Grandpa towered over my thin, five-year-old frame. He probably measured over six feet, weighed a lot, but fat never crossed my mind. He must have been attractive with his white hair and friendly smile, because the ladies gathered around him wherever we went. He displayed super strength which I often witnessed. One time I saw him pick up an entire wall section of a house during demolition and he carried it to his construction trailer. These tricks astounded me. He loved to dance, especially with me. Grandpa was the perfect superhero.

I spent every summer at a lake with my grandparents. Usually at the beginning of my stay, our cottage for that season consisted of basic framing with two-by-fours, windows, and cold-water plumbing, and a cot for my bed. By the end of the summer, we had painted walls, soft furniture, pillows, and fancy dishes on the dining table. Each summer we stayed at a different lake. My grandfather constructed cottages for his income. He purchased an old
house in the spring in the city, took apart the house in sections, transported them to a picturesque lake lot and reassembled the house. In late fall, he sold the cottage “as is” to a handy man.

My summer routine each day began early. Grandpa gathered tools and equipment and I trailed behind him.

“Judy, hand me that hammer over there,” and I scooted across the work area, grabbed the tool, rushed to his side, proud and happy.

“Grandpa, how do you hook the two walls together?” I questioned as my eyes surveyed the assortment of boards propped against the ladder.

“Well, you put a nail…” he responded, but with three nails sticking out from his lips, it sounded muffled. Regardless, I stared at this remarkable trick, and considered trying it, too, but never accomplished more than one nail in my lips. He flabbergasted me.

Our routine usually included a trip to the small gas station/grocery store a short distance from the cottage. The dust and stones popping behind the car seemed appropriate for a superhero’s vehicle. Grandpa always wanted a snack and a cigar. He let me get a lollipop and a soft drink. When we pulled into the parking area, he honked the horn at a friend.

“Howdy, Wayne. Fish bitin’?”

“Not so good this morning. Plan to try at the cove later today,” the friend said.

“Probably see you there. Need to finish the concrete pour under the porch in the back,” Grandpa mumbled.

One day, returning to the large black sedan after our purchases, I planned to practice another trick my grandpa did. He started the engine, shifted the stick, pressed the pedal three times, and then opened his door and slammed it as the car bumped forward. I was ready.

Grandpa moved the stick, pumped the pedal three times, and I carefully began to open my door as the car moved forward. Suddenly the heavy door opened wide, me clinging to the handle, and the next moment I found myself in the gravel, face down. I heard some shouting and knew grandpa stopped the car and turned off the engine and he jumped out of his seat and rushed toward me.

“Judy, Judy, what happened? Oh, my God, are you hurt?” I heard him shuffling around the car and he picked me up, smothering me with hugs. “Oh, my God! Thank heavens, you are okay. Thank heavens! Do not ever try to open a car door again!” he said sternly.

“No,” I cried, tears rolling down my cheeks. But as always, I felt comforted by my superhero who rescued me with his big arms and gentle touch. Later when we told my grandmother about the trick, she scolded grandpa—which I never completely understood.

At the end of the day, when grandpa finished his building tasks, we sat on the screened porch, welcoming the cool breezes off the lake. Grandma fanned herself in her wicker chair. Mosquitoes buzzed around the door, eager to enter and stir up trouble. Fireflies flickered around the lot, but only on occasion did we try to capture them. Grandpa stood in a far corner, playing his fiddle. “Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight,” “Oh, Suzanna,” and “Turkey in the Straw,” were my favorites. I did not sit still, instead twirling and moving my feet to the fiddle tunes.

By the time I was 10, grandpa taught me to play two chords on his old piano and he would play the fiddle. We played the music for at least a couple hours. Grandpa played one song after another, tapping his foot to the beat. Even then, his size impressed me. I thrived on the attention he gave me and tried to do all he said. When I reached middle school, my grandpa often conducted square dance workshops for churches and clubs; he demonstrated dances with me and so we practiced in their dining room.

Once I began college, however, my time with my grandparents dwindled. Unexpectedly, my grandmother
died at a young age, and my grandfather seemed lost. Before school started in my senior year, my mother begged my help; she wanted me to drive Grandpa to Florida for his annual winter vacation. Reluctantly I agreed but made it clear to her I would not go square dancing with him even though he would ask me. As a college student, my tastes geared to rock and roll. Grandpa’s kind of dancing was embarrassing.

Our drive to Florida began with little commotion. We needed to stop nearly every hour for a restroom and finding acceptable restaurants proved difficult. McDonald's worked, but reluctantly. At our first meal, Grandpa introduced me to every employee there. “This is my granddaughter. She is driving me to Florida. She is a wonderful dancer.”

When he ate two double burgers and two orders of large fries, I recalled my amazement at his appetite. Returning to the car after eating, Grandpa said, “There’s a nice little band over at Palmetto. They will be there on Tuesday morning, too.” A few minutes later, he repeated the comment, adding, “I think they will know the Jesse Polka, too.”

“No, Grandpa, I told you there were no dances included. I meant it.”

“Now, Judy, you know I should get at least one dance … and Palmetto is the best. You will know many of the people there, too.”

“Grandpa, that makes it even worse! I am 21 years old and do not want to go to an old people’s dance,” I exclaimed. Whenever these conversations came up, my speed picked up. He ignored me. Soon it would be necessary to begin looking for a gas station.

“I will plan on Tuesday at Palmetto. You know, your Grandma liked that one best,” and he gazed out the window with determination.

After a three-day drive, we reached our destination in Bradenton as scheduled, and Grandpa immediately knocked at his neighbor’s door to let them know about his arrival. He hurried up to the pavilion and the shuffleboard court before even taking his suitcase into the house. He was happy and relaxed.

At breakfast on Tuesday morning, I ignored his mumbling and read my book. But soon, he mentioned “Palmetto” again, and I looked up.

“Grandpa, how many times do I need to tell you. No! I do not want to go to a dance.”

“Now, Judy, I arranged for my friends to pick us up. We will be home by 2:00 and that will give us plenty of time to reach the airport,” he stated as he moved towards the door and banged the screen door behind him. I sighed and shrugged.

Later that morning, I found myself on the Palmetto dance floor with my Grandpa, twirling around the floor smoothly performing the Jesse Polka. In the gallery around the floor, friends applauded as we passed. My misery grew. Grandpa walked with a bit of a prance to his step.

A man approached behind my grandfather, “OK, Grandpa, it is my turn. I would like to dance with this lovely lady.” Grandpa let go, stunned. Soon I was dancing off to the other end with my new partner. Not used to sharing me, Grandpa moped on the sidelines. He struggled when my dance card eliminated him but when it came towards the end, he asserted, “It is now my turn, young lady.” He truly danced the best of all.

Later, after a long drive to Tampa’s airport, we walked together to the gate. The stars shined in the sky brightly. Grandpa seemed very quiet, so I chattered away.

When we reached the outdoor gate at the cyclone fence, a red carpet stretched to the bottom of the steps of the airplane. No one else waited for the trip. He shed tears as he always did when I left.

“See you this spring, Grandpa. You be good, now,” I said giving him a hug.

“Yea, yea,” he mumbled. He still towered over me, with his white hair, and his arms returned with a bear hug. I entered the gate and walked to the plane. Before climbing the steps, I waved once more as he stood there at the gate on that starry night, my superhero. My hero died three days later, instantly, of a heart attack on the dance floor.
Osher’s Marc and Bella

A salute to Ave and Marcia Amith

by Randy Barker

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Sometimes a twosome seems one
In ways all can see.
Oshering with you two gives hints that it’s so.

Whether bonneted pink at the horseradish maker’s,
Or turned ultra-red in the head at NASA,
Or talking of stalking by your own family cat,
Or of conserving momentum with anyone’s cat,
Or of GPS-ing when all else falls short,

You two are one, too, anyone looking would say,
As Marc was to Bella when he painted that day.

I Love Your Life

by Randy Barker

I love your life
Is how I felt
After that meander

When we found ourselves there.
There
Is a place to sit together
Plus an utterance
That awakens your story
Plus a story
That awakens my love for your life
Plus your look
That says I want you to know this.
You and I are lifelong
Or
You and I are new
Friends.
You lived and still live far
Or
You lived and still live near
Home.
I love your life
Because you were there
And
Because you are
Here.

Thoughts after time spent with quite few friends, old and new, in 2016
Elaine Rabin and Her Magnificent Cadillac
by Ruth Hananel
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Everyone wanted to ride in Elaine Rabin's magnificent Cadillac. Sometimes we were tightly squeezed to make room for one more person. The women didn't feel safe driving alone in their own cars late in the evening. They felt safer surrounded by friends in the same vehicle. Elaine, the good person that she was, couldn't make herself refuse a ride to those who asked to be included as passengers. She kept the shiny silver Cadillac neat and clean. The moment you entered it, there was a pleasant odor of leather, the smell of a brand new car.

Elaine was beautiful with eyes big and glowing like two moons on a pitch-dark sky. She was proclaimed an excellent driver by everybody, and also a great hostess who liked to give parties galore. The food on Elaine's table was mouth-watering, and she generously tried to please all of her guests.

Elaine's personality always fascinated me. I thought that she was the happiest person on earth. Then I found out that she lost her 24-year-old daughter to cancer. The daughter's name happened to be Ruth, same as mine. I always thought that my name made her like me. She used to call me Ruthie, and tried to please me more than her other friends.

I had lost my husband in a tragic way not too long before I met Elaine. He died alone from a heart attack in a hotel room all the way in Montreal, Canada, where he was a contractor for a large aircraft company. Both my children and I were proud of my husband's achievements. I was supposed to follow him as soon as he settled in his job. My suitcase was ready, standing in a place in my living room and I was anxious to leave. I missed my husband; he was my soul-mate. My home became an empty nest as both my children were grown up, married, and living in different cities away from New Orleans.

Elaine and I belonged to Hadassah, the largest women's organization in America. Elaine was active in the organization and when she was chosen to be the president of the New Orleans Hadassah Chapter, she selected me to be the vice president of education. My life became busy, writing constantly for the Jewish News and planning many cultural events for Hadassah. All of these activities filled some void left by the loss of my husband.

One of the activities I enjoyed most was the Hadassah book club. We were a group of women who enjoyed reading good literature, meeting monthly in one of the member's homes. Although dinner was pot luck,
the decision was to set the table in an elegant manner by using all of our china, crystal, and silverware. After dinner, we sat and discussed the book. The lady in charge of the book club owned a home that reminded me of a southern plantation. It was always a joy to be in her house.

Sara, an old-timer in the group, went through a terrible period when her husband was jailed for shooting their own son, in their own home, where she remained living all by herself.

“I cannot believe how she can still live in the same house after she witnessed her husband shoot her own son. Once, I even saw some blood stains on the stairs, leading to their bedroom on the second floor of the house,” Elaine confided in me.

“This must have been terrible,” I said. “Why would her husband kill his own child?”

“He must have been a difficult young man, Elaine said. “Sara never spoke about having trouble. No one has asked her for the real reason, and she hasn’t offered any explanation of why the whole mess happened. I guess we will never know the truth.”

Elaine reminded me that she was coming to pick me up on Friday evening, to go to the services at the Touro Synagogue, on St. Charles Avenue.

“Are Shep and Anne coming with us?” I asked.

“Yes, I am picking them up before I get you,” she said.

We departed, and I kept thinking about Shep, Anne’s husband and the only male in the company of four lady friends riding together in Elaine’s Cadillac to different places in the city.

Several years later, living in Bethesda, Maryland, my new home town, I heard that Shep passed away at the age of 89 in New Orleans. That made me think again of the good times we had while in his company. Shep, a holocaust survivor, always told us stories.

I always listened carefully to his tales because I was writing articles in the New Orleans Jewish News. I wanted one day to surprise Shep with an article written about him without interviewing him for that purpose.

Not long before World War II started, Shep was a young man serving in the Polish military. His mother tried to get him out of the military because she was always scared that something terrible would happen and she might lose him. She kept visiting many government offices with all kind of excuses about different hardships in her life which required her son to come back home and help the family. She also kept writing to Shep, saying that she could not wait to have him back home.

In one of our rides in Elaine’s Cadillac, Shep put his hand in his jacket pocket and let us see the letters. Throughout his life, he never left home without having his mother’s letters with him. As I looked at the letters they were tattered and almost frayed by sitting in his pocket for so many years.

“And guess what?” Shep said, “It is because the Polish government wouldn’t let me go home that I survived World War II.”

“How come?” I asked him.

“Well,” Shep said, “at that time in Vilna, the Lithuanians would gather members of the Jewish community and drive them out of town to where they dug an enormous pit in the ground. They would order all of the people to get into the pit and shoot them the same day,” Shep explained.

“In that pit I lost my whole family. Both my parents, my sisters, my brother, my cousins, my uncles and my aunts: a total of 21 of my nearest relatives. When I came back home from the army, there was no one to greet me. I was the only survivor to carry on our story.”

We were all saddened. The people in the Cadillac became quiet. Shep was the spirited one who looked
at us and realized how the impact of the story had changed our moods.

“Well now, this happened a long time ago, since then the world has changed a lot. I immigrated to the United States, I met Anne and we are sharing a great life together. I love America. It’s a great country, the best country in the world,” Shep said.

Elaine was driving all of that time, and we were always safe in her Cadillac.

Fifty Years of Class
by Roberta Schultz Benor

Yesterdays: In High School
We were secure, because our families chose to live in suburbia.
We were educated, because we had caring teachers.
We were spirited, because our school fostered involvement.
We were young, but we thought we knew everything.
We were cool, but we were teenagers, and styles change. We were alert to socio-political events, because the outside world was creeping into our lives.
We were happy to graduate, but we were sorry to leave the cocoon.

Today: In the Fifty Year —
We have spread our wings into the ebb and flow of life.
We have worn the Baby Boomers label proudly.
We have aged, but we feel young inside.
We have scars from battles at home and away.
We have missed those who are no longer with us.

Tomorrow: In the Future —
We will live purposefully as long as we can.
We will be leaving our marks in our closer and wider communities.
We will be comforted in our memories.
We will be united with each other through our pasts.
We are learning every day.
We will continue to learn for a lifetime.
We had classes, and now we have class.

How I Met My Wife
by Steve Boggs
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On a bitter cold December afternoon in 1973, Navy had just routed Army 51-0 in the annual football game at JFK stadium in Philadelphia. All 4,000 men of the Brigade of Midshipmen were in a very celebratory mood. The now infamous Bellevue-Stratford was hosting the postgame festivities for the US Naval Academy with a dance party in the ballroom. All of the rooms in the hotel were rented by groups of Mids. Custom was, each class of the 36 companies in the Brigade rented a separate room as the headquarters for their party. The room we freshmen (“plebes”) from 30th Company, or “Dirty 30” as we were known, had rented was way up on the 14th floor.

The Army-Navy game was the first time during the academic year that plebes were permitted to drink alcohol, and with our unprecedented victory over the Army “Doggies” we were in the mood to let our hair down and party. The plebes that had been enlisted in the Navy or Marine Corps (I was the latter), had gone several months without a drink, and I was on a mission to make up for lost time. The prior enlisted also saw it as our duty to indoctrinate our fellow plebes in the fine art of tying one on. Most of my classmates were fresh out of high school and either nerds, brainiacs, or jocks recruited to play a sport, making all of them pretty much fresh slates for us to write on. We passed the hat and sent a detail to find a State Store and buy as much booze as they could afford and/or carry.

I had a date for the postgame party with a very nice girl I’d met the year before. After the game, I met her and walked her to the hotel to meet my classmates. She wanted to go to the dance instead. So I reluctantly escorted her to the hotel’s ballroom. Once there, I was trying to find any excuse to get back to our room. Fortunately for me, she saw some girls she knew and we joined them at their table. I asked her if she would mind if I left her with them for a while so I could visit with my classmates upstairs? She told me she would be fine with her friends. By this time it was nearly 8:00 p.m. Since the plebes had “Cinderella Liberty” and had to be on the bus back to Annapolis by midnight, time was wasting. When I finally got to our room, the debauchery had already begun and I needed to catch up. So I grabbed the plastic ice bucket, filled it at the ice machine, and made myself a screwdriver using the bucket as my glass—about 6 ounces of vodka with a smidgen of OJ for coloring.

A couple of hours and three screwdrivers later, I remembered my date and thought that it was the proper act of chivalry to check on her. Staggering past the bathroom, I noticed that someone had partially filled the bathtub with beer and one of my classmates was bathing in it. Right outside the door, I almost tripped over another classmate who had passed out. Somehow I made it to the ballroom, but I couldn’t find my date anywhere. She shouldn’t have been hard to spot as she was wearing a bright yellow sweater, one of those fuzzy sweaters young girls wear that make them feel so soft. But I digress. I thought maybe she was looking for me back in the room.

As I walked in the door to our room, I saw my roommate, Boots, another Marine, and asked him if...
he had seen the girl in the yellow sweater with the big chest? I was pretty drunk after all, but not too drunk to notice his expression change as he looked past me. I turned just in time to see the back of the yellow sweater as my date left in a huff. Shrugging and trying to ignore my friends laughing, I moved into the room and noticed a brunette with short hair in a bright red top sitting on a chair against the wall, and a cute brunette with long hair and beautiful brown eyes sitting at the foot of one of the beds. Since the only chair was taken, I sat next to the brown-eyed girl and introduced myself. She told me her name was Rosann and her friend’s name was Beth. We started up a conversation and I found myself really attracted to her.

Beth and Rosann lived in South Jersey just across the river from Philadelphia. Beth’s older brother, Rusty, had graduated from USNA the year before. That year Beth asked if Rusty would find a date for her and Rosann after the game. So Rusty fixed them up on a blind date with two plebes from his company. Unfortunately, the girls found them to be rather dull and decided to go stag to the postgame party the next year and see if they could meet some Mids they liked. They started on the first floor, working their way up, stopping at the occasional interesting looking party. By the time they reached the 14th floor our party was going full tilt. Rosann told me later that the reason she and Beth selected our party was because a couple of my classmates were passed out in the hallway.

When it was time to head for the buses, Rosann walked with me down to the street. I distinctly remember kissing her goodbye. The next day as I was putting away my uniform jacket, I found a scrap of paper in a pocket with a girl’s name and phone number. I asked Boots if he knew anything about it. Laughing he told me, “Don’t you remember? You met a girl last night and invited her to the Christmas Formal dance.”

Since the dance was only a couple of weeks away, I called the number on the paper that night. Rosann sounded glad to hear from me and said that she would like to come to the dance, but her parents wouldn’t let her drive down to Annapolis alone. So I needed to find a date for her friend Beth. Since Boots’ girlfriend was in Alaska at that time, I asked him if he’d be Beth’s escort and he agreed. Friends like him are hard to find.

I reserved a room for the girls at the Hilton on the waterfront in downtown Annapolis. The day of the dance arrived; Boots and I put on our dress uniforms, met our dates at the hotel, and escorted them to the Academy. The Christmas Formal dance was held in
the very ornate Memorial Hall, with several crystal chandeliers as large as a small car and polished inlaid wood floors. A 12-piece Navy band, Mids in their dress uniforms, and their dates in beautiful formal gowns completed the magic. Memorial Hall was a definite home court advantage for the Mids. After a few dances, Rosann and I walked out to the balcony where we could see the full moon shining on the Severn River. We had a nice conversation. I offered to take her sailing sometime and told her I wanted to buy a Porsche when I graduated. She told me years later that she thought I must be rich, and by the time she found out I was actually a country bumpkin from a very small town in southern Indiana, it was too late; she had already fallen in love.

Saturdays at the Windsor
by Otts Lapus
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It wasn’t palatial but it was my escape from hum­drum reality. The Windsor theatre, in the 3100 block of West North Avenue, showed a special feature every Saturday afternoon at one o’clock, and my friends and I would plop down 18 cents for a ticket to Fantasy Land. The Windsor was a B movie house, screening low budget films that were cheaper to make than Hollywood’s first-run productions shown at the hoity-toity Walbrook across the street. The actors in these B films were also B, the production values were C, and the scripts were usually Z, but for two hours I was mesmerized by what happened on that screen.

The first feature was some kind of action/mystery. The Charlie Chan series produced by Monogram, a studio that only made B films, was typical, with Caucasian actor Sidney Toler playing the title role of the Chinese detective. His eyes were pulled to the side and taped to give them that almond appearance. Charlie was orientally profound, citing some adage like, “Man who sits on hands feels no need to raise them.” Now what that meant was anybody’s guess, but I sat there in awe that Charlie could be so perceptive and knew that he could solve any mystery with that verbal agility. And he did!

Zombie and Mummy movies were also big with B studios. One of my favorites was I Walked with a Zombie. The common theme of zombie movies was that they took place on an island in the Caribbean, most scenes were at night, and the villainess had voodoo dolls that she pierced with needles or shrank in some steaming vat of vile, bubbly gunk while chanting weird sounds to weirder music. Scary stuff.

The B films were short, running a little over an hour, in order to provide enough time for the features that followed. Next came a cowboy film with B stars like Charles Starrett, Johnny Mack Brown, and Don “Red” Barry. The titles themselves implied action and adventure: The Riders of the Whistling Skull and Stagecoach Buckaroo. B Westerns had the usual de rigueur scenes—stagecoach hold-ups, saloon brawls, and the rescues of damsels in distress who were pretty schoolmarmes (parasols, bonnets, and gloves a must) from the east. Sometimes the stars were singing cowboys, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, or Jimmy Wakely. Boo on them. They were always singing and talking to girls when they should have been riding, fighting and shooting. All that other stuff was sissy. C’mom guys, real cowboys never sing to girls!
Next came the cartoon, usually a Bugs Bunny or Tweety Bird and Sylvester the Cat. It was time to laugh and laugh we did, especially after seeing that zombie movie! Looking back, it was amazing to see how much violence was in those Looney Tunes Merrie Melodies.

But then came the feature that was destined to get the audience to return week after week, the serial! Serials, chapter plays as they were sometimes called, were 12 or 15 in number and usually featured comic book heroes Batman, Mr. America, and the Green Hornet. For some unknown reason they were masked. Each chapter ended with a “cliff hanger”: the hero driving over a precipice, tied to a chair in a burning building, or stranded in a pool of water about to drown while a ticking time bomb was about to explode. One of my favorite serials, in keeping with the zombie fad, was Zombies of the Stratosphere, featuring zombie aliens from outer space who strangely enough spoke English. They learned it on Mars I guess. The hero had some kind of motorized jet back pack that allowed him to fly and chase the zombies. I distinctly remember that this marvelous machine had three controls: On-Off, Up-Down, and Slow-Fast. The hero constantly adjusted them while flying about. Sort of like operating a blender.

The Windsor is long gone, but the memories linger and are indelibly etched in my mind. I would gladly spend a few bucks just to hear the narrator at the end of a serial chapter chime in ominously with “Will the Masked Marvel free himself from the bonds he’s been shackled with by his arch nemesis Blackie O’Toole? Will the secret code of Baron Von Bortz be broken in time to save Carol on her doomed journey to the Egyptian pyramids in search of the secret hiding place of the stolen mystery thorax bomb with the tele-proton fuse invented by her father, the missing Professor Blake? Return next week to see Chapter Six of The Masked Marvel and the Nazi Zombies From Outer Space!”

You bet your life I returned next week to see Chapter Six.

The Baseball
by Phil Hochberg
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I keep it in my office and always show it to visitors. It’s a Hall of Fame baseball, autographed by 38 Hall of Famers—most of whom are now playing in the Celestial League—including, among others, Jackie Robinson, Joe DiMaggio, Casey Stengel, Hank Greenberg, Carl Hubbell, Satchel Paige, Ted Williams, Mickey Mantle, Harmon Killebrew, Yogi, and 28 others. The oldest—Stengel—started playing in 1912; the youngest—Ozzie Smith—stopped playing in 1996.

As the Stadium Announcer for the Washington Senators in the ’60s, I had gotten to know Bob Addie, the Washington Post baseball writer, and volunteered to help him distribute Press credentials to the 1969 All Star Game and the Centennial of Baseball celebration here in Washington. Bob asked in return if I wanted to go to the cocktail party preceding the big Centennial dinner that night. I had the foresight to bring a baseball to the party and walked around getting autographs. Augie Donatelli, a National League umpire, saw that I was a little shell-shocked at the personalities and took me under his wing, saying,
“There’s Joe Medwick,” “That’s Sam Rice,” “Ask Bill Dickey to sign,” etc.

None of the great stars would sign on the “sweet spot”—the pre-eminent signature place on the ball—all deferring to the other greats there, until I got to Jackie Robinson, who, without a moment’s hesitation, signed on the sweet spot. I always said, Jackie Robinson knew his place in the game. The ball’s been appraised at $4500, but in an anomaly of collecting, a “single signed” Robinson ball—minus 37 other Hall of Framers—is worth $9000.

A Great Life
by Cynthia Hough

If you were to ask what makes life great, I would have to respond, the individual’s “perception” of it. Perception is everything. What the thinker thinks is so powerful, it actually effects the life being lived. For example: two people get up and go to work at the same company on the same day. They both drive the same route, park in the same lot and eat in the same company cafeteria. At the end of the day, one arrives home tired, bored, and uninspired. The other, while somewhat tired, is also still alert for a change of pace, a pleasant meal, some neighborly conversation and an evening devoted to personal pursuits. Clearly, the first person perceives his day as mundane, the other, pleasant.

So how does that make life great, you ask?

Well, the first person played by all the rules, did what was expected, and saw his life as OK, if uninspiring; and so it was. The second person played by all the rules, did what was expected, and saw himself in charge of his own viewpoint. He believed the world existed for the pleasure of those who took note of experiences, and that he should enjoy all he could, no matter how simply, every, single, day.

Over their lifetimes, neither man made a great deal of money, traveled far and wide, nor was ever recognized for any special achievement. Nevertheless, after a lifetime, these men, who were also brothers, unexpectedly passed away on the same night.

At their small funeral it was heard stated that the second man was really a “lucky guy.”

Lucky, they said, because he had lived such a happy life. He relished his first cup of coffee at sunup, and looked forward to his after dinner walk every evening. He took time on his way to work to notice the changing seasons, the birdsong and the people he met each day. He even occasionally tried driving different routes to work; and instead of becoming angry, he laughed loudly at the antics of those drivers in a big hurry. He chose to be interested in, and learn about everything of which he was ignorant that came his way—and, admittedly, there was much.

These brothers were emigres to this country, only moderately educated, hardworking and decent. One led an ordinary life, but the other a great one—all because of his perspective. If there is a moral to this story, it is not that either brother actually had much in life. Most of us have enjoyed richer, more exciting experiences in our lifetimes.

The simple truth is that anyone can have a great life; by taking what you already have and cherishing it, by naming it “the best” on a daily basis, and in the silent moments of your day, naming and declaring enjoyment of those small experiences that are already yours. After a while, little by little, your deliberate choosing of such a
happy perspective makes your life exactly that. And for you, life is great!

Cynthia Hough, November 2005

PS–I’ve suddenly realized that this perspective was a gift from my mother. More than 39 years ago as we sat in my kitchen commiserating the abrupt loss of my young husband, she poured fresh cups of coffee for us.

Mom asked me to be quiet and listen, then, to smell the coffee while stirring in the cream and sugar. As we took our first sip together, outside my window a blue-jay landed on the shrub and chirped a little note. She looked quietly at me, and we both smiled … a-h-h-h ...

Thanks, Mom!

A Visit to Belfast, Northern Ireland (NI)

By Arthur K. Yellin

My wife and I had the chance to visit Belfast this past July. There are many things I could write about Belfast; about the AWESOME, friendly people, about the wonderful fish I ate there, about the Titanic Museum (the infamous ship was built in Belfast), but … no:

One experience in Belfast left such an enormous, weighty, impression on me that my memory of the visit is consumed by the “Black Cab” tour that we took. While I believe “Black cab” is actually a brand of autos used for decades as taxis, the term has become synonymous with a tour of the Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods that, until fairly recently, were the sites of the period euphemistically called “The Troubles.” This term describes the long-running internecine war between Irish Catholics and Protestants.

For anyone unfamiliar with the history of “The Troubles,” here is a brief and over-simplified synopsis: back a few hundred years, King Henry VIII wanted to divorce his wife. The pope said “no.” Henry said, ok, I’ll start my own religion and then get a divorce. Some of his subjects converted, some remained Catholic. Fast forward to 1906; some Irish folks wanted independence from England, some did not. There was a war for independence resulting in TWO Irelands: the Republic of Ireland, an independent and self-governing nation, and Northern Ireland, part of “The United Kingdom” (UK). The Republic is predominantly Catholic, NI is more a mix of Catholic and Protestant. In NI, the Catholics wanted independence from Great Britain and the Protestants wanted to remain part (Great Britain + NI = United Kingdom). This led to “the troubles” with England stepping in with their usual delicacy dealing with colonies.

We were told that the Black Cab tour guides were carefully selected, especially for lack of (obvious?) bias as well as historical knowledge of the period. Our driver/tour guide was both. Eventually, we learned that he is Protestant Irish, but there was no way to discern this from his presentation.

We first drove through a Protestant neighborhood. Almost all homes were festooned with the Union Jack, symbol of the UK. There were numerous billboards and murals paying tribute to those who fought and died to remain part of the UK, including many British soldiers. We drove along the “peace wall” and stopped to add our words of wisdom with a marker supplied by our tour guide. Many notables have done this including President Clinton and the Dali Lama. The wall separates the Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods.
The tour guide then drove through gates in the “peace wall,” that are STILL closed at night even though there is a long standing truce, into the adjacent Catholic neighborhood. We observed an enormous change. The Union Jacks were GONE. There were still lots of billboards and murals, but now they celebrated the MARTYRS who fought against the aggressors and imperial occupiers (the British).”

We stopped at one very public shrine to these “martyrs” that included a plainly worded statement that continues to weigh heavy on my heart. Partial paraphrasing and emphasis added, “there will be NO peace until we have independence from the British.” How very, very sad for such warm and wonderful people. While The Troubles are regarded to have ended with a truce signed on Good Friday, April 10th 1998, with a very public statement like the one I saw, I have doubts. Although the bright light of hope does shine through the gloom in the fact that the Sinn Féin, former guerilla arm of those wanting independence from Great Britain, is now very active as a political party, currently holding four ministerial posts and having many members of Parliament.

Early Couples Therapy
by Charles E. Sternheim
cstern@umd.edu

It’s not my fault He took out your rib.
So you’re lopsided. Deal with it.

I gave you the apple.
Did I make you eat it?

Don’t blame me if you’re losing your leaves.
Think belt, for goodness sake.

Even our sons know you’re wonky.
Do you know what it means to live with wonkiness?

Is this what you want?
Is this what you want to teach our children?

What will the neighbors think … when we have neighbors?

Sit down! Where are you going?
Summer Courses at Osher at JHU
Below is a sampling of courses available this summer. Please visit www.osher.jhu.edu to view additional offerings.

ART ESCAPADES:
The best way to view art is in person: getting in front of a painting to see the actual texture of the paint, moving around a sculpture to view it from every angle, or watching as art is created in a studio. This class offers weekly lectures in Columbia and at MCC, followed by trips that bring you up close and personal with famous artworks and brand new art!

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COLUMBIA
A Closer Look at Public Art
Instructor Ann Wiker discusses Baltimore’s thriving public mural program, Philadelphia’s outdoor sculptures and DC’s plethora of contemporary public artworks. Public art is art in any media that has been planned, executed, and staged in the physical public domain, usually outside and accessible to all. This course will explore the many forms of public art: sculpture, murals, stained glass, ceramics, tapestry, etc. We will also discuss how public art is funded, planned, and installed and view famous and lesser known examples of public art.

Dates: July 25–July 28, Monday through Friday.
Time: 10:00 a.m.–12 noon

MONTGOMERY COUNTY CAMPUS
Opera
This course is taught by Osher at JHU member Bruce Herzfeld and is intended to provide enhanced appreciation of selected operas for both the novice and experienced operagoer. The operas Nabucco Luisa Miller and MacBeth Rigoletto will be presented in their entirety on DVD.

Discussion of background and context along with some ongoing commentary on the operas will be included. Emphasis will be placed on focused listening as a means to better enjoy and experience opera. Time permitting, excerpts of CDs will be presented.

Time: 10 a.m.–12 noon
OSHER at JHU Journal

The 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 linda@middlestadt.net, or by hard copy to the above address.

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