116th United States Congress: Women Come into Their Own as Never Before

Eleanor Clift

Eleanor.Clift@thedailybeast.com

The dramatic increase in the number of women running and winning in the November 2018 midterm election revived my faith in the power of the ballot box. If people show up to vote, change can happen. This watershed moment for women was a long time coming. Next year marks the 100th anniversary of suffrage, an occasion to reflect on how we got here, and to celebrate the 102 women in the House and 24 female senators that together are almost a quarter of Congress.

The 19th amendment granting women the vote in 1920 did not immediately translate into women running for political office. There were pioneers of course like Jeannette Rankin, first elected to the House in 1916, elected again in 1940, and Shirley Chisholm, who ran for president in 1972, the first black woman to seek the Democratic nomination.

But when I came to Washington in December of 1976, fresh off the campaign trail covering Jimmy Carter, there were no women senators, and the handful of women who had previously served were widows serving out the remainder of their late husband’s term. In that same tradition, in 1978, Muriel Humphrey was named to fill out the senate term of her deceased husband, former vice president Hubert Humphrey.
Humphrey was soon joined by Nancy Landon Kassebaum, the daughter of Alf Landon, the 1936 GOP presidential candidate. Kassebaum was political royalty, and she capitalized on her family name to become the first woman ever elected to the US Senate without her husband having previously served in Congress. A liberal Republican, Kassebaum served until 1997.

Change happens slowly, and then it happens all of a sudden, which is what we saw with the 2018 election. The number of women winning races in all parts of the country helped give Democrats the margin needed to take control of the House and once again install Nancy Pelosi as Speaker, the first woman to reach that formerly male-only perch of power.

Whatever reservations Democrats might have had about Pelosi holding the gavel for a second time were put to rest in that oval office meeting when she stood up to President Trump “mansplaining” to her about government shutdown politics, and got him to own the “Trump shutdown.” Wielding power in Washington is not for neophytes.

When Pelosi won a special election in 1987 for her California seat, she was one of 23 women in the House. She served 14 years, or seven terms, before becoming a member of the House Democratic leadership. That same year, 1987, Barbara Mikulski won a senate seat in Maryland, the first Democratic woman elected to the senate in her own right. She liked to say that no man had to die for her to get her seat. She served 30 years before retiring.

Emily’s List (Early Money Is Like Yeast; it makes the dough rise) helped make Mikulski’s election possible by bundling contributions, mainly from women, for pro-choice women candidates. It has been a mainstay on the Democratic side, recruiting and training candidates and supporting them financially.

In 1992, a backlash sparked by the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings produced the “year of the woman.” Four Democratic women won senate seats—Patty Murray in Washington state who ran as “the mom in tennis shoes,” Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer from California, and Carol Mosely Braun from Illinois, the first black woman elected to the senate.

A record number of women was also elected to the House, prompting a disgruntled congressman to complain there were so many women running around, “the place looks like a shopping mall.”

A quarter century after that political earthquake, the ground shook again, this time in response to the unlikely election of Donald Trump.
Women marched the day after his inauguration in January 2017 in the greatest display of spontaneous resistance that the nation’s capital had ever seen, and over the following months translated that resistance into voter engagement and activism.

The result was a turnout of significant proportions to return the House to Democratic hands with a freshman class that looks like America with more women, more young people, and more people of color. There will be growing pains as impatient new members adjust to the snail-like pace of Congress, its arcane rules and rituals, and the stranglehold of seniority.

Thanks to social media, there have already been a handful of breakout stars. The self-named “Fabulous Four” features AOC (Alexandria Octavio-Cortez), who drives the Republicans crazy with her command of today’s media, her engaging smile, and her ability to get people talking about a “green new deal” or Medicare for all or raising marginal tax rates on the wealthiest Americans.

Filling out the foursome: Ayanna Pressley, the first black woman elected from Massachusetts, Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, who ran on impeaching Trump and gained early notoriety for using an expletive to describe the president, and Ilhan Omar, the first Somali-American elected to Congress.

Not that any of their ideas will be implemented anytime soon, but the Democrats have to start showing the country what they would do if they capture the White House in 2020. Democrats gained back the House because they talked about health care and voting rights and public corruption, not because they talked about Trump. Resisting Trump is a given.

This year’s freshmen class of Democrats is the most educated and the least politically experienced. There are people with military and intelligence backgrounds, social activists like AOC, people who align with the Progressive Caucus, and others that line up with the New Democrats and Blue Dogs, which represent the more moderate faction of the party.

Policy differences will emerge, but for now, the central focus has to be on defeating Trump in 2020. Four women will chair House committees for the first time in history, and on the senate side, four of the 17 Democratic women senators are running for president or are expected to enter the race: Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, Kirsten Gillebrand of New York, Kamala Harris of California, and Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota.

This is serious girl power competing for the presidency. The experts will tell you that having several women in the race makes it harder to denigrate a single candidate based on gender when she’s not the only woman in contention.

On the Democratic side, women have come into their own as never before. 2018 was truly a banner year. On the Republican side, it’s a very different story. Elise Stefanik, who represents an upstate New York district, was first elected in 2014 at age 30, which made her the youngest member of Congress at the time. She is now one of just 13 Republican women in the House, the lowest number in a quarter century.

There is only one Republican woman in this year’s freshmen class, Carol Miller of West Virginia. Republicans have never had more than 25 women in the House, a record that was set in 2006. By contrast, Democrats elected 89 women to the House in this cycle.

Rep. Stefanik has called on the NRCC (National Republican Congressional Committee) to “officially assess the reasons behind our party’s historic losses and to develop recommendations for implementation moving forward.”

It shouldn’t be hard to figure out why women feel more at home in the Democratic Party. Trump has a lot to do with it, his coarseness, his refusal to address gun violence or climate change, and his policies like separating families at the southern border.

Trump won the electoral college in 2016 by scaling the blue wall in the once reliably Democratic states of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. The 2018 election has
the potential to reverse those GOP gains. There are four women in the Pennsylvania House delegation now where there were none before. A woman, Gretchen Whitmer, was elected Governor of Michigan on the slogan, “Fix the Damn Roads.” And women turning out in greater numbers helped end Minnesota Governor Scott Walker’s bid for a third term. The founding sisters that made the 19th amendment possible set this in motion a hundred years ago not knowing how long it would take, but knowing that women would eventually find their voice and their place in public life.

Serendipity
Barbara Orbock
orbockbd@verizon.net

I am not particularly sentimental and my husband is definitely not a romantic. Over 61 years we have had our moments—shared adventures, special times and favorite places that evoke in both of us memories that touch the heartstrings. Yet, during this time many of our pursuits, endeavors, and travels have been undertaken without the presence of the other. That is why what happened in May of 1993 remains an enigma.

Dave was spending a month as an exchange artist from Maryland to her sister province of Anhui in China. When his exhibits and lectures were over, he traveled to other parts of the country with a Chinese friend from NASA. During this time, I heard from him only once because phone service was very erratic and he was often in places where it was totally nonexistent. You see, his accommodations were not the usual tourist hotels, but the homes of villagers or inns for traveling overseas Chinese. There was little chance of finding a phone in places where his bath was heated with boiling water brought to the room in thermos bottles.

I was teaching at the time and could not accompany him. My job, competitive tennis, and an occasional visiting grandson filled my days, and it was only at night when half the bed was empty that missing Dave became acute.

Then one day toward the end of his journey, I was driving to work. The talk on NPR was getting boring so I switched to classical music. A piece I was not familiar with had just started. A solo violin was being played and mesmerized me. I found a safe place to pull over and just listened. The piece was so lovely that tears filled my eyes and fell onto my lap. When it was over the announcer said the name of the piece was The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto and could be purchased at An Die Musik.

The next day I tried to purchase it, but was told the store was sold out – actually they had received only three copies. They expected more in two weeks.

Two days later Dave came home, full of tales, film to be developed, and lovely souvenirs. The last thing he pulled out of his suitcase was a small flat object in a brown paper bag. It was a CD—The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto. He had heard it as he passed a music store in Guangzhou. He went inside to hear it more clearly and suddenly missed me. When we compared notes, and
calculated the time difference we were astonished to learn that we had heard the music on the same day at almost the same time.

How to explain this occurrence? My scientist husband chalks it up to the law of probability, though he does admit the odds are miniscule. I know better—that day the gods looked on us with favor and sent a message of love across the universe. No Cupid’s bow was needed, just a beautiful violin concerto.

The Spaghetti Dinner
James C. Strouse
sstousejc@aol.com

It is a dark and foreboding night—not really—it’s generally pretty nice the night we meet, usually the Tuesday before Thanksgiving each year.

So here we are, all sitting around the table, gorging ourselves with spaghetti and saying nice things about our mother. First, we eat spaghetti, salad, beef bones, with a special secret sauce made by my sister Rosalie. I bring Texas toast, Charles brings the salad, and Doug the dessert. Once we were stuffed with spaghetti, we would start our conversation.

We are five siblings, and we get along quite nicely. We call each other on birthdays and holidays and send cards as well. We get together on Thanksgiving and sometimes Passover, when I can get my wife to do the event. All of us have been married for a long time, with me holding the record at 51 years. All of us have had our personal struggles, but we came through as loving spouses, good parents, and devoted siblings.

The purpose of the spaghetti dinner (we ate spaghetti many days during our upbringing) is to get together without spouses to remember our mother who passed away about 12 years ago. We all reminisce about her and what she meant to us.

My mother was one of eight children. She grew up in Brooklyn, NY, daughter of a Russian Jewish mother and an Italian Catholic father. She was a little person, four foot, 11 inches, with a strong personality who would discipline us with “the silent treatment” if we got out of line. She divorced our Father after 25 years of a difficult relationship. Mom was our rock and stayed the course after he effectively abandoned us when I was in my late teens. I get a lot of praise for helping to buy our house when we were about to be evicted for non-payment of rent.

Later, Mom went back to school and became a typist/receptionist at the University of Maryland Hospital in Baltimore. She worked there until she was 65 years old, when she retired. Even in our toughest economic days, Mom would often boast that someday she would travel the world. It seemed absurd when she said that since she barely made enough to pay the bills even with my help. But it became the truth as her second husband, Joe Lederman, was clever with travel and booked cruises and European holidays every year. When they first got married, they spent each January and February
in Hawaii for several years. Joe was about five foot, three inches. He and Mom loved to ballroom dance. On cruise ships, they would dance the night away.

As we reminisced about Mom and Joe during our spaghetti dinners, Charles would say the same thing many times. Mom, he said, would ask him, “why can’t you be a good student like your brother, Jim, and do well in your studies?” He would answer, “Mom, I’m the athlete in the family and I can’t do both.”

Doug would call her each day and yell “Houtheheath!” into the phone. My mother would tell him to stop. He missed her rubbing his feet when he came to the house. Mom would often make spaghetti dinners for us and our friends. She did this for the grandchildren as well until she was about 85 and she had trouble seeing.

I would comment that my job was taking her to Weight Watchers each Saturday, and then to lunch at the Double T Diner in Catonsville. She would always ask the clerk what my weight was, but the clerk wouldn’t tell her. I would always say that I lost weight. She would lean over the counter, even though she couldn’t see very well at the time.

Gale would mention that my mother never came to her softball games but always attended Doug and Charles’s baseball games. Mother had apologized to her. Gale was close with Mother and was an attentive daughter. Gale was a good athlete but was mostly praised because she was and is very pretty.

Rosalie would make several comments about Mother’s dancing and traveling. She seems to follow in Mother’s footsteps.

Then after about an hour of eating and an hour of talking, the dinner would end, and we would all return to our spouses. Filled with tasty food and warm memories, we would bundle up—just as Mom had taught us—and stroll happily into the night.

**Failed Dreams**

Ruth Hananel

rhananel@yahoo.com

We arrived in Chicago because of my husband’s new job. We began a new adventure and found a splendid apartment in a large condominium building called “The 400 East Randolph,” overlooking the great Lake Michigan, the awesome Grant Park, and the famous Chicago Loop. Everything sparkles under the Chicago sun and makes you want to live forever.

In the 1980s you could find articles about AIDS in the Chicago Tribune, depicting the epidemic and the many fatalities the disease caused. This was kind of scary and people felt sorry about everything that was going on during that vulnerable time, creating a gloomy atmosphere all over.

In one of the buildings on Michigan Avenue, I found a beauty shop operated by Alberto Gonzales, an excellent hairdresser. The building was quite old and had a quaint elevator. The door of the elevator was built of old iron, and the people riding in it could be seen by everybody on each floor. There was a tall stool where the elevator man sat and usually he’d open and close the door each time. He asked the number of the floor we needed and pushed the buttons for us.

I usually visited Alberto Gonzales’s beauty shop once a week. I’d never had such a good hairdresser who was also a nice person. Alberto once told me that he had worked as a hairdresser for 20 years at Carson Pirie Scott, the big Chicago department store. He was saving money to one day open his own beauty shop. His dream came true just a year before I arrived in Chicago. He didn’t hide the fact that he was gay, and there was a time...
that his companion came to visit him, and he introduced him to me and to some of his other clients as their hair dried under the hair dryers.

Six months passed, and I received a post card saying that Alberto was sick and that the beauty shop would be closed until his recovery. I was disappointed to have to change hairdressers, but hoped it wouldn't be for a long time. Indeed, three months passed when I received another post card saying that Alberto had recovered from his sickness, and I was welcome to come back to his shop. I was happy for him and for myself to have Alberto fix my hair again, as no one else did the job better than he.

On my way to my appointment I visited a florist where I bought flowers for Alberto. When I arrived at the beauty shop I couldn't believe my eyes, Alberto looked frail and vulnerable. He was limping and walking with the support of a cane. Gone was the healthy and energetic Alberto I knew. He was crying and gathering his belongings from the place.

When he saw me come in he said, “The owner of the building asked me to vacate the business immediately as he couldn't rent the place to gays. Can you imagine a thing like that?”

“This sounds terrible. I cannot believe it. He cannot do a thing like that!” I said.

“Oh yes, he can. It is his building and he doesn't give a damn that I sent plenty of money every month to Mexico to support my family either.”

“You can try to find another place. You shouldn't give up,” I said.

I was devastated to see Alberto's dream crushed and taken away from him. I felt helpless to see my friend in such a terrible situation and that nothing could be done about it. I asked Alberto if he needed my help.

“No, but thanks for offering. My companion will be here on time to take me home,” he said.

“Alberto, please promise to let me know as soon as you find a new place. You are the best hairdresser I ever had. I am sure that all of your clients will come back to you,” I said. The time was running and Alberto was in a hurry to gather all his belongings. I had to leave the place.

“Goodbye, Alberto, I wish you well,” I said, and left.

Being in a bad mood I didn't want to take the bus to bring me back home. I decided to walk the several long blocks all by myself to vent out my thoughts about Alberto's misfortune. The sun was still shining and the city still appeared beautiful. I saw many people walking the sidewalks on both sides of the street. They didn't seem to care as they had no idea about the nightmare that was happening to my friend. I also passed by my favorite bakery where they sold all kind of different freshly sliced breads and some of the favorite pastries my husband and son liked. The smell of fresh bread was irresistible. I decided to go in and buy some croissants. People in Chicago love croissants more so than in any other places we have lived before.

Not far away from the bakery, there was a fruit and vegetable stall where I bought fresh strawberries. I proceeded to walk home with two brown bags loaded with delicious food. Just before entering the 400 East Randolph building, I came across a lady whom I had befriended one day at the swimming pool. I didn't know that she was David's mother. David was a 10-year-old boy and a good friend of my son. I was so happy to meet his mother as I liked David very much.

Esmeralda was from Costa Rica. The moment she saw me coming, I felt that she wanted to talk to me. Since I was kind of tired from the whole day I asked her to follow me to my apartment so we could talk there. Sitting at the dining table and drinking coffee we engaged in a friendly conversation. Esmeralda’s eyes became moist and she looked very sad. I couldn’t stop her from talking and describing how her husband had left her for another woman. I was dumbfounded. How in the world did that happen in a marriage of 15 years?
“She is a medical doctor,” Esmeralda said. “She fell in love with my husband and took him away from me. He is fascinated by the fact that an American woman and also a medical doctor had fallen for him. He is leaving me just like that. I tried to persuade him that the thing he is doing is crazy and that he should reconsider his decision, all to no avail. It is over, he left me!” Esmeralda said.

“Is he going to continue paying the rent for your apartment?” I asked Esmeralda knowing that she didn’t have a job.

“He said that he will, but of course I don’t know for how long. He spoke to David and told him that nothing has changed as far as his feelings for him. David is a very young boy. As of now, I don’t think that he can grasp the consequences of the split. David loves both of us very much, and doesn’t seem to understand what is happening.”

“I do feel sorry for you and for David,” I said. “You are still a young and beautiful woman. The first thing that you should do is to try to find a job which will make you financially more secure and give you an opportunity to meet new people. What I am trying to say is that you have to create for yourself a new life by becoming more independent,” I said.

“There is something that I can do again. I used to sell jewelry from home, and I was successful. I will try to do that again,” she said.

“Excellent idea,” I said, trying to encourage her.

It was getting late in the afternoon, and my husband was about to come home from his office. I had to be honest and polite telling Esmeralda that I had to start getting busy in the kitchen preparing dinner for my family. She was bright and considerate. Esmeralda stood up from her chair and said that she had to go home and prepare dinner for David. We departed with a friendly hug.

“Thanks for talking with me. I feel better that I had someone to talk to. Thank you again,” she said and left my apartment.

The next time I saw Esmeralda she looked different. She didn’t look happy. There was something that she wanted to tell me. I already felt that she needed to talk to me the same as the first time. We sat at a table for two next to the pool, and she started whispering.

“You don’t know what happened last night. My husband came to visit me and David. He said that he forgot something at home. We were about to have dinner so I asked him to join us. It so happened that I cooked one of his favorite foods. You should have seen that. We looked again like a family like before, as if nothing happened. David was so happy. It didn’t look like my husband was ready to leave in a hurry. It was late and David was getting sleepy. I asked him to go to bed. My husband was not about to leave. He wanted to stay. It was obvious that he missed me. One thing led to another and we spent the night together in the same bed we had slept in for the 15 years of our marriage. In the morning he asked me to swear not to tell anybody that he spent the night with me.”

“And what did you say?” I asked Esmeralda.

“Okay, I won’t talk about it.”

“Just like that?”

“Yes just like that, I still love him!” Esmeralda said.

“Do you think he will come back to you?”

“No,” she said. “I think he will stay with her.”

“How is your business going?” I asked. “Are people buying jewelry from you?”

“Oh yes” she said.” It is going fine. I am going to make it, and once I do, I will never want to see him again.”

I was sad for both Alberto and Esmeralda. Two people with failed dreams. Alberto had his companion to lean on. However, Esmeralda became suddenly a single mother to her son, and David was left a young boy, soon to become the only man in the house.

My encounter with Alberto and Esmeralda, made me realize how happy my life was. My husband was an accomplished intelligent man,
loving and loyal to me and both our kids. Our 17-year-old daughter was already a college student at Brandeis University in Boston, and my 10-year-old son was showing an excellent talent for playing the piano. I started teaching Hebrew in one of the Hebrew day schools in a suburb not far from the city. We joined Temple Shalom on Lake Shore Drive, and started having friends who invited us to their homes. And yet, I constantly had in the back of my mind thoughts about Alberto and Esmeralda who were not as fortunate as me.

We called him “Teddy,” not a very creative name. They were commonly called “Teddy Bears,” named, I seem to recall, after Theodore Roosevelt.

It’s strange to unearth how it just “felt so good” to hold him. He hung around until I did not even notice him. Until a few years later where he was calmly resting in a closet. Just gave him a hug and put him back.

A few months ago, a new grandchild arrived. She’s a tiny little girl, named after my dear wife, Louise.

I held her in my arms and Teddy knocked on the door. So I held her in one arm and his ghost in the other.

Love them both, so much.

That’s about it.
I ain’t felt his pulse yet.” Etc. etc.—a sickening scene.

Sirens were arriving from all over. Soon, the area was filled with police. Then I saw the killer sitting handcuffed in the back seat of a police car. I approached a police officer and said that I was a few feet away from the shooting and that I could identify the killer. He said, “Get the hell out of here.” I approached about five or six cops, saying the same thing to each cop and being told by each one to get lost.

By now there was a big crowd of onlookers, and I joined the crowd. I told a Kresge store guard standing next to me that all the cops chased me away. He said, “Hey, Joe,” calling a sergeant over, one of the cops who had chased me away. “Don’t you know that you get 50 points for locating a witness to a first degree?”

Exclaiming, “50 points,” the sergeant grabbed me and pushed me against a wall. “Don’t go anywhere. You’re a witness to a first degree.” The sergeant stood next to me.

Then I saw the guy with the snub-nosed revolver in the crowd. I tried to point him out as a co-conspirator. But I started shaking so badly I couldn’t raise my right arm to point. I used my left arm to raise my right arm to point (crazy as this sounds). Then the sergeant explained that the man with the snub-nosed revolver was an off-duty cop who chased the killer down the alley and arrested him. The killer had thrown his weapon into a trash can as he ran.

A black guy in a wild yellow outfit came up to the sergeant, stood right in front of him and yelled, “You’re a m----- f-----, You’re a godd----- m-- --- f-----.”

I asked, “Why are you calling this cop names? He hasn’t done anything to you.”

He replied, “Those cops all chased Sam Smith down the alley and left Mel Jackson to die on the pavement.” (actual names not recalled)

I asked, “You know those guys?”

“Yah, it was an old grudge.”

The sergeant harshly told him to get lost. I told the sergeant that the fellow he had chased away had been waiting for the bus on that corner when the killing occurred and would have seen everything, knew the killer and his victim, and even knew the motive. The sergeant made no response.

Two reporters came up to the sergeant and asked what happened. He told them to get lost. I began to talk to them, figuring that if the sergeant didn’t want to tell them anything, I would. Then the sergeant grabbed my arm, bent it behind my back, threw me against the wall, and told me to shut up.

The dead man had been carrying a briefcase. It turned out to be filled with jewels. The killer hadn’t taken the briefcase. The kids fighting over the right to feel the dead man’s lack of a pulse apparently hadn’t noticed it, missing out on riches.

Then the sergeant took me to headquarters to be interviewed by a detective. I had not identified myself as an Assistant US Attorney to the police on scene because I had wanted to see how the police handled
themselves. I asked the detective why the police on scene didn’t want to take a statement from me. He explained that, “Ever since the ’68 riot, one black guy kills another, we don’t give a damn.”

Then the arresting officer entered the room, very excited about having caught a killer red handed. You’d think he had just won the lottery.

The whole episode seemed surreal. For six months I couldn’t get the picture of the dying man out of my mind. A terrible experience. Years later, I watched, from a few feet away, a man shoot his wife four times in the chest and head, and it took another six months to get over that. Good thing I never had to fight in a war.

I suppose we all have, in some corner of our memories, a favorite automobile, one that seems, in the softening haze of recollection, to combine all of the qualities we ever wanted in a car. Back with a sentimental portrait of my car of cars in a minute (the sponsor then jumped in)… It was a 1948 Studebaker and it had 25,000 miles on it before I ever saw it. But it was love at first sight just the same. It was called, I believe, a Starlight Coupe, and the original owner had gone all out. It had a radio, carpet on the floor, and a little knob inside the car that ran the aerial up and down. It also had overdrive, which must have accounted in part for the car’s astonishing durability.

More of that later. In 1950, when we bought it, it still looked more modern than the latest models: indeed, it would not look out of place today in a new car showroom. It was built very low to the ground, and with its rear windows, which ran almost completely around the car, it was sometimes hard to tell the front from the back, and here too, it was like cars built more than 20 years later. I drove that car past the 100,000 mark and never had to be towed to a garage. I never once had the engine head removed, and it was only in the last months of its stay with us that I had to add oil between changes. On the road it got at least 25 miles to the gallon, even though we loaded it unmercifully, and the overdrive not only saved the engine but virtually eliminated engine noise once over 35 miles an hour. With its low center of gravity, it was a joy to drive, and the spring was firm but not too firm, so that we often drove all night with our two small kids in a kind of double decker I built in the back seat. That car took us up and down the eastern seaboard, and when I took a teaching exchange in England, my British counterpart drove it to California and back, and he fell in love with it too. The tires never wore unevenly, and I got at least 50,000 on a set. I never had any brake or transmission work done. Indeed, the only money I ever spent, short of routine maintenance, was on a new clutch. But at last the day of reckoning came, not because of the car, but because our third child was on the way, and the car became the vehicle of my brother, who enjoyed it a few more years.

Note: In the 1970s and 80s Jerry Downs gave a two-minute spiel on WBAL five days a week. This is the text of one, on a spectacular car he and Betty owned early in their family life.

1948 Studebaker Starlight Coupe
Jerry Downs
jennifer@jenniferdowns.com

Meat Loaf, Mashed Potatoes, and Succotash
Otts Laupus
art4lee2@verizon.net

Some years ago, when I read about a fire at Mt. Washington Tavern and saw the mention of the former owner, Ed Sparwasser, it jostled memories lodged somewhere
in the nether regions of my brain. In the 1960s and '70s, I was a teacher in the Baltimore City Schools assigned to the Department of Radio and Television, housed in an old public library building on Smith Avenue and Greeley Road in the heart of Mt. Washington. At noon a fellow teacher and I would eat lunch at Sparwasser’s Tavern as it was called then and order the “daily special.”

The inside of Sparwasser’s was typical of any neighborhood bar of the time. It had a pool table with the local cronies sizing up shots, a 25-cent claw machine containing kitsch of the day—mood rings and plastic figurines that resembled Hummel dolls—and a Pabst wall clock no longer working. Of course, there was a bar in the center that still had spittoons beneath the railing, close to being a clone of another neighborhood bar I frequented, Al Keltz’s Elite Tavern on York Road.

And then there was old Ed Sparwasser himself, balding and overweight, wearing an apron that obviously had not been washed since the Great Depression. I still remember specific stains, ones that obviously preceded our first encounter with Ed, along with ones that ensued.

Ed was a staunch adherent to form and ritual. He didn’t greet us with “hello.” When we entered, Ed was wiping down the bar with a rag that obviously served the multi-purpose of cleaning counter tops, washing cars, and wiping off dipsticks. Without looking up he would say, “Meat loaf, mashed potatoes, and green beans” or if it was Friday, “Cod fish cake, French fries, and succotash.” That was it. No substitutes. We nodded, sat at the bar, and Ed would take off for the kitchen only to return seconds later, silverware in one hand and a passel of paper napkins clutched in the other, taking the time to carefully fold the napkins into triangle shapes with the knife and fork on top, no spoons. If there was a water spot on one of the utensils, Ed would wipe it off with the bar rag.

I guess Ed felt it necessary to make some attempt at conversation so he’d say, “Nice day out there, huh?” We nodded. He added, “Suppose to rain tomorrow or so the paper says.” We nodded again. “That was some rain, yesterday, wasn’t it?” Another nod. Who needed a weatherman when Ed was around?

The price of the daily lunch special was a dollar. The only time I saw Ed flustered was in the early '70s when my friend and I walked in the door expecting the first words out of Ed’s mouth to be the items on the “daily special.” But no. There was a look of apprehension as he said, “Sorry, because of inflation I have to up the price of the special to a buck and a quarter.” There was an awkward pause. He added, “So, I mean, if you wanna eat somewheres else...” We said that was fine. A broad grin of relief appeared as he blurted out, “Spaghetti, meatballs, and apple sauce. Sun’s out today.”

The Mt. Washington community is now gentrified; there went the neighborhood. Ed is long gone, and Sparwasser’s Mt. Washington Tavern has been transformed into an up-scale restaurant with organic ketchup on the tables, catering to a young, upwardly mobile clientele. The menu is reflective of the wants and tastes of the millennial generation with
trendy drinks, gluten-free entrees with infused Omega-3s, and a staff of waiters wearing pristine aprons.

But you know what? They don’t serve succotash.

Memories at the Lake
Judy Ashley
judyashleyakanana@gmail.com

My summers during childhood meant staying at a lake cottage in Michigan with my grandparents. Quite often my parents and baby sister visited on the weekend.

Perhaps chaos and commotion described the usual situation but in my child’s mind only happiness and adventure occurred.

According to later stories told me, my grandfather worked as a City fireman or City policeman. He apparently disliked his walking beat, although photos of him with his night stick impressed me. He disliked paperwork and night duty, so he quit these jobs by age 50. Using his craftiness, he purchased an old house in the city, dismantled it in sections, hauled the sections to a lake-front lot within a few miles of town, and rebuilt the house into a fine cottage. Late in the fall he sold the cottage to someone who wanted to finish the inside. He deposited a hefty profit into savings, and began the process again in the spring. The best part for our family resulted in our family staying at a cottage all summer, even if the lake changed each year.

My grandfather worked hard but he took time to teach me how to hammer, use a screw driver, cut a board with a hand saw, and drill holes. But my grandmother worked hard at her main responsibility, listening to me. She loved my stories.

Each day we walked to the dock, she fastened a long rope on the rowboat to one of the dock posts. She helped me into a life jacket, and assisted me climbing into the rowboat between the oars. She gave a shove to the rowboat and my adventures began.

“Ship ahoy! To your positions, mates!” I shouted. For the first few minutes I slammed the oars, splashing water everywhere, adjusting to the huge size of oars and my awkwardness. Grandma dangled her feet in the lake.

“Sail the world, captain!” Grandma said. Often she ducked water from the splashing of the oars. Synchronized rowing took a long time to learn.

For at least two hours, Grandma relaxed as I struggled with fierce ocean winds, mastered gigantic waves, and travelled to many parts of the world. When it was time to go cook dinner, Grandma rang a bell and I docked in home port. Immediately I began my stories of the day’s adventures.

She told me later I met a man and woman who took a camel trip across the Sahara Desert. I described a very fancy tea party at a hotel called the
Ritz, the same name as the crackers we ate.

Her favorite tales though were about my imaginary married sister, who lived in Calli-for-nee. She had two kids who really were naughty.

Often after dark my grandmother walked with me to the dock and we looked at the stars and moon. She talked about faraway places, and my next day’s voyage began to be planned. Sometimes we stood on the dock quietly. The lake water lapping gently into shore provided the best noise of the silence.

After a while, holding my hand, we returned to the cottage porch. She made hot chocolate or a glass of iced juice for me. I climbed into bed, sleepy and content, looking forward to the next morning and my adventures. My fondest memories include summers at the lake cottages with my grandparents.

**Martin and Lewis**

Les Weinstein

lynnles@comcast.net

The death last year of the zany comedian Jerry Lewis reminded me of the time in the 1950s, when I interviewed him for the Bishop Bugle, the student newspaper of Nathan Bishop Junior High School in Providence, Rhode Island.

I had heard that he and Dean Martin, the singing half of the famous Martin and Lewis duo, were coming to Rhode Island to do a show. I asked the faculty advisor to the Bugle, for which I was a reporter, if it would be okay for me to try to get an interview with them. Not only did she readily agree, but she gave me some sort of makeshift “press pass” to use. She and I were doubtful that the “pass” would work, but we felt it was worth a try.

The stars were staying at the Biltmore Hotel where I presented my “credentials” without a problem and was granted access to the press area in the lobby of the hotel. Shortly thereafter, Lewis came bounding down the stairs to the press area. I went over to him right away, introduced myself, and began the interview. The only question I remember asking was related to the line he often used in his movies and on TV: “I LIKE IT; I LIKE IT!” said in a very loud, twangy, whining, sing-song voice that invariably got a big laugh. I asked if I could quote him as saying “I LIKE IT; I LIKE

Martin came down to the lobby much later, when there was no time for an interview with him, but I did meet him and smelled alcohol on his breath. When performing, he would often have a drink in his hand, but he denied drinking at other times.

My interview appeared on the front page of the Bugle (there were only two mimeographed pages!) under the title “Comedy Team Interviewed.” The next year I became Editor-in-Chief of the Bugle. I like to think that my “scoop” of an interview had a lot to do with this promotion!
**The Epicurean**
**Obsessed**

Fred McCormick

(“The snows are fled away.”)

Diffugere nives
And crocus bloom
Under the bare feet
Of naked Graces—
O, Quintus Flaccus,
The time still races
Along and the cup of Samos,
Sweet beloved
Of Bacchus
And Silenus
Is drained
When spring and summer age
Into autumn’s bounty.
The dusty book is thumbed
Page by drying page
Toward climax and end,
Fading out like
A novel by Scott
To brown leaves
In the gutter,
Ungathered, left to rot
Beneath ungraceful,
Naked trees.
Without the green
Canopy
Vision clears
And one sees
Open gaps,
Veiled summer secrets
Are revealed

Like masked desire
Stirred as the gaze
Rises in a lazy way
Toward a higher
Ridge above a marsh
And the setting sun
Of another day.
The Osher at JHU Journal is published semi-annually in the fall and spring by the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Johns Hopkins University to strengthen community connections and share experiences. Readers are encouraged to respectfully share their reactions with authors via email.

All members and faculty are welcome to submit essays, anecdotes, poetry, and memoirs, subject to editorial review. The Journal strives to publish a diverse array of voices. Send work by email to Linda Middlestadt, at linda@middlestadt.net or mail a hard copy to Osher at JHU, 6740 Alexander Bell Dr., Columbia, MD 21046.

Submission Guidelines:

- about 250-1000 words, or up to 50 lines of poetry
- emphasizing one significant experience or idea clearly and succinctly
- relevant to the Osher community
- accompanied by a photograph or illustration

Submissions are accepted all year, due by January 15 for the Spring issue and August 15 for the Fall issue, and are evaluated during the last weeks of January and August. Writers will be notified if their articles will be published in the current or a future issue. When an article needs modification, a writer will be given an explanation and will be encouraged to consult with committee members Randy Barker at lbarker3@jhmi.edu or Chuck Sternheim at cstern@umd.edu, if they decide to make revisions. A revised submission will be subject to the same editorial review as any new submission.

OSHER at JHU Staff
Susan Howard
Director
Ann Wiker
Administrative Supervisor
Kathy Cooke
Program Coordinator
Lianna Davidson
Program Assistant
Michael Pawela
Program Assistant
Emily Owens
Program Assistant

OSHER at JHU Journal
Committee
Randy Barker
Joseph Baron
Jim Blue
Lee Blue
Murrie Burgan
Linda Middlestadt
Chuck Semich
Chuck Sternheim

Advisory Board
Baltimore/Columbia
Robert Stiefel, Chair
Nancy Bienia, Vice Chair
Recording Secretary, Open
Marcia Amith, at Large
Jan Brady, Chair TA Committee
Linda Middlestadt, Journal
Nancy Oppenheim, Curriculum
Carol Tillson, Membership
Tom Wing, Hospitality

Montgomery County
Laura Sieglebaum, Chair
Ann Brockhaus, Vice Chair
Debbi Vivari, Recording Secretary
Bob Barshay, at Large
Andrea Baruchin, at Large
Josh Fried, at Large
Susan Fried, Volunteers
Phil Grimley, at Large
Carl Huntman, at Large
Cynthia Hough, Teaching Assistants
Cicily Iacangelo, Curriculum
William Lewis, at Large
Erin Mendolsohn, at Large
Virginia Murphy, Hospitality
Ginny Schultz, Membership
Peter Shaw, Teaching Assistants
Martin Stein, Membership

Mickey Stevens, Past Chair
Cali Tamarkin, at Large
Carol Walden, Travel
Gail Weiss, Update
Alan White, Special Events

Committee Chairs
Baltimore/Columbia
Curriculum—Nancy Oppenheim
Hospitality—Tom Wing
Journal—Linda Middlestadt
Membership—Carol Tillson
Travel—Maureen Nicholas
Teaching Assistant—Jan Brady

Montgomery County
Curriculum—Cicily Iacangelo
Hospitality—Virginia Murphy
Membership—Ginny Schultz
and Martin Stein
Special Events—Alan White
TA—Peter Shaw and Cynthia Hough
Travel—Carol Walden
Update—Gail Weiss
Volunteer—Susan Fried