THE GREAT COST AND MYTH OF US DEFENSE SPENDING

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US defense spending is out of control, severely undermining our ability to tackle climate change, infrastructure needs, health care, and other national challenges. The mainstream media, particularly the New York Times and Washington Post, contribute to the problem of defense spending by understating the cost of defense.

Journalists and pundits regularly refer to US defense spending as greater than the next seven or eight countries. Nonsense! US defense spending when correctly tabulated exceeds the defense spending of the rest of the global community. Current defense spending is greater than $1 trillion and the bipartisan support for US defense spending assures continued increases. Many of the largest spenders on defense, moreover, are our treaty allies.
Most estimates of US defense spending cite only the budget figures for the Pentagon, which points toward $750 billion. However, much of the spending of many agencies, particularly in the intelligence community (more than $70 billion), is devoted to support of the military. The same can be said for the Department of Homeland Security (also around $70 billion) as well as the Department of Energy ($30 billion), which devotes huge sums to nuclear forces. The Veterans Administration (nearly $200 billion), moreover, must be considered part and parcel of US defense spending. At the same time, the Trump administration is cutting the spending of US cabinet agencies to support defense spending, excluding not only the Department of Defense, but the Department of Homeland Security and the Veterans Administration.

When these departments and agencies are considered, US defense spending greatly exceeds $1 trillion, which finds very little criticism within the Congress or the various think tanks that address the issue of military spending. With the loss of Senators Carl Levin (D-MI) and John McCain (R-AZ), there has been no bipartisan scrutiny of defense spending. This is particularly troubling at this time because the various Democratic candidates for the presidency have little background in the field of national security, let alone the abstruse aspects of defense spending, and there is no attention given to the many obvious areas for cutting back allocations for defense.

The trillions of dollars allocated for defense in recent years received insufficient congressional monitoring and internal oversight. Until recently, the Pentagon budget was the only large federal budget that had never been audited, and last year’s audit, which cost nearly $400 million, produced a failing grade for the Pentagon. President Eisenhower’s warning about the military-industrial complex nearly 60 years ago noted that military demands on US spending would become a “cross of iron” that would limit domestic spending. Now, at a time when there are no serious challenges to US security or military supremacy, more than 60 percent of US discretionary spending goes to support defense.

There is no better example of the insidious nature of the military-industrial complex than the industry’s recruitment of retired generals to become executives at defense companies and the Pentagon’s use of these same retired generals to take part in exercises involving weapons systems that their companies are vying to build for the military. Retired generals and admirals are also working as military analysts for television and radio networks, often receiving classified briefings from the Pentagon before their on-air appearances. Nevertheless, a recent Inspector General study found no conflict of interest involving these officers.

Every aspect of the Pentagon’s budget needs to be scrutinized for savings, including procurement, operations and maintenance, and infrastructure. There are hundreds of US military facilities overseas with hundreds of thousands of US military personnel stationed there. By comparison, China has one overseas facility, a small one on the Horn of Africa, and Russia has only modest air and naval facilities in Syria outside the former Soviet space. Procurement boondoggles have robbed the US treasury of hundreds of billions of dollars, particularly for national missile defense and the Army’s Future Combat System, which consists of interconnected vehicles, robots, and sensing devices. Hugely expensive US aircraft carriers are vulnerable to inexpensive sophisticated cruise missiles in the Russian and Chinese inventories.

The excessive spending on the Air Force is the most wasteful of all military expenditures. The Air Force is obsessed with fighter superiority in an era without a threat. Pentagon briefings on Capitol Hill regularly exaggerate the capabilities of foreign air defense. Billions of dollars have been spent on advanced aircraft, such as the B-1 bomber and the F-22 fighter, which have never been deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan or any other combat zone. The F-22
was designed in the mid-1980s to confront Soviet fighter planes that were never built. The F-22 program was eventually killed to make way for the more costly and contentious F-35 program.

Like the Air Force and its dominance of the skies, the Navy has had total dominance at sea for the past six decades. U.S. naval ships are deployed in too many areas with too many missions. The Navy, moreover, has its own air force, its own army, and its own strategic weapons. It has greater lethality than all of the navies of the world combined and has a subordinate organization, the Coast Guard, which represents the world’s seventh largest fleet. The US Marines, moreover, have more planes, ships, armored vehicles, and personnel in uniform than the entire British military. The very existence of the Marine Corps is questionable in view of the fact that its last amphibious landing was in the first year of the Korean War nearly 60 years ago.

One of the best kept secrets of the past 60 years has been the high cost of producing and maintaining nuclear weapons, somewhere between $5 and $6 trillion, which represents one-fourth to one-third of overall defense spending. The total is roughly equivalent to the total amount of money spent on the Army or the Navy since World War Two. When the United States began to develop and deploy nuclear weapons, the military-industrial complex stressed that the huge investment in nuclear systems would allow a smaller army and navy. Meanwhile, our army and navy have gotten larger and costlier for taxpayers.

In sum, Republican Presidents George W. Bush and Donald Trump have created the worst of all possible strategic worlds. Bush abrogated the ABM Treaty, the cornerstone of deterrence and one of the pearls of arms control and disarmament policy, and paved the way for the murky world of national missile defense, which costs hundreds of billions of dollars. Trump abrogated the INF Treaty, one of the most successful disarmament treaties in history, and paved the way for a renewed arms race in Europe and Asia. These actions were guided by John Bolton, who served as an arms control adviser to Bush and the national security adviser to Trump. As a result, incentives have been created for others to deploy intercontinental missiles, modernize strategic inventories, pursue weapons of mass destruction, and follow the folly of national missile defense. Once again, only the interests of the military-industrial complex are being served.

Cicero said that “endless money forms the sinews of war.” So, it is not surprising that the United States has been in conflict for nearly all of the past three decades. At the same time, there has been a withdrawal from the world of diplomacy, which finds that there are fewer Foreign Service Officers than there are members of military service bands.

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (TIFF) 2019

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In September 2019 I attended the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), which is one of the most prestigious and influential film festivals. I saw 13 movies (of the more than 200 in the entire festival) within essentially a four-day period! The following are my mini reviews of three of the films I saw.

**Parasite:** A South Korean film and the winner of the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival and four Academy Awards: best picture, international film, director, and screenplay. Part comedy and part tragedy, with a subtext of class warfare, it’s a combination of Hitchcock (the clever and
The guest speaker approached the podium. Throughout the audience a slight sound of a gasp could be heard. During the introduction, a history explained the necessity of a wheelchair and members of the audience visibly sagged into their chairs at the harsh reality told to them. Initially the microphone sputtered, but once the speaker began, the audience eased into their best listening posture. The speaker related story after story of the problems, and the completely silent reaction communicated the impact one person made on a difficult topic.
Judith E. Heumann, a well-known advocate for disability rights currently working at the Ford Foundation, spoke to the Osher Life Long Learning audience for more than one hour, citing at least one in four Americans are diagnosed as disabled. The absence of discussion about the problems motivates her to participate in various organizations to improve the situation. She noted the voices of the disabled only recently began to unite. In the media, she claimed, almost no disabled individuals are provided the opportunity to audition for media roles, much less be cast. The deafening silence about disability issues reflects, in her opinion, the lack of experience and exposure of most people.

As a registered student in the Osher JHU Speaker Series class, I am often surprised by the spectrum of topics introduced or explained by speakers. Since I have attended this type of lecture all my life, sometimes I feel a little smug as though I have heard it all. On occasion a topic “blows me out of the water,” an entirely new idea that had never crossed my path.

Today when attending Ms. Heumann’s speech on Disability Rights, I heard a new message. The speaker related so many problems and histories of what people have done to solve the problems, and then encouraged every person in the audience to write their stories about the topic, even if the stories were about not having any experience. Initially, her suggestion seemed easy enough to do. But then I looked seriously around the audience and knew people wanted to be helped to get started. The audience, regardless of age, place, or background, needed specific ideas about what they could do. It was my opportunity for action.

The following list of suggestions on how to get started on an action plan regarding your opinions applies to most topics. It is only a beginning.

- Write an email to your congressperson.
- Make a phone call to your congressperson.
- Write a letter to your congressperson.
- Send a $ contribution to an organization that supports your opinion.
- Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper about your opinion.
- Make a list of people who believe the same ideas as you about this topic.
- Place a sticker on the back of your car that advocates your opinion.
- Write a thank-you note to someone who demonstrates helping in special ways.
- Draw a picture illustrating an action you could do related to your opinion and put it on your refrigerator.
- Wear a piece of jewelry symbolizing your position on your opinion.
- Make a list of questions about your topic that could be asked of an expert.
- Look up on “Google” and find out what Wikipedia says about your topic.
- Make a list of significant events in the history about your topic.
- Make a bookmark to send to someone with the problem, reminding them of their worth.
- Visit a facility related to your topic and tell at least one friend about it.
- Encourage a fundraiser at a restaurant about your topic and help promote it.
- Ask a grandchild what they talk about at school on the topic.
- Offer to transport a patient involved with the problems of the topic to an appointment.
- Offer to pick up some groceries for a person with transportation problems.

I hope that this list leads to many additional ideas for you to act on your opinions about difficult issues. As Ms. Heumann suggested, by little actions we begin to tell stories, and suddenly change occurs.

Note: Al White must be given credit for arranging the guest speakers at Osher for many years.
HALLOWEEN 2003
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My grandson was born
October 16, 2001 at St. Vincent’s Hospital on
12th street, about a mile
north of where the twin towers
came down. I experienced the
astonishing joy of becoming a
grandmother, amid the horror of a
city experiencing immense shock,
pain and loss. Carrying my newborn
grandson out of the hospital, I saw
signs everywhere with heartbreaking
pictures of “lost” people. Even
more egregious was the smell. Life
and death.

Two years later, I was in town for a
conference and a quick visit to my
daughter and grandson. The signs
were gone, as was the smell. But the
memories were there, and … just
looking south, a huge emptiness
served as a constant reminder. The
city still felt raw, on edge.

It was the day before Halloween, and
my daughter had asked me to pick
up a Halloween costume for my
grandson. I stopped in the nearest
drugstore and found a total mess in
the Halloween section. Costumes
were all over the floor, with just a
few remaining on the rack. All sizes
were mixed up together—costumes
in pieces (tops without bottoms,
loose witches’ capes, and a variety
of hats and swords). I searched for
something suitable for a little boy.
At last, I saw a bright shiny yellow
fireman’s jacket, and (a miracle) a
fireman’s hat—in his size! Across
the back of the jacket, in big black
letters: NYFD.

The minute my grandson came out
of the subway and saw the costume,
he insisted on putting it on. My
daughter and I found ourselves
running quickly down Third Avenue,
trying to keep up with a very happy
little boy in a fireman’s costume.
As we walked, I became aware of
the reactions of the people on the
sidewalk. At first, turning heads,
benign smiles. But then, as they
absorbed the NYFD costume, they
would pause—look stricken as the
memory of that terrible day flashed
across their minds. Then, surprisingly,
I heard some cheers, some claps.
Others called out to my grandson,
“Hurrah” or “Way to go.”

Suddenly, around the corner came
waves and waves of police on
motorcycles, riding in formation up
the avenue. A few of the police at
the front of the formation noticed
my grandson in his NYFD costume,
running happily down the sidewalk.
One called out, “Look at that!” And
then a cry began. Soft at first, but
as more and more saw the happy
little boy, the cheers got louder and
louder. The sound was defiant. It
almost filled the huge hole in the
skyline.

Soon, we were all cheering, police,
people on the sidewalk, my daughter
and I—for the fallen firemen, for all
the fallen, and for a happy little boy
in an almost-sacred uniform, who
remained oblivious to the fact that
for a brief moment, he represented
all of our hopes for the future.
**LIBBY GORDON’S MYSTERY TOUR**

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“Indeed, I finally found the fountain of youth in Libby Gordon’s mysterious mirror,” I announced first thing late evening when I had returned home from Libby’s house. My husband was anxious to hear me tell my new story.

And that is how it really happened. Libby invited me to see her new house. When we were inside, I became enchanted by the beauty and the spaciousness of the large rooms furnished with exquisite taste. I felt how proud Libby was of her incredibly beautiful home. In every single room she had on display her wedding pictures and also pictures of herself as a young woman. It didn’t take long for me to see that Libby was at one time a striking beauty. Her late husband appeared in the pictures, a very handsome young man, and there were also the pictures of Libby’s two children who were, by that time, grown up and married.

Now that she lived all by herself in the big house, Libby felt lonely.

“I like to look at these pictures all the time. In that way, I really feel that I am surrounded with all the people whom I really love,” she said.

As we were moving from one room to another, we suddenly came across a room with an enormously large mirror on the wall. If you didn’t know the secret the mirror possessed, you would have looked at yourself and passed by it into the next room, unaware of its magical power.

It was Libby who told me to stand up still and to turn only my head to the right side of the mirror. All of a sudden, I had the sight of myself being duplicated time and time again way in the distance. I felt as if I were stepping straight into the twilight zone. The farther I saw myself the less visible were the wrinkles that had formed on my face throughout the years. The bulge around my waist seemed to disappear and I saw a new me: slim and much younger by far, more attractive and ready to take over the world again. I didn’t want to leave the room, but I had
to because it was getting late.

On my way out the front door accompanied by Libby, I couldn’t help thinking about the mirror. Before my departure, Libby told me, “I don’t ever plan to go to a nursing home. I love my house very much.”

At that moment I felt that what caused Libby to be full of energy, and to have the most amazing social vigor, was the secret of her powerful mirror, which transformed her way into the distance, time and time again, into a strikingly beautiful woman.

NAMASTE!

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Don’t go! Stay home! Give it up!

These were admonitions my friends in the JHU Evergreen Society directed at me because I was about to travel to Nepal with some other members, led by Albert Berney. The time was a few days after September 11, 2001 and most Americans were wary of any possibly dangerous situations that might follow. If any of us felt that our lives were in jeopardy, it was never mentioned—so we went!

When we arrived at Kathmandu International Airport, we were met by our tour guide Birendra Chaudhary, soon to be a dear friend. Nepal’s main industry is tourism, and because of the atrocities of 9/11, few people were traveling anywhere abroad. We were the only group then on Birendra’s schedule; all those reservations after us has been canceled. Everywhere we went, restaurants, hotels, store, the owners of the establishments came out to thank us for not canceling our trip.

Our first activity was to go to a section of Kathmandu that was probably quite old because it had a high, aged, red brick wall around it. We walked through an archway onto cobbled streets leading into “The City.”

After walking through the entrance, I looked to my right and saw a young boy about 8 to 12 years old sitting cross-legged on a concrete stoop holding a yellowish earthenware jug in one hand and a cobra in the other. Was I about to see a snake charmer? I rushed to tell my group ahead of me when I suddenly felt something on my head. A large, dark, quail-like bird had flown above me and had deposited a “blessing” on my head. By the time my friends worked to “get the poo off Doris’ head,” the moment of the snake charmer had passed.

In one part of Kathmandu there is a very large open area where craftsmen, artists, and vendors spread out rugs or blankets and display their wares.
for (they hope) customers to see and buy. I’m guessing the number of these merchants is in the hundreds. It was a great place to shop for religious items, jewelry, and souvenirs. This area is somewhat closed in by buildings housing stores, businesses, and restaurants. Like many of the dining places we visited, the cuisine seemed to be multicultural.

Berindra took us to many places and taught us many things. We visited temples and monasteries where the paths were solidly edged with yellow and orange marigold plants holding pleasantly fragrant flowers as large, or larger, than baseballs. We were not allowed into the monasteries but we could sit on the walls and terraces around them. There were many monkeys running over the roofs and balconies and we were cautioned not to put anything down beside us because the monkeys would surely steal it. The monkeys carefully inspected us and even sat beside us, as we guarded our possessions.

One memorable excursion was to Lambini, the birthplace of Siddhartha Buddha. It is said that his mother traveled to that spot and gave birth to him in a nearby pond. That pond is now reinforced with concrete and there is a large institute on the grounds nearby for research, study, and learning. There we sat on a lone stone wall encircling a very large shade tree. The director of the project told us of Buddha’s life and his teachings.

A very pleasant surprise took place one day when we went to the airport. There a small plane was waiting for us. It was so small that I, at five-feet-two, had to bend over to walk through the aisle, which had a single seat by each window. After the plane took off, the stewardess, also stooping over, told us we were heading for Mt. Everest! When we neared it, one passenger at a time was allowed to go into the cockpit and look over the shoulders of the pilot and copilot. What a thrill!

A week or so before we went to Nepal, the country’s much beloved prince had died. Some believed he was killed by his brother, who took over the throne. Berindra took us to a river where the body had ceremoniously been cremated. There was a funeral going on, so we watched as a shrouded body was placed on a pallet that extended out over the river. The wrappings on the deceased were set afire, and as the body was consumed, mourners with small brushes swept the ashes into the river where they flowed away.

Another place we visited was a Tibetan refugee center. These people had settled there because of religious and/or political persecution. Here they make their living carrying on their crafts, one of which is rug making. The wool comes from Tibet but the product is made here.

There were many places in the villages we visited where ropes or wires were extended from the top of one building to another and on these lines were pieces of colored paper, some about one foot square and others triangular, where worshipers had written prayers and believed the wind would carry their messages. Because of our observations throughout the trip one member of our group commented that the people are their religion, and we all agreed.

One of the things we learned about Nepal is that there is no compulsory education: if you want your child to go to school, you have to pay for it. This was the dire situation in which Berindra and his wife found themselves. They had two elementary-school-aged children, but no income. During the course of the trip home, five of us organized to try and find some way to finance the education of Berindra’s son and daughter. Russ Dixon took over the lead, and for the next ten years the Berney Group sent money that paid for these two children’s schooling until they graduated from high school. During this time, we received many thank-you letters and meaningful gifts from the Chaudharys. Berindra’s daughter headed to college to be a nurse and his son chose to go to a university to be an engineer. We received pictures of the family at graduation and another letter of gratitude from Berindra. He recalled that when he found out that we would be sending financial support for schooling, his wife had been awake all night crying because she was so happy.

I have been so pleased and proud because that trip to Nepal has had such an impression on my life.
Grandma Gertrude, a typical stay-at-home housefrau, did not object when Grandpa Sam joined the Peace Corps. Over the years they had grown apart. Gregarious Sam always wanted to be in the spotlight while shy Gertrude preferred staying in the background. She could usually be found in her cozy kitchen, clad in a fresh but dowdy housedress protected by a crisp apron, hair pulled back in a tight bun, scents of ginger and spices emanating from her very being—the reliable, dependable spouse, always there for everyone, a brick in any crisis.

While Sam enjoyed himself in Morocco, Grandma began to emerge from her reclusive lifestyle. One day he called to tell Gertrude of his decision to remain in North Africa with a young woman he fancied and of his plan to live with her. This news devastated Grandma for a time but then, like a new awakening, she underwent a metamorphosis. She said the hell with that philanderer. First off, she re-styled and dyed her hair into a chic red bob. She swapped the frumpish housedresses for jeans, T-shirts, and hiking boots. She became totally independent, reliant and concerned mainly with herself.

She enrolled in an art class and discovered a real talent for sculpting. Then she became a sculptress and a damn good one at that. She carved wood into fanciful figures; sometimes she even used a chain saw for her work. Her amazing resourcefulness soon earned her a remarkable reputation and multiple sales for her works. She embraced the popular notion of saving the environment, became a passionate member of Greenpeace and supported other similar groups. In keeping with her conservation principles, she often used “found” materials for her projects. She combed the countryside seeking unusual stuff to create her art. She changed her name to Henrietta after Henry Moore, the famous English sculptor, hoping that someday she too would be famous.

One cloudy day her SUV stalled on the Pacific Coast Highway near Big Sur. She managed to coast onto the narrow shoulder and raised the hood in order to diagnose the problem. Looking over the cliff she saw the angry Pacific waves breaking on the beach while overhead loomed a steep, rocky ledge. Henrietta adjusted the carburetor, tightened some wires, and gave herself a pat on the back for her automotive know-how. As she slammed down the hood she caught sight of a marvelous tree stump with some exposed roots. What a perfect specimen. The scavenger knew at once she had to have it.

Without a second thought she fetched her trusty chain, hooked one end around the stump and the other end to the SUV bumper. She was excited as she contemplated the stump’s future. She already had a vision of it becoming a beautiful octopus. She thought it would be a cinch to retrieve it from the hillside. Meanwhile, because she was so intent on getting that wretched stump, she forgot about the weather. There had been ominous warnings all day and now what had been a misty drizzle turned into a downpour.

She jumped in the car, put it in gear, and revved the engine but the car did not budge. Her patience prevailed as she tried again and again to drag the stump off the hill. Slowly, slowly the SUV began to inch forward dragging the stump inch by inch.

Finally, the stump came out of the ground. Gertrude felt ecstatic as she shouted EUREKA! At the same moment she heard a tremendous rumbling as if the earth were moving. She looked up to see the side of the cliff sliding in her direction. The SUV, the stump, and a terrified Henrietta careered down the cliff onto the beach in a twisted mass of debris and rubble only inches from the rising surf.
As the paramedics loaded her into the ambulance, she opened her eyes long enough to ask about the tree stump. “That thing? It floated away. You’re lucky we saved you.”

True to her new persona, she murmured, “Oh, shit.”

I am driving east through Louisiana and Mississippi. It is fall, 1963.

My thoughts are so focused on my destination I hardly notice the lush scenery rushing by my window. A journey. Excitement. Trepidation. Many questions. I like that I am alone. I want all my focus on the adventure I had planned only a few short weeks ago in San Antonio. I had run for months and was in peak shape. I still worried and wondered if I could do it.

Finally, Georgia and a strange-looking town, one roadside mall after another full of bars, liquor stores, and strip joints. Not my kind of place, but expected. My new roommate was a few years younger who played Joan Baez records on his portable Victrola. I would forever be grateful. Stayed up that first night guessing about the future longer than we should have.

Our day would start in the dark at five. Our many teachers were serious, stern. There was singing from many groups spread out in the large area. “I’ve got a girl in New Orleans, prettiest gal you’ve ever seen.” There was a strong spoken voice. “Today and for many days you will learn how to fall down. There are five points of contact, the soles of the feet, the calf, the thigh, the hip, the latissimus dorsi muscle. The head is not a point of contact.” We were to spread impact over time and distance. If we didn’t, we could end up useless for the mission.

I had always been afraid of heights. Later a doctor would suggest that I was worried I could not resist throwing myself off. Initially skeptical, I later could identify with the concept. What is so appealing about counterphobia? Risk, control, testing, challenge, but in the end, why do something frightening if you don’t have to? Androgens?

First the four-foot platforms. Elbows in, arms across the chest, body slightly bent at the waist and knees, feet together, a jump and then a controlled collapse beginning with the sole of the foot. Difficult. Scores of practice attempts. Bruising, soreness. Later landings moving from the front, the side, the back. The back was the trickiest. Klunk!! “Sir, is the head a point of contact?” “NO, SERGEANT!”

The eight-foot platforms with a harness, a pulley, a rope in the hands of a fellow trainee. Not smart. I had
the rope, but didn’t protect my buddy appropriately, leading to an ankle sprain. I didn’t like that sergeant and was surprised when he allowed me to go to the medic tent with my victim. I felt guilty and critical of myself.

In the evenings the docs visited the noncom barracks to help with the injuries of the day. There were surprisingly few. The teaching was intelligently run and fair. By the end we had practiced so much and been so strictly supervised, that we would, when ordered, jump out of any noisy door even if we thought death might be a few seconds away. I was impressed and surprised.

The 34-foot tower was to teach us how to exit and manage the few seconds afterward before all was amazingly quiet. I would grow to feel that 34 feet was more frightening than 1200. I flung my semi-fetal shape into the void, eyes clinched, mind hiding. “The real thing couldn’t be worse?”

In the evenings we talked and listened to Joan. We were exhausted.

Finally, the day arrived. We were sitting on the tarmac checking our gear.

It was not quiet. Multiple engine noise. Groups were boarding. We sat across from each other trying to look calm, many just looking down.

The wait, the anticipation. Then the warning light. “Stand up!! Hook up!! Check static line!! Check forward status line!! Move!! Stand in the door!!” Then all hell broke: green light, piercing continuous ringing, shuffling forward, frightening noise growing with every step toward the door, Sergeant yelling, “GO! GO! GO! GO! GO! GO!” screaming wind, deafening roar, light streaming in and the leap, or was it a push into the unknown. What I had memorized well: untwist, check canopy, check location. Then complete silence like I had never not heard before. Peaceful floating balloons gently swaying. Ultimately came what I had practiced over and over: deceleration over space and time. “Sir, is the head a point of contact?” “NO SERGEANT!!!!”

THOUGHTS ON DOWNSIZING
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The time has come to downsize and move to a senior residence. Yes, it really has, although we’ve put it off for years. But the outside steps truly are getting steeper and it takes resolve to get in and out of the bathtub—not to mention undertaking the courageous act of carrying dirty clothes down to the washing machine in the basement and precariously bringing clean ones back upstairs.

No doubt, it won’t be so bad to leave the 1940s-era Maryland suburban three-bedroom where we have lived—and accumulated things—since 1977. I am ready to part with some possessions—for instance, the wedding dress I bought on sale for $39.99 in 1970—didn’t want to pay more because I wasn’t sure the marriage would last, but it has for 49 years. Then there are the beautiful pictures of our daughter and son-in-law on their wedding day in 1996. She looks so radiant in her ($1500!) wedding gown. Alas, they were divorced five years ago and the pictures stored in the closet. Yes, I can give up those, as well as the cute little Halloween witches our granddaughter made in kindergarten 11 years ago. They are disintegrating anyway and embarrass her as a sophisticated 16-year-old.
As far as our furniture goes, a good part will find a home at Goodwill, I assume. Some of it may have come from there to begin with—we always have had a house with an attic-like décor, chairs and tables of hand-me-downs from our parents’ homes far away from here where we grew up. I have a solid oak buffet that was a wedding present to my father and his first wife, who were married in 1916. It has never looked right in this house anyway, particularly now that it is wedged up against a flat-screen television.

The drawers hold the hand-embroidered table linens my mother loved plus mismatched silver. Well, I never fancied washing, let alone ironing, those linens, and cleaning silver does not inspire me.

I doubt I will shed any tears when the buffet is carted off. Yet, I remember how imposing it looked in my childhood home in Sedalia, Missouri. My parents used it to conceal a book on the facts of life that I was supposed to find and read by myself when I was a teen-ager. (And, yes, I did! having learned that the buffet served to hide presents and family treasures of one kind or another.)

What really will be hard to part with are the books. No, I don’t mean the popular novels—the John Grishams, the Michael Connellys, the John Mortimers with those marvelous Rumpole stories. I don’t mean the classics either that we read at Osher. After all, I always can, and do, find them at the public library. What I mean are the volumes with faded covers that we took the trouble of shipping here when we closed our family homes, the one in Sedalia in my case and one in Albany, Georgia, in the case of my husband, Hank. For years they have been piled on homemade shelves in our basement.

My books are the ones my parents kept in an old glass-fronted bookcase that, like the books themselves, went back to the Victorian era, since some belonged to my grandparents. The books merged in a tangible way the strands (and limitations) of my family’s interests. They focused on the Methodist church (hence hymnals and prayer books), biography, education (long-discarded textbooks from the University of Missouri), sentimental poetry, and occasional pulp fiction.

Some, like Hank’s books (another eclectic collection), were inscribed with the names of long-deceased readers. A dog-eared copy of Grave’s History of Education, which Hank’s mother studied in teachers’ college, contains a handwritten bit of doggerel signed by a girlfriend, “From the day you are born until the day you ride in the hearse, there is nothing so bad but what it could have been worse.” His family apparently had more of a sense of humor than mine.

Hank is not especially attached to his family’s books, at least not the way I am to mine. I fancy that a few of my books might have historical value; for example, Ida Tarbell’s, He Knew Lincoln, a thin volume with a frayed binding, once dark green but now grey, that served as a backdrop for a cover profile of Abraham Lincoln. Both my father and his father wrote their names on the first page, probably to show their reverence for Lincoln as the deified symbol of the Republican Party to which they adhered with unwavering loyalty. A battered copy of Anecdotes of Abraham Lincoln, punctuated by grim-looking engravings, stands on the dusty shelf.
beside it. Next to it, a red, white, and blue cover, long since yellowed with age, marks a thicker work, *Theodore Roosevelt The Citizen*, by Jacob A. Riis, who I learned, years after leaving Sedalia, had investigated sweatshops and child labor at the turn of the 20th century.

As a child I found more enthralling the cover of another book, now quite grimy, but once a vivid royal blue. It still shows a pair of grasping hands reaching up to grab a bag of money that ornamented the front of *A Little Brother of the Rich*, by Joseph Medill Patterson, who I later found out was himself a rich newspaper publisher. It appears my father must have been interested in the political controversies of his younger days, although when I came along late in his life health concerns dominated family discussions.

No, I never read any of these family books while I was growing up. Mainly I was attracted to their looks. The most splendid covers, replete with gold leaf and fancy floral designs, continue to grace the books of poetry that somehow have been shoved into a corner of our basement near extra yard furniture. One, titled *Songs Sacred and Devotional*, was inscribed to my father’s parents in 1880. Another is called *Poems of Passion*, although I cannot say I ever witnessed any of the latter in my family’s staid household.

A tiny, fly-specked volume, *The Language of Flowers*, with a publication date of 1847, has hand-colored illustrations still vivid after some 175 years. It includes one of lovers embracing with red roses and green leaves covering their private parts. It must have belonged to my extremely pious grandmother, who seemed very ancient and formidable when I grew up. I still cannot imagine her ever having been in love, but I suppose she must have been, or she would never have kept that book.

As I look at my family’s books, preparing to give—or possibly more to the point throw them away, I realize why I am so hesitant to part with them. In their faded pages may lie the key to many of the family secrets that I will never know.

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**Baseball Dreams**

By Barbara Orbock

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When I was a little kid I wanted to grow up to be a boy. Boys wore overalls, played ball, dug in the dirt, rode bikes at terrifying speeds, and definitely had more fun than girls, who had to wear dresses, sit like little ladies, and play with dolls.

It slowly dawned on me that I would never be a boy — okay, I could still grow up to be a baseball player. By eight, I could run as fast, throw as far, catch as well and bat as hard as any boy my age. I maintained this equality through grade school, and even though I knew that there were no girls among my idols on Baltimore’s International League champion Orioles, I still dreamed.

In seventh grade I was chosen for the Baltimore County softball throw competition and won. However, the competition I was in was confined to girls — the boys had a baseball throw and the boy from Dundalk...
who won threw a lot farther than me. From then on, I knew that except for pick-up games in my neighborhood, I would be confined to softball and never play on a team with boys again.

Then, in the summer before ninth grade, I had my moment of glory. My parents and I went to a double-header at Babe Ruth Stadium on 33rd Street to watch my beloved Orioles. We sat behind home plate near the broadcasting booth of Bill Dyer so that we could not only watch the game, but also watch Bill wave his little red chair whenever the Orioles did something really stupendous.

Sometime in the third inning of the second game a foul ball came off a Newark bat, rose high over the backstop, and came spiraling down right in front of us. My mother ducked — my father said, “Get it, Barb.” There was nothing to do but stand up and catch it—barenhanded, I must boast. I don’t even remember it stinging. I was just so happy I had a new baseball.

Then this guy who was sitting four rows in front of us got up and started clapping and before I knew it there was some photographer asking me to pose like I just caught the ball. Some picture — please observe, I’m not even looking at the ball. Anyway, this reporter was really excited because he said foul balls that came backwards off a bat had a peculiar spin that made them hard to catch, even with a glove. After the interview, the reporter, Rodger Pippen, assured us it would be in the next day’s paper.

My father was so pleased he came home from work with ten copies of The News American, the local paper we didn’t subscribe to and which my father swore wasn’t worth reading. I never heard him say that again.

Even though I went on to play varsity softball in high school and on traveling teams in college, nothing could ever compare to my 14-year-old feat on 33rd Street. It was the closest I ever came to my dream of growing up to be a baseball player.
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 csterm@umd.edu if they decide to make revisions. A revised submission will be subject to the same editorial review as any new submission.