Pat Castillo—Student, Benefactor, Friend
by Leight Johnson

It has long been a rule that the Journal does not publish obituary notices of former members, but there are exceptions to any rule, and this is one of them. When Mary Patricia Willis Castillo died in July, we lost a very special friend. A member of Evergreen (now Osher) since 1992, she endeared herself to all who were lucky enough to meet her.

As a member of the “Memoirs” class, she wrote of her interesting life with a gentle sense of humor (My aunt Mimi is standing in front of a full-length mirror tying a narrow black velvet ribbon around her head midway on her forehead. She is making a fashion statement; although I think she is holding in her brains.) Hard of hearing in her later years, she once said during a critique session, “If that’s a compliment, please speak up—I don’t want to miss a word.”

A Maryland girl, she married a Cuban diplomat with whom she lived all over the world before they retired to Baltimore. Here they became benefactors to Hopkins, with generous donations to the medical school, the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, and the School for Professional Studies in Business and Education, as well as to the undergraduate school. As a widow, she donated more than half a million dollars to Evergreen/Osher, primarily so that “those who couldn’t afford to come would be able.”

Before failing health prevented her attendance, she drove herself to classes when she was in her nineties, always dressed as if for a party. Only months shy of age 100, she was lucid until the end. There’s a saying that seems appropriate:

Some people come into our lives and quickly go.
Some stay awhile, and leave footprints on our hearts,
And we are never, ever, the same.

Farewell to a dear friend.
OSHER at JHU Journal

Memoirs of Public Events
by Hazen Kniffin

“Roosevelt is dead!”
News arrived while I’m at-bat.
Grounded to shortstop.

JFK is killed.
Some of America dies.
Parricide lives on.

John Lennon murdered.
Try not to weep in the car.
Then “Imagine” plays.

Challenger horror.
O-ring failed. A battle lost
for want of a nail.

Mighty, stone Hussein
tugged to fifty-five degrees.
Premature party.

“Mission accomplished.”
Pride goeth before a fall.
The proverb wins out.

Tim Russert startles us.
He should leave at least a ghost
like faulty TV.

Yes, the center holds:
Art, music and poetry.
Can you spare a dime?

The Internet and the Future of Our Brains
by Susan McCarter

Like many who have more of their lives behind them than ahead, I often find myself amazed at the behavior of the “younger generation.” Group dating, Facebook, iPods, and Kindles have appeared so abruptly it’s somewhat disorienting. Oldsters have been shaking their heads at the antics of the young for at least five millennia, but it does seem that we are in one of those awkward periods during which the lives of parents and children diverge more radically than usual.

I know that when I was in college in the mid-1960s, American culture was in a similar period of generational estrangement. And I’ve been telling myself that the current societal dislocations are a natural result of youth’s need to experiment and their elders’ need to talk about the good old days. But a new book on the effect of the Internet on the structure and functioning of the brain has convinced me that something new really is going on.

Nicholas Carr’s The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains explores the social and physical changes brought about by our very recent dependence on cyberspace. And if what Carr reports is true, this time—unlike other periods of rapid cultural change—our brains are being irreversibly altered by our new technology.

In the first chapter (pg. 5-6) Carr writes: I’m not thinking the way I used to. I feel it most strongly when I’m reading. I used to find it easy to immerse myself in a book or lengthy article. My mind would get caught up in the twists of the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I’d spend long hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That’s rarely the case anymore.
Now my concentration starts to drift after a page or two . . . The deep read that used to come naturally has become a struggle.

When I read this I realized my experience is similar. I used to read *The New York Times* from start to finish every morning. Now I call it up online, scan the headlines, read some of the columns on the Opinion page, and then go on to something else. I’d assumed this was a symptom of normal changes in my brain as it ages. But maybe age has nothing to do with my increasing tendency to skim rather than read. Maybe the change is connected to my use of the Web.

Recent neurological research strongly suggests that our brains are plastic throughout our lives. They get less plastic as we age, but our neurons keep setting up new connections, and nerve cells are constantly being born. No matter how old we are, our brains, Carr writes, are constantly changing, coping with new experiences and readjusting as new information floods in. You used to mow the lawn and then you hired a lawn service company to do it for you. Now you spend that time in Osher classes. Your brain adjusts. The areas that help you learn and consider new ideas get larger, their neural pathways get stronger, while the parts that were essential to success in mowing shrink. And even if you return to mowing, the shrinkage won’t be entirely reversed. I was unbeatable at the game of jacks when I was seven, but I’ve forgotten how I did it. Thank goodness I have: this is a positive evolutionary adaptation that keeps my brain uncluttered and focused on what is important to me today.

What does this have to do with the Internet? When I learned to play jacks I spent long periods concentrating on mastering the game. I invented new ways of throwing the ball. And I interacted with the other players. But when I enter cyberspace, I slip into a world where concentrating and repetition aren’t rewarded, and there is no human interaction.

The Internet provides endless information, but demands that I make instant decisions, and this invariably leads to rapid but often unclear thinking and superficial understanding. Carr’s thesis (supported by dozens of scientific studies) is that if we spend extended time online, receiving information in short bursts rather than through deep concentration, we begin to lose the ability to concentrate deeply. Like my jacks-playing skills, unless I use them constantly, my concentration skills decrease. Maybe the students who ignored my instructions to use the library and did all their term paper research on Wikipedia weren’t being lazy. Perhaps they simply can’t read books anymore. Or rather, maybe their brains could no longer process information that requires patience and careful consideration.

This would be a small matter if only a few geeks used the Internet. But the Internet is planet-wide and addictive. When I prepared my lectures using a typewriter, I often got up and walked around the house, mentally processing what I had just read or written while stretching my muscles. Today, when I want a break, I don’t get up. Instead I check my email. Or upload images. Or order something from Amazon. I’ve found myself in front of the monitor for four or five hours at a time. This creates both mental and physical fatigue; and in my case, stiff and aching knees (which I remember only when I try to stand). It also decreases my overall ability to concentrate.

As children grow up in the harried age of the Internet, they’ll have to learn how to text their friends, talk on their phones, and write term papers all at the same time. Their brains will adapt to make this possible. But they won’t need to learn to think deeply, and so this skill will weaken as they age. While our descendants will find it harder to slow down and concentrate, they’ll be much better than we are at storing and retrieving remembered information.

I ask myself when was the last time I sat down to read Thackeray or Dickens, which I used to do every couple of years. The answer: it’s been decades. Could I read them now in the same intense way I once did? Could I immerse myself until the scenes and characters were more real than the room in which I read? Probably, but I’m not sure.

If the changes in human information processing that Carr discusses continue to be necessary for survival in an electronic world, will anyone read Thackeray or Dickens? Or will they skim the graphic novel versions, e-books they download onto their Kindles? In 50 years will an actor be able (I repeat be able) to
search for nuances in the Shakespearian character she is portraying? Will there be any live actors? Does it matter? I don't know. After all, Homer would find it hard to drum up an audience today.

I'm a prehistorian, so I tend to look back over the couple of million years of prehuman and human evolution and take comfort in our amazing ability to survive. But I can't help wondering: if our brains are no longer configured to think deeply, will our future continue to reflect our past?

I could be pessimistic and expect looming disaster, or optimistic and forecast a future that's environmentally clean, safe, and filled with no-calorie chocolate. But because we can't see the present until it's behind us, I have no data to support either scenario. No one does.

**Viet Nam Memorial**

*by Morton Katz*

He is always with me...a faceless, nameless young man. Our paths crossed but once, yet I cannot escape either the memory of our encounter or the burden of its consequences.

The year was 1967. The place was a former Michelin rubber plantation forty miles northwest of Saigon. From my tent I could see Cambodia, or at least the summit of the Tay Ninh Mountain rising above the perfect rows of rubber trees oozing sticky white latex and the scattered clumps of palms and bamboo bending to the occasional breeze. It was the dry season, a welcome respite after eight months of monsoon; welcome, that is, but for the swirling dust that coated all surfaces and added grit to every swallow whenever a Huey helicopter or a fixed-wing recon plane landed or took off.

On the far side of the French planter’s dirt landing strip, a single strand of concertina wire separated us from them—the Vietnamese villagers of Dau Tieng and an unseen but ever-present enemy. Certain knowledge that Viet Cong lived in that village as shopkeepers and rice farmers by day and as enemy combatants by night, kept me sleeping fitfully. The fully loaded, round-chambered .45 under my pillow was for psychological comfort. In no way was I capable of defending myself with my handgun, should the meager perimeter have been breached.

I was serving as the dental officer in support of a small unit of the Fourth Infantry Division on the day that a company clerk entered my tent and pointed to his discolored maxillary central incisor and its draining fistula. The tooth had abscessed, but my options to treat him in the field were limited. Having neither X-ray equipment nor root canal reamers and files and gutta-percha points, I was unable to conserve the front tooth, but could only extract it and leave him with an aesthetic problem. Frustrated, I tossed the mouth mirror onto the bracket table. The mirror found a new resting place out of register with the clean impression of itself left in the layer of dust that had accumulated overnight.
We chatted. The specialist had been enrolled in college, studying journalism, and he’d had the security of a draft deferment. But his country was at war and he felt the calling to leave college and enlist in the infantry. Someone at basic training must have recognized his education and above-ordinary verbal skills and assigned him to be a company clerk (a task that rankled him because he wanted a combat role).

He was handsome, he was intelligent, he was an idealist, and he was patriotic. My decision to do him a special favor is what got him killed.

My parent unit at Cu Chi had an endodontist with all the knowledge and equipment needed to preserve his front tooth. Being so impressed with the young man’s attitude, I chose to go the extra mile for him and arrange a helicopter evacuation back to Cu Chi, where he could get dental treatment, have access to a PX, and enjoy a few creature comforts away from enemy contact in our base camp. Unfortunately, he was bumped off my arranged chopper ride. He was impatient to get back to his buddies, so rather than wait for another flight to be arranged, he joined the daily overland convoy to Tay Ninh and down Route 1 to Cu Chi.

Several hours later a soldier pressed into my hand a shredded medical file. Clipped to the tan folder was a scrap of paper displaying a partial sentence: the diagnosis, in my handwritten scrawl. With my fingers clutching my neck, I tried to hold back the acid rising into my throat. I became lightheaded and had to sit down. The soldier proceeded to relate to me in a detached, matter-of-fact tone how the Viet Cong had planted a command-detonated mine in the road, had allowed the jeeps and troop-carrying trucks to pass over, had waited for the Red Cross-marked ambulance in the middle of the convoy and had exploded the mine.

I must have been in shock in the immediate aftermath, or I would have had the presence of mind to write down the young man’s name and unit. But at the time, contact information seemed so needless. It was not until many years later, and the Vietnam Memorial had been dedicated, that I began to feel the pain that could come from not knowing. A memorial composed of names demands of us that we know the name of our fallen, that we look up his name in the lists placed about the grounds and locate him among the 58,261. Only then can we have an unspoken communication with our deceased comrade. It pains me that I cannot leave a flower or a token, touch the spot where his name is chiseled into the black granite and wipe away the dust—the damn dust.

Not until I became the father of boys myself did I fully realize what the parents of that young soldier must have experienced. Had I known his name and explored the army records, could I—or should I—have contacted the bereaved parents in 1967, or sometime later, to express my heartfelt sadness over their loss? Would my condolences have given them comfort? Would the guilt have shown, the guilt I felt for having been an unwitting instrument in his passing? Would that emotion have only increased their bitterness? I will never have answers to these questions.

Today, when I read a death notice for another young man who volunteered, who answered the country’s call to fight in some far-off land and who paid the ultimate price, my thoughts travel back four decades, and I again feel the emptiness…for another life not fully lived.

What Technology Has Done to Civility

by Arthur K. Yellin

Up until the late-1950s, telephones were not all that common. They were moderately expensive to have and to use—and long distance calls were particularly prohibitive in cost. When the telephone rang, we knew it had to be important.

As with the telegram, which preceded the telephone, a phone call commanded immediate and sometimes fearful attention. When the phone rang, we dropped whatever we were doing and ran to grab it. Local conversations were halted. Meals were left uneaten and allowed to get cold. Mail was dropped.
As technology progressed, the presence of telephones became ubiquitous. New homes had phone jacks in virtually every room. Well-to-do people even had phone jacks in their bathrooms! Since our society had already been socialized to do so, when the phone rang or whistled or tweeted we dropped whatever we were doing and ran to catch the call.

Although the telephone answering device was invented around 1935, it did not come into widespread use for roughly 35 years. Call screening became possible, but we found that we had to force ourselves to allow calls to “go to the machine” because we were so used to jumping for the phone.

We are all familiar with the scenario in which we are at a store check-out, where we've waited in line for many long minutes, when the clerk's phone rings. Our transaction is placed on hold as the caller receives immediate attention.

Now comes the Cyberspace Age and new technology. Cell phones, originally too large and too clunky to carry on our persons, proliferate. They are truly a wonder of science and engineering. Small and cheap, almost everyone eight years of age and up carries one…and, with the advent of Blue Tooth®, funny-looking things right out of Star Trek™ have sprouted from human ears. People wandering around seemingly talking to themselves may actually be talking with others. Technology has given us the capability to be in communication with someone, somewhere on the planet, at all times.

However, due to our preconditioning to answer whenever the phone rings, we now do so to the detriment of face-to-face conversation—and to everything else going on in our lives. Then add to the cell’s disruptive ringtones the power of Blackberry® and similar devices. In my observation, the Blackberry vibration, alerting us to incoming emails, commands even greater attention than the cell phone ringtones!

Just how many of our emails are that important? Just how many of our cell phone calls are more important than the person we are walking with or sitting across from? What has technology done to civility? What has humanity lost through technological gains?

“Can anybody here throw a football?”

As my hand went into the air, I looked around at my sorority sisters. They were all sitting stone still. Feeling very conspicuous, I slowly lowered my hand. I was only a sophomore and didn’t want to appear a showoff.

“Great, Barb! You’re the quarterback. Now—who can catch a football or run fast?” Three hands went up. “Okay—Pat, Ginger, and Maryanne, you’re halfbacks. Who knows what it means to center the ball?” Carol raised her hand. “Carol—you’re the center.”

In the following half hour our sorority president, Lou Howard, explained there would be two charity Powder Puff football games in mid-October at Biddle Field. Zeta would play Pi Phi and Chi O would play us, Phi Mu.

Lou's directions were succinct. Larry Baner and some other Crows (Alpha Chi Rho) would be our coaches, and we would practice three afternoons a week. On game day we would wear Phi Mu T-shirts, but jeans or shorts was a personal choice. No helmets would be needed because it was only touch football and no rough stuff was allowed. Volunteer frat guys would be cheerleaders. So much for preparations—bare bones and anything but glamorous…on to other sorority business.

This whole brilliant shebang had been thought up and approved by the Pan-Hellenic Council. The women's phys ed instructor hadn't been enthusiastic. She’d thought the deans and male coaches would nix it and had made it clear she would not argue. However,
the dean of women had more balls, so to speak, and told us to proceed. We all knew our dean’s record for championing the minority female population against the “Great White Fathers.”

Of the twelve girls who would make up our team, the six of us who were tomboys thought it would be great fun. The others grumbled, but stuck with it because word had gotten around campus that male Dickinsonians were actually buying tickets. None of us was quite sure whether the guys thought that this event would be the comedy of the century or just a way to pass an otherwise boring Saturday afternoon.

Practice went well. Larry, our coach from Alpha Chi Rho, was pleased. My passing was better than he had hoped, our runners were fast, and our receivers could actually catch. (Keep in mind these evaluations were all relative.)

We only lacked one necessity—a kicker, not for extra points (we would run the ball in), but to punt. I really didn’t like to kick, but it turned out I could get the ball farther downfield than any of my sorority sisters. So this was added to my quarterback duties. I practiced a lot and really was improving, until…

At a lunch time practice two weeks before the game, my third kick sent the ball sailing high and longish, the best punt I had ever made. However, as the ball shot through the air, a stinging pain shot through the back of my thigh. I knew I was in trouble. Larry looked at my leg, shook his head and told me to go back to the dorm and ice it. I said okay, but I had a two o’clock and knew the ice would have to wait because Professor Kepner wouldn’t.

After sitting through a two-hour criminology class, I needed more than ice. Blood vessels must have ruptured because the back of my thigh was black and blue. The bruising cut off in a straight line where the edge of my chair apparently provided pressure. Now what?

I wasn’t going to our wimpy women’s phys ed teacher. She would only get upset and say I told you so. The school nurse was a shrew and all I knew about the only doctor in Carlisle was that he was fond of giving penicillin shots to girls in their thighs. My roommate, Blanche, suggested I go see John Steckbeck, the men’s football trainer. Steck was a sweetheart, friendly, kind, and respected by all, whether they were sports team members or choristers he directed in the college choir. He seemed the perfect choice.

“Worst mess I’ve seen all season. I’ll give you an ice pack to take back to your dorm, but starting tomorrow it’s the whirlpool and massage. Come to the men’s training room in Conway after four when the guys have all left for the field. Bring your roomie—I can’t work on you without another female present.”

“Will it be better by the nineteenth? Phi Mu doesn’t have another quarterback.”

“You’ll be ready, love, but you won’t be kicking.”

The following afternoon, Blanche and I watched the team jog to the field and then we entered the lower level of Conway Hall, the freshman boys’ dorm. At the end of the corridor were steps that led down to the locker room and training facility. As instructed, I hollered down and waited for an okay, meaning all the guys had left. There was no response. I called again. This time an answer came, but it wasn’t quite what I expected.

A figure stepped into the bright lights at the foot of the steps. I recognized Fred Specht immediately. He was the Red Devil’s halfback and boyfriend of one of my dorm mates.

“Oh my God,” he said weakly.

“Oh my God,” I echoed, but never moved. Fred was de-void of clothes and his male member was not behaving.

Then a teammate appeared behind him and started roaring with laughter. Behind me, Blanche was giggling. Even after his teammate handed him a towel, Fred was motionless, seemingly rooted to the floor.

Suddenly Steck’s voice boomed out. “You guys were supposed to be on the field by now. Get dressed and get outta here or I’ll run you both b’ar arsed through town.”

Fifteen minutes later Steck came up to where we were waiting and signaled the all clear.
“Best not say anything about this or we’ll all be in trouble,” he said softly as he prepared the whirlpool. However, like all things of this nature, word got around. I was teased, but poor Fred was reminded of this embarrassing encounter until the day he graduated.

My leg mended and the Powder Puff Bowl went on, as scheduled. I threw two passes for touchdowns and Phi Mu won, 14-6.

That was my brief moment in the sun. I still remember it well, but not nearly as well as I remember Fred Specht standing in the spotlight at the foot of the stairs, lily white and stark naked.

The Storyteller and the “Gangster”

by Janet George

Noa Baum, instructor for “The Art of Storytelling” at Osher, worked as an actress for the Khan Repertory Theater in Jerusalem. Whenever theater roles were not available, the actors were hired out to tell stories to children at schools and community organizations. One day, disappointed at not having a role—a rare occurrence—Noa went to tell stories.

Noa, who was in her early twenties, found herself in front of a group of “at risk” children in the south of Tel Aviv. She wondered how effective she would be in reaching these students and was surprised when the children listened to her stories with interest and participated in the role playing. Noa left the school looking forward to the next day.

On day two she planned to tell “The Tinderbox” by Hans Christian Andersen. She sat before the same group and was about to start when several more children entered the room with their teachers. One burly child with long stringy hair ran around the school room yelling and kicking chairs. When the child finished her rounds, she stopped and said, “Now we can start,” and sat down to listen with the others. She was one of the school’s few special education students—a real “gangster,” thought Noa as she proceeded to tell the story.

“The Tinderbox” is the story of a young beautiful princess, a smitten soldier, and a trio of vicious dogs programmed by a witch to grant the soldier his fondest desires. His desires focus on the lovely sleeping princess whom he ultimately kisses into consciousness and into his loving arms.

At the story’s end, the nine-year-old gangster jumped up and declared, “I be the princess.” Without any prompting, she pushed together two chairs. Then, with the grace of a ballerina, she eased her body onto the makeshift bed and assumed the position of a sleeping princess. The children acted out the story with the gangster playing her part well. Noa saw, for the first time, the healing effects of a story with herself as the storyteller.

Today Noa looks back on a long history of bringing the treasures of storytelling to many people around the world. This fall she seeks to bring them to those of us in Osher who live in the autumn of our lives. Her students here will do what her first students did in Tel Aviv, listen and act out the narrative. Noa looks forward to the wealth of life experiences and cultural traditions that Osher students will bring to the task.

“The Art of Storytelling” will be organized into parts: the traditional and the personal. The traditional will deal with oral traditions that celebrate our differences and likenesses. The personal will help us find our own stories to share with others. Noa tells us that through the ageless oral traditions of the world, we can connect to the universal human experience and create meaning and order from the chaos of life. Like the gangster, we too can find healing.

For more information about Noa Baum and her art, log on to www.noabaum.com.
Egypt: My Life in the 1980s
by Wayne Faulkner

We lived in Maadi, a suburb of Cairo along the Nile, in a two-story house where we had summer and winter gardens. The winter garden was a kind of greenhouse on the roof of the second floor. The summer garden, also on the second floor, was open air with many flowering plants and a vegetarian turtle the size of a dinner plate. Our second-story bedroom had a small balcony overlooking our adjoining open-air garden. We usually ate breakfast on the balcony. Everything outside had a patina of dust (including the turtle’s shell).

We had a gardener, who loved to polish our little Datsun; a cook, who was a Muslim with two families; a parlor maid, who, three days a week, ran our vacuum cleaner, trailing a twenty-pound transformer; and an ironer, who ironed half a day on Friday. All this largess came courtesy of the Agency for International Development.

The Maadi Country Club had tennis courts, a swimming pool, and every Friday an American movie. The American colony had a fourth of July celebration. One year we did Berthold Brecht’s Galileo. I was Galileo.

GROCERY SHOPPING

Mary, my wife, crossed the mosquito-infested canal in front of the house to shop in Maadi where a kilo of oranges cost seven cents (American). Ramadan, our cook, accompanied her, as he also spoke English. One day, on her way home, she was accosted going up the stairs of the house. Her screams, swelled by those of neighbors and servants, scared off the robber, but he got her purse.

To buy meat, Mary went to Cairo. Here’s why: As you approached the Muslim butcher who displayed his mutton hung by a chain over the sidewalk, the mutton appeared black. As you got nearer, a cloud of flies arose, and the mutton was white. After you passed, the carcass turned black again. In Cairo, the Coptic (Christian) butcher kept his meat in a case, American-style. He also sold pork. Incidentally, the garbage men, who came by daily in wagons drawn by donkeys and followed by a gang of cats, were Copts. They lived on the garbage mounds and tended the pigs. This was forbidden to Muslims.

TECHNOLOGY

Each morning I was picked up by our Coptic driver, who rang the door bell, then shooed away the mosquitoes while I hurried to the safety of the van. We would drive up the Corniche along the Nile, past the pyramids across the river, through the standing water of the underpasses (no, it hadn’t rained, this was sewer overflow) and into Cairo. There, we were cut off from Maadi. Phones in Egypt, installed by the English in the 1920s, were audible for a mile or two. Past that, they were garbled or, if you prefer, garbage. It meant you couldn’t book a hotel from the airport.

My job was to install a computer system for the Egyptian government’s Department of Health and Social Services. I was a tad early. There were no desktop computers, and electrical power, like telephone service, was intermittent. Records were kept in ledger books, with pens dipped into inkwells. This worked well enough. Speed and repetition were probably unnecessary, even a bit silly. And so I went to the University in Assuit in upper Egypt to stare at a small IBM computer, which hadn’t worked for more than six months, and tabulating equipment that could be turned manually and, yes, ledgers.

They took me to a small hospital in the delta. It was new and they were proud of it. How many doctors here? One. How many nurses? One. How many
patients? One. Hospital patients in Egypt brought their own bedding, and their families brought them their food. Different strokes. We were told that if you needed to be hospitalized, fly to France.

ALEXANDRIA

There are two roads from Cairo to Alexandria. The longer, slower, more scenic delta road follows the Nile and its tributaries. We would pass Egyptian families on the road. In the lead would be the father riding the donkey, then the mother carrying all the goods on her head, then the children, all single file at the side of the road, eldest first. One day, in the distance we saw a huge obstruction. As we approached, we realized it was a haystack that seemed to be slowly moving away. As we overtook it, we saw that it was a haystack on a camel; the haystack was so huge that all you could see of the animal were its legs.

The desert road is shorter. We stopped to take pictures of the desolate Sahara. Nothing like the western American desert, in that there is apparently nothing growing. I saw my first and only desert fox. Like the European fox, but sand colored. As we approached the Mediterranean the air became moister and we saw grapevines that were first planted by Alexander. Alexandria is almost European, but older—a nineteenth century, bustling city with old cars fighting old streetcars for a piece of the road. Cairo is Asian, African, European—and none of those. That is because it partakes of every century from the eleventh on. The streets are filled with cars, people walking, polio victims riding wheel chairs propelled by hand with bicycle chains attached to the wheels, caravans of camels, hawkers selling tea by the cup, European suits, ankle-length galabeas for men and women. Most streets are narrow, with upper floors close enough that you can hand over food or cups of tea. The old market is called Khan el-Kalili. Here the streets are shaded by canvas stretched on ropes, streets that are paths with steps. No bikes. Men making shoes, saddles, bridles of leather. Goldsmiths, silversmiths, coppersmiths making unrecognizable objects from unrecognizable metals. Women hawking food, much of it unknown to us. Bring a guide—otherwise you’ll be lost, spending all your money on wonderful things you won’t know what to do with.

There is more, much more, but alas dear reader, I have run out of energy and time.

An Incident on the Yangtze

by Jerry Steiner

As our Elderhostel’s floating hotel chugged its way down the Yangtze River toward the Three Gorges, our collegial, extremely cordial group was enjoying Chinese cuisine in one of the adjunctive dining rooms on board. As might be expected, our group of 30 had diverse backgrounds: we were teachers, lawyers, engineers, salespeople, managerial types, and a retired dentist, me, the only health professional in the bunch. Our very spritely Chinese guide, Mei Ling, who was in her early thirties, was exceedingly intelligent and quite fluent in English. Early on, I had indicated to Mei that I wished to tell a story with relevance to our trip and that I would signal her at an appropriate time.

That evening, the dining room was furnished with two large round tables; each accommodated fifteen of us. As we dined, a horrible, shrieking gasp came from Maggie Frobisher, an English teacher from Brooklyn. A fish bone had stuck in her throat. Her predicament alarmed all of us. Fortunately, I was able to grab a hunk of bread, form it into a small wad and ask her to swallow it. My hope was that the bolus would envelop the bone and carry it down her throat. This remedy seemed to work because Maggie began to calm down. However, the group remained a little anxious and I felt this was the perfect time to inject some humor. Accordingly, I signaled Mei Ling and she arose and informed the room: “Jerry is now ready to tell his story.”

I got up and prefaced my tale by saying, “I want to apologize in advance to Mei Ling because my story is best told using a very contrived Chinese accent by
which I mean no disrespect.” Mei quietly smiled and nodded her head. Then I began:

“On the banks of the Yangtze River an elderly farmer called his three sons before him. In a fiery, angry voice he ranted, “SON NUMBER ONE, YOU THROW OUTHOUSE IN YANGTSE WIVER?”

“No, Father, I never do such thing!”

“SON NUMBER TWO, YOU THROW OUTHOUSE IN YANGTSE WIVER?”

“Oh, Father, you know I never would do such thing!”

“SON NUMBER THREE, YOU THROW OUTHOUSE IN YANGTSE WIVER?”

“Oh, Father, NO—of course not!”

The old farmer stroked his short, pointed beard, uttering a low, “Hmm.” After pausing a moment he said to his sons, “Let me tell you little story, story of George Washington. When George Washington little boy he chop down cherry tree. When George father saw cherry tree chopped down he very, very angry and shout, ‘WHO CHOP DOWN CHERRY TREE?’ George Washington, being very honest boy, say, ‘Father, I must tell truth, I chop down cherry tree.’ Then, George Washington father say, ‘Since you tell truth and have been good boy up to now, I no punish you, but never do such thing again!’

“NOW!” said the old man, “MY SONS—WHICH OF YOU THROW OUTHOUSE IN YANGTZE WIVER?”

After a short silence, the tentative, weak voice of Son Number Three answered, guiltily, “Father, I tell truth like George Washington. I throw outhouse in Yangtze Wiver. I tell truth.”

Whereupon the old farmer gave Son Number Three such a whack as to send him reeling across several yards of farmland. When the son recovered, he cried, “Father, Why you punish me? I tell truth like George Washington and his father no punish him! Why you punish me?”

“BECAUSE, MY SON, WHEN GEORGE WASHINGTON CHOP DOWN CHERRY TREE, HIS FATHER NOT IN TREE!”

The room convulsed in laughter, which spread to Maggie, and the tension was broken.

### The Leight Side

*The Osher Book of Style: A Guide for Writers*

1. And don’t start a sentence with a conjunction.
2. Each pronoun agrees with their antecedent.
3. Just between you and I, case is important.
4. Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
5. Watch out for irregular verbs which has cropped into our language.
6. Never use a preposition to end a sentence with.
7. Don’t use no double negatives.
8. A writer mustn’t shift your point of view.
9. When dangling, don’t use participles.
10. Join clauses good, like a conjunction should.
11. Don’t use a run-on sentence you got to punctuate it.
12. About sentence fragments.
13. In letters theme reports articles and stuff like that we use commas to keep a string of items apart.
14. Don’t use commas, which aren’t necessary.
15. Its’ important to use apostrophe’s right.
16. Don’t abbrev.
17. It does matter two spell rite.
18. Check to see if any words out.
19. In my opinion I think that an author when he is writing shouldn’t get into the habit of making use of too many unnecessary words that he doesn’t really need.
20. Last but not least, lay off clichés.
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