch, then he’d go bounding over to Lake Michigan, a half-mile away. I replaced that latch with one that dropped over the gate pole. Then he was forced to wait in the yard for a neighbor child to open the gate and come in. Knocking the child aside, Caesar would bound through the gate — and away.

Between us and the lake was a wide boulevard with fast traffic. How did our dog get across? One day, driving on Sheridan Road, I spied Caesar sitting on the curb, surrounded by pedestrians waiting for the light. I pulled over to watch. The light changed, the pedestrians crossed; so did Caesar. He would return, many hours later with a coat stinking of alewives (summer) or covered with ice crystals (winter).

I put on a screen door in back. Caesar would shoulder it open to go to the yard. To return, he would paw a hole in the screen and pull the screen door open. I didn’t like replacing screening every day. I put a handle on the bottom of the door horizontally. Caesar could place a paw in the handle and open the door. I called Caesar, got on my hands and knees and pawed the door open. “Now it’s your turn Caesar. You open the door.” Naw. I repeated the process. I took his paw and put it through the handle. He waited, grinning, for me to open the door. I quickly tired of tutoring the dog, pushed the dog away, and went into the house. Caesar then put his paw through the new handle and opened the screen door, leaving me to wonder Who’s smarter?

Your sisters enjoyed playing with you. You would do anything they asked. They played house in the yard and built a playhouse in the corner, complete with kitchen. They cooked mud pies and you would eat them. One day Kate told Mary about their new room: the bathroom. Mary had learned to be suspicious of the children and investigated. “Frank is not allowed to use your bathroom. He must come into the house to go to the toilet.”
Then we had a new baby; her cradle, set in the dining room, was sheltered from Chicago drafts. Our kitchen had two doorways strategically located; one opened into the family room, the other into the dining room. Mare could watch the kids, cook, and read. The family room also had a dining room entrance. The children could make a circuit through the doorways, through the kitchen, play with the new arrival and return. You, Frank, passing the cradle, would give it a vigorous shake, establishing seniority. Annie would crow with delight.

You went to pre-kindergarten. The girls took you. There, you learned to print your name and gave your mother a birthday card (made by the girls) and proudly signed by you: F R A K.

You started playing with the neighborhood boys and were frequently on backyard detention for playing in the street. Kate asked, in all seriousness, if Mary had eyes in the back of her head. Your mother never denied it. The neighborhood mothers were a tight-knit group. When you were perhaps five, you and the boy across the street ventured onto the Northwestern tracks, a block away. This time it was another neighborhood father, coming home from work, who spied you.

I called your companion’s father and asked if I could come over — we needed to discuss this together. It was easy to keep a serious face. It was serious. I told you that this was too serious for a spanking and related a story of a boy who had lost a leg, playing on the tracks, hit by a train. The neighbor boy’s father gave him a hiding. I thought my strategy would make a more serious impression. Did it?

(Same time, next year.)
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.

OSHER at JHU, 6740 Alexander Bell Drive, Columbia, MD 21046-2100, 410-516-9719.

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Virginia Murphy
Beverly Scharff
Virginia Schultz
Marshall Sneiderman
Ann Sokatch
Phyllis Sonen
Martin Stein
Michael Wallace
Alan White
Shirley Wolock

Committee Chairs
Baltimore/Columbia
Curriculum – Betty Downs
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 – Manya Ballenzweig
Historian – Samuel Joseloff
Hospitality – Virginia Murphy and Beverly Scharff
Membership – Jane Jasper and Martin Stein
Travel – Shirley Wolock
Update – Bernie Lipsky and Martin Stein
Volunteer – Mimie Meltzer and Harvey Milens