As a participant in the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Tufts University, you already know how generous our members are with their time. They organize and lead study groups for us; serve on our committees; arrange our special events; and take care of all the behind-the-scenes operations that keep our program running smoothly.

What you might not know is that our members aren’t just generous with their time: they’re generous with their talent as well! Each piece in this edition of *Spotlight* was written, photographed, painted, or drawn by our own OLLI members—members who, as you’ll agree after you’ve looked through this book, could easily have had their pieces accepted by well-established literary magazines or journals. Many thanks to them for having opted to submit their work to *Spotlight* instead.

Many thanks, too, to everyone involved in the production of this edition, including our hardworking program assistants Mia Forslund and Kathy Scanlon; longtime member Arline Heimert for serving as the supervising editor; and to the various Study Group Leaders who not only encouraged their class participants to explore their creativity, but then convinced them (in some cases with a little bit of arm twisting) to share their work with our OLLI community.

As you flip through the following pages, please bear in mind that we’re always accepting submissions for our next edition of *Spotlight*. If you have any writing or artworks you’d like to share with us—be they essays, short stories, poem, paintings, photos, sculpture, quilts, needlecrafts, etc.—please let us know via email at Osher LLI@tufts.edu. In the meantime, enjoy the edition you’re holding in your hands right now, and remember that it’s a reflection of the time, talents, and energy of our own talented members.

— David A. Fechtor, Director
Osher LLI at Tufts University
Spotlight
Spring/Summer 2014

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POETRY
Blue Orchid
(for Theodore H. Stavro)

The flower stand lures us
as surely as if we were bees.
Instead of nectar,
we crave color,
in this month bleached by winter.

We are dazzled by blooms,
but one reigns supreme:
a brazen, blue orchid,
unnatural,
with startling sapphire blossoms,
pokes its head
over the tops of the other plants.

Neighboring flowers—
cyclamens, primroses, pansies—
cower in its regal presence.
The orchid’s gaudy petals alone
would set it apart.
But that ethereal blue
is not of this world.

You pause, in your slow shuffle,
to admire the brightness
of the orchid’s blooms,
its garishness delights
our sun starved senses.

You, who could grow anything,
just like your mother,
would softly prod tomato seeds
with your thumb,
tucking the seeds
into beds of black loam,
in pots that marched
the length of the dining room table.
It seemed your very breath
coaxed seeds out of their casings
and caused them to send up
spindly shoots in no time.

Now you face the sun
like your seedlings,
seeking renewal
from these rays,
dreaming of a spring
you will not see.

How strange that you should pass
in this season of fertility
when life suddenly sprouts
from dank places
in unexpected bursts.

But cancer captured
you in its snare, and
death became a tangled weed,
encircling you with its tendrils.

Even the pain that made you shudder,
that collapsed your cheeks
and rendered you toothless,
couldn’t extinguish
the light in your eyes,
a blue flame,
the same blue as these orchids,
the ones you wanted to buy me
for Valentine’s Day.

Unwilling to have you
deplete your paltry purse
on this purchase,
I demurred,
realizing too late
my theft of the foolish pleasure
that would have brought you.

—Deborah Stavro Lapides
Its name suggests
Power at the table’s head,
With armrests and curved wooden slats to support
The uniformed Chief,
Surveying his crew, resting from
Navigational duties and
Dinner of fish ’n chips.

But not this chair.
Its chief occupant was
My grandfather.
Retired early, he sat—
A lot.

No captain, he.
Rather, First Mate to Grandma.
She steered the family
Through small dangers,
Alert to his back seat chiding,
Annoyed by his watchful eye.
“Hey, Ma! Water’s boiling
On the stove!”
Monarch of the checkbook,
Paying bills to the gas company,
Citing radioed weather reports from
A seat molded to his
Bony butt.

With cigarette in fingers,
He wore down
The chair’s wood grain
To a light beige,
Scanning the horizon
For neighbors passing by
His perch

On the porch. On the look-out for trouble,
Witnessing the wide world
From a chair,
Captain Jack.

—Carole Smith Berney
The Haunting
(after The Gift, by Li-Young Lee)

To hunt for her reading glasses
was my constant task
when my mother visited us.
To share with her a clipping from The New Yorker
I had to find her eyes for her.
Without them she could not read,
nor could she notice my building annoyance.

Had you been there you would have seen
me darting from room to room,
then back to her:
“Where did you last use them?
Could they be in your car?”
Passively she’d sit, as if to say,
“Bring them to me.”
You would have seen this
and thought me impatient.

And in our kitchen, helping to make
a salad to accompany dinner,
she would call out, her words
slicing the air like a sharp knife,
“How do you want me to cut the tomatoes?”
And I, the parental child, would fume,
“I don’t care, Mom!”

And now, you observe me visiting my adult daughter,
who invites me to help with dinner.
My inner voice whispers, “Should I tear the lettuce or cut it?”
Watch as I pause, remembering the sharpness of past feelings,
and decide to just do it my way.
As she shows me a story she has written,
notice how I stop myself, get up, and
search for my reading glasses.
And, as you observe her waiting for me to enter or exit the passenger seat of her car, you would be aware of how I do so slowly, and with a sigh, wondering if she is as mystified by my getting older as I was with my mom.

—Carole Smith Berney
Beyond the cupboard door a guilty pleasure sits.
Tightly wrapped in gold,
Fair-Trade
Marked.

Inside, dark as late December,
The 4 pm sinful substance
Waits.

Foil unwrapped,
A small brown square is
Snapped.

Even before it meets the lips,
Sensors flash,
Await an endorphic
Rush.

Mouth to brain: Enjoy this now!
Disappearing darkness around the tongue
Calls out:
More!

How can this be legal?

South American tribes
Gather the dark drug.
Beans of bittersweet
Intoxicant.

A bite of heaven.
A post siesta
Fix.

—Carole Smith Berney
The Awakening
(Reflections on a Day in Room 400)

He has been taming us, this little stranger.
In his darkness, his suffering, he has been changing us.
Calling on us to be truly, deeply human.
To share in his life as it ebbs away.
He is Every child, Every man.

He came from far away
Unable to see, or walk, or speak,
Hoping for a miracle to end his travail.
But it was not to be.
Not for lack of caring or skill.
Sometimes tumor cells prevail.
When caring or skill cannot.

As I watch him gently sleep, I think of the life he had.
I think of what might have been.
I think of parents saying goodbye,
Letting go of their precious boy
To give him the chance to be healed.
I think of the goodness of Jan, his sponsor,
Hoping, sacrificing, and now rocking him towards
A final Peace

This fifteen pound beautiful little stranger has
already made a difference in our world.
He has made us more compassionate,
More in touch with our own humanity
Without uttering a word.
This beautiful boy has made us feel deeply,
Reawakening feelings sometimes tucked away for self-protection.
But now, these feelings channel into making him comfortable,
Dignified, wrapped in Love,
As we midwife him towards his death.
His room is a sacred space.
To be in Room 400, to share his journey,
Is a profound privilege.
It is the essence of personhood,
Waiting with someone as they transcend this life.
To bear witness.
To walk with someone who will soon take another form.
To know that every life is important.
Even that of a fifteen pound silent stranger.
We are all connected.
We all share the same sky.
I thank you David, for our Awakening.

—Kathie Pazola

Notes from the Author:
“This was written about a very touching experience I had caring for a boy from Uganda. “David” came here for treatment for his cancer. Unfortunately when he arrived at the hospital with his American sponsor, Jan, it was evident that his disease was very advanced. In a short period of time, our focus changed from treating him, to helping him have a peaceful death. We caregivers did not know him, he could not see us or speak to us, and he was in pain. Our job was to care and comfort this little stranger, whose parents were in Uganda. We, for all intents and purposes became his family—‘the family of Man.’ He died five days after his arrival.”
First Communion

Folded hands, eyes cast down, lips pressed, candles flickering bright
Slivers of light streaking upward, splitting the purple stained glass
Golden choir voices blend and float, incense hovers suspended
State of grace, angelic face, suit of white, tie of blue
Sideway darting glances, shuffling softly one by one
The moment of possession nearing like a siren song beckoning
Wafer thin and dry, tasteless yet savors sweetly of the almighty
Taste the bread, host they said
Kneeling down, staring up, catching the priestly eyes
Sacred hands, burning tongue, taste divine, muted smile from ear to ear
Rise, turn, return, slowly walking one by one
Lips pressed, possessed, melted Christ, hands folded in reverence,
eyes flooded in reverie,
Innocent’s delight

—Bob Page
THE NIGHT JOHN LENNON DIED

It is 10:58 PM in Baltimore on Monday night Football, December 8, The Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and I am taking the elevator alone up four levels to the ground floor of Eisenhower Library at Hopkins. And I want to go straight home to sleep.

But the doors open and I can hear the high-pitched voice of a tall Asian girl who’s crying that he’s been shot as she draws a rattled crowd around her.

I walk out the door across the darkened Keyser quadrangle and follow the new moonstruck scholars rearranging their textbooks and notebooks and pocketbooks and straining toward the student union.

On the television screen I can hear a reporter solemnly intone that he has died at Roosevelt and I fall back with my beer and try to absorb the chaotic scene of city police and writhing crowds struck numb in the ghastly light of the Dakota, in the shadows of Central Park.

And it is all coming back to another day, pressing across a sun-stroked campus as I hear the splintering voice of a girl (I think her name was Nora) crying out that he’s been shot and a sophomore I do not know is gasping that he has just died at Parkland just before I dissolve into the dazed crush around the television in the student union.

Both gone now, ripped away by a bloody trigger finger.

I am walking out into the stiff night wind with my red neuropsychology handbook in one hand and a Marlboro in the other, turning my collar as I pass by the trembling streetlights on Wyman Park down to North Charles.

The clock in the foyer is chiming midnight and the elevator lifts me alone to my fourth floor rooms in Homewood and I am sinking into the plaid couch as the fugitive melodies of imagine and Camelot intermingle somewhere in my simmering brain and I just cannot get warm.

—Bob Page
At Six Forty-Five

At six forty-five in late September
the sun grabbed my collar and spun me around
to face into woods. And I still remember
how the damp leaves had littered the ground.

As sun grabbed my collar and spun me around
I saw the far meadow beyond through the cold,
beyond where damp leaves had littered the ground.
The birch in the meadow had burst into gold.

I faced the far meadow beyond through the cold
as sun hit wet grass and turned into mist.
The birch in the meadow had burst into gold
like joy in the eyes of a man I once kissed.

As sun hit the grass and turned into mist
I faced into woods. But I still remember
the joy in the eyes of a man I once kissed
at six forty-five in late September.

—Betsey Farber
The Postman
(after Ignatow)

All night long he sorted mail,
delivered telegrams by bike
down dark alleys of Marseille,
familiar with them, not afraid.
At dawn he’d stop and sleep a while,
his attic room beside the ancient port
(his mother once a fishwife there).
At noon: tartines, café au lait;
and once again back to his studio,
to where his real work would begin.
With wood he’d found washed on the shore,
with tree roots, bird skulls, unknown photos
from the street, he slowly built
a habitacle, a shaman’s memory,
a wooden triptych, twelve feet long
and seven high, he called “The Holocaust.”
At night, he would return again
into the darkened old port’s streets,
shoulders aching with heart-breaking art.
And all he’d see along the streets,
or later sorting out the mail,
was flotsam teak and fist-sized figures
he’d joined together, fixed forever—
cathedral doors of nameless saints.

—Betsey Farber

Notes from the Author:
“This poem was imitating brief sketches of workers written by David Ignatow. He
described the manual labor each performed all day, but left the reader with a sense
of the person as well. The postman I’ve described is a man I know, Pascal Verbena,
and his triptych is now in a museum in Lausanne, Switzerland. To see it online go
to: http://www.artbrut.ch/en/21004/1066/authors/verbena—pascal”
I: Sunup
Sunrise rims the lowered shade, filling jonquils with a glow of light, a cloudless day poised low at dawn. The pitcher’s white is made an iridescent gold that fades blue gray, reflected down below.

The table’s smooth as polished slate, the waiting book’s a brimming plate of pages laid out on the table for our morning coffee, as late as noon, or later if we’re able!

II: Sundown
Sunset, despite the lowered shade, finds the jonquils, turns them slow defusing images, an afterglow.

The plain white china pitcher’s made to bleed to gray as daylight fades, and leaden gray the ghost below.

The table’s cold as polished slate. The unread book’s an untouched plate of silent pages. And at the table, words unsaid have come too late to say. And we’re no longer able.

—Betsey Wells Farber
A NIGHT, A DAFFODIL, LONGFELLOW’S GRAVE

I walked alone among the dead
Their voices liquid in my ears
I tred upon no man-made path
I sought the grass, the trees, the stone
Spring blossoms sang into the night
Spirits danced on midnight’s breath
I walked in hand with ghosts undead
Our shadows merged; our steps were one;
Our halo ringed the moon.

They led me, then I climbed the stair
I knelt to touch the graven name
I placed my night-plucked flower there
I pressed soft lips upon rough stone.
The stone kissed back: kissed forth a path
That seemed to lead not anywhere
I followed it, my eyes gone blind
Until at last I found a mesh
A wire weaving life from death.
With unseen hands in mine I climbed
Until I perched upon an edge
I smiled, laughing, at the sky
The moon raised up a brow of cloud
I blew my ghosts the night’s last kiss
Felt their strength surge within my flight
As I leapt forward, into light.

—Barbara Ann Ahearn
IN PLAIN UN-SIGHT
(ON READING STEVEN JOHNSON’S
THE INVENTION OF AIR)

Our pure and simple air
Discovered was to be
As seen through insight rare
Less pure and simple air
Than a most complex affair.
An elemental sea
Our pure and simple air
Discovered was to be.

Where breathing creatures died
Deprived of vital air
A sprig of mint survived.
Where breathing creatures died
A cycle was descried
To keep all life in care
Lest breathing creatures die
Deprived of vital air.

Can we not see what’s there
Now that it’s unconcealed
A cycle in our care?
Shall we not see what’s there
A threatened ecosphere
In need of breath to heal?
Can we not see what’s there
Now that it’s unconcealed?

—Margaret Gooch

Notes from the Author:
“The book by Steven Johnson describes experiments Joseph Priestley conducted with sealed jars in the 1700s, resulting in his discovery of oxygen, an element ‘invented’ by plants.”
Unanswered Questions

Does hope incorporate fear in its deliberations?
When fear dies,
does hope become transcendent?
If so, what is its face?

Such iterations, murky and obscure,
spin far beyond the pale.
The trumpet sounds from the upper balcony.
Druids, mute, dance on.

Accepting narrowing parameters,
Do we hear tomorrow’s music?
When does hope become belief?
Do we practice the steps before we dance?
If so, how?

—Janet Trowbridge Bohlen
“Cobbler” is an Old World word for passable work, hopefully thrown together—like the dessert.

America, in Your World, machines exist that cut various lengths of nail from wound wire spools. You don’t stop there—this length is precision driven into material atop a woman’s heel, to make the mend.

Called a “Nibbler” this small machine nips off excess material, like a hawk beak might trim meat: relentless until the job’s complete.

The heel bottoms, newly nailed, newly shaped, on the paid-for pair are smoothed on two grinding belts, one coarse, one finer. The final finish: a device with a Native American name that whirls through air—a diminutive 80 grit space ship: the ultimate refinement of crude process.

America do this to us: Naumkeag our rough edges—Bring us to God.

—Suzanne O’Neill
Mandatory worship is out at Tufts
Though Goddard Chapel still stands,
A light upon the hill.
The beacon atop its carillon tower has
Neither dimmed for over-flying aircraft
Nor for Tufts’ turn toward a secular bent.

Circle the building and view
Its different angles:
Odd shaped and multicolored blocks,
Like field stone, cemented slabs of slate
In contrast to its brick red roof, as much a
Contradiction as the stone cross atop
Its belfry, the irony of a non-sectarian place.
So unlike the vestibule of learning called the Tisch,
Crouching below, where grass-lounging students
In summer frocks and cut-off jeans think
Not once they are between the rational and the divine.

Mandatory chapel is out at Tufts.
But can panes of stained glass lie, even when
Balanced between the religious and mundane?
Religion still exists for those who want to find it.
Why else would couples come to wed there once per month?

Mandatory worship is out at Tufts. Yet to paraphrase,
Lawrence Bacow* called this chapel “a sacred space,
A place to leave behind, if but awhile, the secular
For nourishment of the soul.”

—Bob Green

* Former President of Tufts University
Think about an Etruscan horseman
Like this statuette, replica of an age long past.
The horse’s mane within the horseman’s grip,
His hoofs screwed to its solid base’s tether.

Horse and rider melded together,
Suggesting for me the power of comradeship.
What thoughts perhaps devised the sculptor’s plan;
When did this Etruscan soldier know battle last?

Its rough-hewn shape suggests an ancient state,
The figure tarnished green as bronze is apt to be;
The soldier’s shield rests on his horse’s flank,
They stand upon my desk awaiting battle.

I have no knowledge to affix a date,
But Wikipedia provides a clue:
Etruscans with Romans into warfare often sank.
Perhaps they faced Horatius at the bridge to prove their mettle.

It’s not the glory of war that draws me in,
But recollection of a companion no longer mine.

—Bob Green
Ode to Formaggio’s Meatloaf

This is a paean to a simple meal: joy to the world for turkey meatloaf.
A Spanish onion grated, celery chopped, the commonness of a single egg
and one third cup of bread crumbs, tablespoons of sage and thyme
and parsley
mixed with salt and pepper to the taste. And now the piece de resistance:
defrosted spinach squeezed liquid free, two jellied tablespoons of apricot
blended in this savory bowl of meat and herbs and sweetness,
placed and formed
within a shallow dish, the oven at 350, for half the cooking time.
The orange-colored jam,
a spoon held in reserve, is spread to a transparent glaze
atop the loaf
to seal the flavor in and baked for 30 minutes more, removed
to cool for cutting.
Like the eighth Henry’s fowl, only ground, and wedded to the nectar of the gods,
the proof is in the eating, born from Formaggio’s recipe,
that’s come to grace our table.

—Bob Green

Notes from the Author:
“Formaggio’s Kitchen, located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was frequented by Julia Child, who was considered a ‘loyal customer.’”
I had been shopping on the web,
Endlessly, exhaustingly, obsessively
Through so many sweaters and jackets:
Photos, zooms, clicks, previous, brands, styles, searches, shopping carts.
All I wanted was
A front zipper,
A light fabric (warm enough, but not overheating),
Pockets,
A color that goes well with everything--perhaps tan,
Like the one I need to replace:
All stretched out and spotted from a decade of service.
Nothing was right. I give up!

Glumly heading for the gym;
Parking spaces are scarce.
But here’s one across the street, where I usually don’t park.
Lock the car, carrying my gym bag,
Wait at the cross-walk and think:
What did I just see as I passed that store window?
Some kind of weird zippered sweatshirt
With all kinds of quilted colors and holes cut in the fabric?

Well, I’ve got the time, why not take a look?
A Himalayan craft shop!
The bell tinkles behind me. “OK if I look around?”
The brown-faced man at the counter smiles, “Certainly.”
Brilliant reds, blues, oranges, purples, olives, blacks and pinks
Sing out from every shelf and hanger.
In the back, a rack with more jackets like the one in the window!
“I’ll just take a look back there.”
“Sure.”

An extra-large feels soft and sturdy.
Cotton jersey fabric, dyed red, lilac, black,
Earth green, royal blue, orange, navy, gray.
Cut and multi-layered in hand-sized squares,
Machine-sewn together with red zig-zagged seams.
Lines scored across the outer squares forming
Curled jersey lips opening to inner colored layers.
Tailored body and long full sleeves.
Hood, pull cords, pockets and sturdy black plastic zipper.
It fits; it feels cottony and comfortable.

No brand. One of a kind.
“From Nepal; European cut” the man says.
Miraculously meets my needs, I think.
My cheeks pick up the red, my eyes the green and blue.
The black suits my age (not young) and clicks with my every day black pants.
These people know how to make something really fun and comfortable.

Who made it? My imagination takes me
To the shoulders of the Himalayas.
While at the counter, the man asks for $39.
Such a paltry sum--but so it is. I admire a hanging,
“Is that a mandala?” It is, he says.
We speak of Buddhists and Hindus,
Friendly religionists in the land of his birth.
I thank him for his time and attention
And, feeling suddenly jaunty, take the jacket--

No virtual shopping cart needed--
Wrapped lightly in tissue in a fresh paper shopping bag.

—Susan Frey
FICTION
&
ESSAYS
Hold it! Why not? Giles inwardly exclaimed, noting the sign for the Jephthah Oakes House and braking for the turn. The biblical ring of the name snagged his attention, as it had on driving past that morning, and now he thought, *Might as well see.* Scattered through the area were historic homes of figures he recognized, but who was this Jephthah Oakes? Could the house have a story worth hearing? He could use the distraction, so he would just take a look at the place.

Pulling into a small graveled space inside the tree-shielded enclosure, he stepped out to bright sunshine, and cool air made suddenly cold. A dark, two-story colonial of the framed overhang type bulked before him. It sat squarely at center of its upsloping lot, its door, nine small windows, and stark brick chimney placed right where a child might draw them, its slab-like solidity a frontal assault. Jarred, Giles questioned his instant revulsion. Too hulking the structure seemed: its plainness blank-faced, its projection of dubious innocence in tones of dull olive-gray and full dark an affront. The overhang of its drab, steeply pitched roof pressed down frowningly against the upper windows of its clapboard frame. No shutters or trim gave adornment; no shade blurred its grim assertion. To one side a spindly young tree seemed to struggle for fresh green life and off to the other a hemlock and rusty cedar did nothing to lift his dismay. Oh, too harsh, too austere, a blockage thrown up in his path that said, “the past”—the past that could never be changed for the better whatever progress the future might hold. Yes, more than he had bargained for in his whim of making a stop. Giles turned to re-enter his coupe, but no—the move had been made. He would at least make a simple inquiry.

Deliberately he took the short path that led straight to the blunt, boxlike structure. “Closed” read the small sign at the bell, continuing with instruction to, “Leave name and number in mailbox for a tour: to be arranged.”

Reprieve then. Giles faced about, stepped away, and took a deep, cool breath, glad that the fine Sunday afternoon was his to enjoy at his leisure. Shaking his shoulders against renewed disquiet, he strode forward. Still, he felt compelled to glance back at the house, only to have his eye caught by the whimsical turn of a footpath to its left. The winsome bend in the path, the dip, curve, and sway of it through grasses and an overhanging willow, were evocative of a picture from a children’s storybook. It struck him as turning off toward some other sort of country though all he could see was that it led into a grove that would block the house from view.

At once the grass at his feet seemed to brighten, the patches of clover scattered through it attracting the kind of alert focus he remembered from childhood. The
late August air glowed with vibrancy. He would take the path and see where it wandered. Perhaps it would lead to a hill across the way from which, though the house would be visible, it would only be a small blotch viewed across flower-strewn meadowland. At that moment a flicker of blue, a jay, dipped to the path and cocking its head at him took one hop along it before swooping off beneath a willow to vanish from sight. Well then, have at it! Glad for reflections shut down and senses awakened, hands clasped at his back, he set off. Soon the sights and sounds of the path and his delight in exertion had him wholly engaged.

_Hey, no disappointment to his walk,_ he thought later, emerging from woods to the grassy upsweep of a hill, obviously the one visualized a while back. But what lay ahead? Under a stand of three copper beaches, a young woman was reading, plaid blanket outspread beneath the tree at center. Jephthah’s daughter, perhaps? The conjecture provoked a smile even as he cast about to remember what the biblical story was all about. Book in hand, she faced away from him, but the dark gloss of her single braid gave her an instant charm. Her full-length sundress, though flower-patterned, was prevailingly dark as well. As he drew close, she turned to glance up at him. Bright eyes, dark lashes, a smile that instantly warmed him to speech.

_Oh, if only one’s life could open like a storybook, allowing entry to a realm where all had the charm and stirring good order a fantasy tale could unfold. Even if only for an occasional break, a brief vacation from the usual, a step into one’s own true-life fantasy would be heartening So the young man must have thought on setting off through an expected play of light through windings of leafy green. Had he envisioned more than seen an arched bridge, a brook, the quicksilver brightness of a waterfall? But surely he now saw that the three copper beaches crowning the hill were magnificent in their full-girthed luxuriance. After the verdant bath he’d enjoyed, the darkness of their foliage, promising shade like sudden nightfall, would strike him as offering the refreshment he’d expect from a cold drink of water. And who was that seated in their midst? A dark-haired young woman whose sundress shimmered with a sheen of rich, shifting colors: purple, maroon, indigo._

“What a fine day! Great to be out in it. Say, know anything of that house across the way?”

“A little. I’m from the neighborhood.”

Giles let his glance roam over the sweep of countryside around them, which offered no sign of the residences noted on his drive.

“There’s a neighborhood here?”

“Most certainly.”

“Then I suppose you’d be able to tell me what’s of note about the house. It must have some importance, but I’ve never heard anyone say.”

The girl regarded him in smiling curiosity. Giles knew she must be question-
ing his lack of casual attire. Dressing respectfully for his role that morning, he had spontaneously embarked on his walk without removing his tie and jacket, although he was now carrying one, with the other stuffed in a pocket. Not overheated, he felt it unnecessary to explain. Pleasantly conscious of matching her in approximate age, he gave a swipe through his dark hair and waited with an expectant, answering smile.

“Well, there’s the story connected with its original owner,” she said. “Ruth McAllister, the guide—she’s the one to tell you. It’s rather involved.”

“When can I count on that?”

She cast him a puzzled glance. “The house is normally open these weekends, but perhaps not when you came. Like its mystique, it can seem to resist disclosure. But there’s a website for it actually, with tour hours stated there.”

“Well, I doubt I could force myself anyway. That place is hardly inviting.”

He glanced across at it. Even from a distance, it sent a small chill.

“Too gloomy!” he exclaimed, but then, at himself, gave a laugh.

“Old fellow Oakes, eh? If you won’t divulge his story, I’ll probably never know it. That could be just as well.”

Again he let his eyes take in their surroundings: the down-swept open field before them, the rough-textured pastureland the hill dropped away to in back, the wooded stretches to each side.

“But hey, how could anyone complain? Today’s the day for a walk. If only for these trees!”

Giles gazed admiringly at the immense silver trunk of the beech lifting its canopy above them.

He observed that what he had at first taken for initials carved into the beech were hieroglyphic-like figures; he couldn’t make them out. But entrancement enough in the foliage. Gazing up through the branches, he drank in the pale strawberry color the light gave to the leaves, though viewed close at hand each leaf glistened with darkness, a liquefied glaze of night.

“These leaves...”

“Did you know you could drink of them?”

“It seems so.”

“No, I mean really.”

The damsel lifted an arm to the nearest low-hanging branch and, angling it further down, tipped the leaves at its edge to the fingers of her hand cupped beneath it.

“Just try.”

She held her palm up to him. An inky phosphorescence shone within. To his further amazement, the liquid was more than appealing; it promised a draft of cold effervescence. The thirst he’d intuited earlier, now wholly for the dark beverage sparkling in her hand, rose in him full force. He bent his head and drank.
A pure shadowiness—

And now he was alone, the trees thickening around him, and another path, he was on it, or was it a path? Deep woods, at one with the night; he was lost in a glimmer of moonlight through them.

But suspicion flickered of where he was headed. An opening— he approached it and saw he was right. He stood at a high rocky outpost, below which stretched away a grand dim vista of fields and darker forests: a mazy patchwork lightened with glimmers of lakes and streams. And across that be-nighted expanse he saw it—at distance, the castle—crowning an eminence higher than his own. He must reach that far bastion and enter it, for he was expected. He was the one...

Turning to lean back against the tree trunk, he held her in thoughtful regard.

“But you have the right idea also. I hope the book you’ve chosen does this fine setting justice.”

“Just some light reading. A kind of fantasy-mystery.” She held up the paperback, showing its cover, which pictured a small bridged rivulet running through cloudy darkness. Its author was unknown to him.

“Well, I won’t interrupt you further. When I’m involved in a mystery, the suspense can be gripping enough to make me want to keep on with it.”

“Oh no hurry,” she said. “I’m not so enthralled.” Smiling, she let the invitation hang in the air.

Viewing the path ahead, Giles saw that it skirted the edge of the meadow and so would be quicker to traverse than the stretch through the woods. He was tempted to linger for more conversation. Still, a glance at his watch brought a start.

“Sadly, I have to get back,” he informed her.

She started to rise but he forestalled her by bending to take her hand in farewell. Unexpectedly, he was moved to assume, in that small act, a certain grave courtesy, even courtliness. He sought to prolong the moment.

“But tell me your name,” he requested.

“Oh, it’s Serena.”

“Serena.” He thought it over. Despite her calm manner, she impressed him as more vibrant than serene.

“And mine is Giles,” he said.

“Giles. You’re the second person to exchange names with me today. She also asked about the house and the book.”

“Another walker here?” Somehow, he felt surprised. “And her name?” he asked, just for further conversation.

“Lauren. She told me it was Lauren.”

“Goodbye, then.” He turned with a kind of salute. With a last smile, she waved him casually on, her manner gracious, but in his final view, a little remote.
Back at his automobile, conscious that haste had blurred the features remaining to his walk, Giles took a last look at the Jephthah Oakes House. Cheerless indeed, but too plain to be intimidating. When he rarely felt curious about lesser-known historical sites, what had made him even think to stop?

But the walk was well worth it, he reflected. Especially that beautiful hilltop setting across the way. And what an fair damsel! The storybook term seemed apt.

As his look held, though, he flinched. Something dismal in that dwelling still made him uneasy. With a brief questioning glance at the car beside his, the one he’d half noted on arriving, he entered his car and drove off, glad to remove the Oakes House from sight.

Ruth

Well, another Sunday of fritzing around this house while waiting to see if anyone will show up for a tour. Yet Ruth knew her complaint was only from wishing the house more esteem. She closed the cabinet drawer on the illustrations gathered up from the long display table, her usual last step before leaving. Not that she would mind shutting them away sooner, her distaste for them increasing over time.

The house might have had one visitor that day, she realized. If she had changed the sign at the door upon arriving rather than at the hour advertised for first tour, the young man she saw turning away might have heard her accustomed spiel. But just as well. She had needed to change into costume, lay out the pictures, and be sure all was set. Besides, he surely found the outdoor walk in such splendid weather invigorating, unlike time spent in the gloomy house. After all, not everyone shared her taste for that gloom as suiting one’s half-melancholy mood, although the even more forbidding exterior of the house could sometimes draw visitors to it. A number seemed thrilled to experience a brief stint in Puritan-style sternness from which their own time was blessedly free.

What’s more, by choosing the walk, her unadmitted visitor had brought her the gift of a new story idea, one that at once intrigued her. A movement of figures on the hill across the way, noted on glancing through a window, had led her to employ binoculars kept for idle-time birdwatching and see him speak to a young woman she recognized as a former visitor to the house, one curious enough to ask more questions than usual. Immediately, Ruth imagined what their conversation might be and visualized the fantasy journey to follow. Wonderful! With her previous children’s books lagging in sales, except for the story of the house that she now found partially objectionable, she needed a new writing venture to engage her. But had the conversation between the two young people lasted long enough to ground the piece in a true romantic base? And what about the first young woman, the one she had greeted on reaching the house that morning, who, refreshed from her walk on the same path, had spoken of returning for an indoor tour some other day? Was there a triangle here?
The thought provoked a laugh. *What a romantic!* And yet she knew her friends did not think her so, instead questioning why, brightly alert and pleasantly trim at mid-sixty, she had not remarried in the ten or so years following her husband’s death.

“Lyle would not want you to be alone,” they would say. Well, if she had entertained the possibility once or twice, a sense of disappointing difference had convinced her that, unless by surprise, marriage could only mean for her the full and happy years shared with Lyle. What’s more, an absorption in writing, expressed in so scattered a way in her married years, had been bringing increased satisfaction. What did it matter that her children’s books had found a quite limited readership? At least she had published several in recent years and seen her writing talent develop.

Well, she would explore where this nascent story might lead. But now she gazed around her, reluctant as ever to depart. It pleased her to see the house kept spotlessly clean, just as she kept her own home, its plank floors swept and mopped, its plain oaken tables, chairs, and cabinets well-dusted, its small windows washed – at least from the inside, its every stolid furnishing strictly in place. It pleased her more that the rooms seemed clouded, as if steeped in a haze of the past. The dimness of natural light contributed to the dully filmed over impression, as did the dark wood moldings and ashy tinge of the walls, with the sense of thick bolstering against winter’s cold. The sparse decor, no embellishment in sight, did nothing to lessen the cheerless effect. Only the dully glowing sheen of pewter knives, plates, and tankards set out on a low dining table leant a trace of brightness to her view.

And yet the building’s dim interior soothed her mood. Elsewhere she might be brisk, cheerfully capable, sensibly getting on with her life. Besides relishing her writing pursuits, she delighted in telephone and actual visits with children and grandchildren living away, in gardening work, gallery visits, and especially her involvement with the historical society overseeing the Jephthah Oakes House. She liked to indulge other tastes, wishes, and quietly pursued interests just as she chose. She particularly enjoyed her partial curatorship of the house, notably the duty of leading visitors through it. But lingering here in a setting hospitable to somber emotions, she could allow a still-poignant sense of loss its renewed recognition. And here she had company, not just from the figures who gazed out from parlor-wall portraits. For more than one widow had lived in this house, some widowed quite early. The one she now called to mind was Martha, Judge Oakes’s sister, whose husband had not reached forty at his death and whose only child, a son, had left home in his twenties, rarely to be heard of again.

Ruth made a quick change of clothing and checked for her belongings. But for now she had a more cheerful theme in the promising germ of a story to mull over. Could this tale be the one to outshine all the rest? The thought was not new, nor was its excitement. With a smiling farewell glance, she strode to the door. *Let time, inspiration, and the work to come tell!*
Experiencing “La Dolce Vita”

by Fran Lanouette

The Alitalia flight touched down in Rome at 7:30 a.m., though my body was telling me it was 1:30 a.m. However, tired as I was, the anticipation of spending two weeks in Italy energized me and I soon overcame my fatigue. My vacation was planned as a way to reacquaint myself with the city and country I love and I was going to get started immediately.

My taxi left me at the front door of Via Labicana 16 where I was greeted by the owners of the apartment I was renting along with a friend who would arrive later by train from Tuscany. Paola and Umberto were warm and welcoming and I was delighted to find that the apartment was immaculate, comfortable, well-equipped and blessedly air-conditioned against the 90 degree outside temperature.

I spent most of the rest of the day settling in and getting to know the neighborhood, a bustling collection of trattorias, restaurants, tobacco shops, fruit and veggie stands, a small but convenient supermarket and other retail shops. It was comforting to know there were two ATM’s around the corner, stops for five different bus routes outside the front door and two major cathedrals within five blocks in each direction, Santa Maria Maggiore and San Giovanni in Laterano. Clearly my financial, transportation, culinary and spiritual needs were going to be well taken care of. And as if that were not enough, the ultimate attraction for me, a lifelong Classicist, was that the Colosseum, Roman Forum and other brilliant antiquities were just down the street. We passed the area every day in our travels.

When my friend arrived and had settled in we explored the restaurants in the neighborhood and in the course of our 8 days in Rome tried as many as we could. We were not disappointed once….well maybe once. Our particular favorite was Hostaria del Buongustaio where the owner, Max, proclaimed himself to be the “president of wine in Rome.” He sells only the wine he makes and it was quite good, one red, one white, one pink. The food did not disappoint either, my friend declaring her linguine with mussels the best she had ever eaten and I devouring my veal al limone without taking time to breathe!

With the convenience of the local buses at our door we were able to get an early start each day (except for day 1 when I unintentionally slept until 9:30!), giving us some cooler weather for a couple of hours and assuring us that we would
see all we wanted to see. The first day we took the #110 ATAC bus, an open-air, hop-on/hop-off tour, so Kathy, a newbie to Rome, could get oriented and I could get re-oriented. The overview worked really well for helping us set our goals for the week.

We wisely pre-purchased our tickets to the Vatican and Sistine Chapel so we could avoid the huge, blocks-long entry line. No matter how many times I’ve seen the beauties they don’t fail to inspire awe. We went to the Borghese on Sunday (probably not the best idea), but they were sold out until Tuesday. We bought tickets for then and went to Plan B, the Piazza Navona, Trevi Fountain and the Pantheon. It was there that we had an unexpectedly thrilling experience. The Ansan City Choir from South Korea was performing a concert, the first time I had ever heard music in the Pantheon. Dressed in native costumes and with voices of angels echoing from the dome, they were truly an inspiration.

The rest of our week saw us climbing all seven hills, strolling Trastevere and Tiber Island, descending the Spanish Steps and avoiding the designer stores along the Via Condotti, getting lost in the Pincio/Piazza del Popolo area, visiting churches to cool off and to view the phenomenal art, taking “hydration” breaks at neighborhood bars and trattorias and doing a lot of people watching.

The Italians are loud, passionate, always entertaining, sometimes infuriating and drive like madmen and I can think of no city that better suits them than Rome which is loud, passionate, always entertaining and sometimes infuriating.

We left Rome after 8 days for a “relaxing” trip to the Amalfi Coast. After a longer-than-planned stay at the train station in Napoli waiting for our ride we were driven to our apartment in Sorrento. Though not as spacious or convenient as the one in Rome it was perfectly suitable for our needs and allowed us to explore the local beach (rocky) and take tours of Capri/Anacapri, Positano, Amalfi and Ravello. Our reward for hiking down into Positano was a swim in the Mediterranean and a delicious lunch beachside at Chez Black. We fortunately discovered a local mini-bus that drove us back to the main road for our bus back to Sorrento. On the return we had another unexpected treat when we were stopped for about 30 minutes to allow access for a procession of most of the townspeople to reach an outdoor altar for a Mass celebrating the feast of the Sacred Heart.

Our last night was spent back in Rome at a small hotel near the train station. We decided to stay in and relax before our flight home so we finished up the food and wine we had carried with us in our room and made it an early night. It turned out to be an excellent idea since our flight home was grueling. We spent two hours in the plane on the tarmac because of an engine problem and then, thanks to the jetstream, nine hours in the air. But even that ordeal didn’t dampen my spirits or alter the wonderful memories I have of this trip to Bell’Italia: the people, the beauty, the food, the wine, truly “La Dolce Vita.”
“Where are you, Mom?”

There was a brief silence on the other end of the line. “On Rockville Pike. I think.”

He paused. “But you were supposed to be in Bethesda getting your tires rotated.”

“I know,” Althea said after a moment. “I just got turned around. I’ll go to the car shop and then head home.” She sounded like her old self, determined.

“Okay,” Adam said as he hung up. This was not like his mother, to get lost. Granted, she sometimes made a wrong turn or got into the wrong lane, but that had been rare and she usually corrected the error quickly. Sometimes she mixed up her words a little or wrote down phone numbers wrong. No big deal. She was eighty-eight and entitled to a few vagaries. But getting lost while driving a car was something else again. He called his sister in Oakland and reported the latest maternal escapade.

“Take away her keys,” his sibling said promptly.

“I can’t do that. Not yet.” He paused. “She’s the only one among her friends who still drives. She takes them on errands and to all their doctors’ appointments.”

Adam thought about his feisty mother. He had known her (of course) all his life: as an aggressive skier, as the chair of various school boards. Finally, when the kids had gone off to boarding school, to their vast pride, she became a student again herself. She completed an MA in international relations and got a well-paid analyst’s job at a Washington think tank. She was fifty-five.

Now she was thirty-three years older. For some time Adam had known her eyesight was failing. Now he wondered about her mind, but he was reluctant to bring it up. At fifty-five he was still her child; she had always been in charge. Always there to wipe away tears, to car pool, to help him choose college courses, to guide him in his career. He remembered once when he cost his team of ten year olds the state ice-hockey championship because of a missed goal, she had intoned as he moped: “What is, is. Suck it up.” This was her mantra, and she lived by it. (As she grew older, others often called her a Tough Old Bird.)

“Get her out of her apartment,” urged the faraway sister. “Take her in. Coddle her.”

Easier said than done, thought Adam. On the other hand, he and his wife had bought the large house in Chevy Chase with just such a scenario in mind. It had what they call an “in-law’s suite” just off the kitchen where Althea could come and go as she liked, but under their eye.

Adam pondered this.

“I’ll try.” They hung up.
My close friends called me “Murf” while I was growing up. “Murf” was a nick name for Murphy, which is undisputedly an Irish name. The fact is I am only half Irish. My grandparents on my father’s side, James and Catherine were born in Ireland and immigrated to the United States in the early 1900’s. I do not know a lot about the Murphys. My mother divorced my father when I was a toddler leaving her with my sister and me to raise by herself. I can vaguely remember my father visiting us when I was two or three years old, but I had no contact with him as I grew up. My father had a brother, James and two sisters, Catherine and Mary. I remember James and his family visiting us once when I was a child. He and his children had bright red Irish hair. I do not remember ever meeting my father’s parents or Catherine or Mary. My mother told me that Catherine and Mary never married and were drunks like my father.

My mother was also an immigrant. She left her birth place in Shelburne, Nova Scotia when she was in her late teens or early twenties. She never told me why. I suspect it was a young person’s dream of a better life that drove her to leave. She told me that her ancestors were from England and she thought she was from nobility, but I have no evidence that this is true. Her parents Thomas and Athena Acker had five children that reached adulthood, two boys, Harold and Burns, and three girls; Alva, Catherine, and Mary. Alva was my mother. They all left for Massachusetts except Mary who stayed in Nova Scotia, married and had a family. There was another child, a boy named Thomas, if I remember right, that drowned when he was two or three years old. My mother never talked about the circumstances of his death. Alva told me that her father was a railroad worker and a part time fisherman; although he did not know how to swim. My grandparents on the Acker side died before I was born, Thomas in 1935 and Athena in February, 1946. I was born in June 12, 1946. The Ackers go back five generations in Nova Scotia. My mother’s ancestors John B. Acker and Ester Crank arrived in Shelburne in 1783 from New York. They were loyal to the king and sought refuse from the American rebels.

I lived in Germantown in Quincy, Massachusetts as a youth, a predominantly Catholic neighbor hood. The local parish was St. Boniface. With the name Murphy, I fit well into the neighborhood culture. Most every one assumed I was Catholic. I belonged to the Boy Scout troop affiliated with the local Catholic Church. As a Boy Scout I attended many Catholic services as a youth, but never took communion because I was not a church member. My mother brought us up as Protestants. We first joined the local Nazarene church and later joined Bethany Congregational Church in Quincy Square.
In the spring of 1995 my wife Helen and I had an opportunity to visit Nova Scotia. After attending a conference in Boston we drove the rental car to Bar Harbor, Maine. From there we took the six hour ferry ride to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. We drove from Yarmouth to Shelburne, my mother’s birth place. We were on a tight schedule and could only stay in Shelburne one day. Shelburne harbor had the look and feel of the 1600’s because of its natural wooded landscape, harbor and tree line without the intrusion of modern buildings. The year before we visited the movie “The Scarlet Letter” was filmed in Shelburne because of its pristine view of the harbor. We happened upon a two story wooden building that housed the Shelburne County Genealogical Society. We walk up the steps to the second level and went inside where we met an older woman in her sixties. We told her that my mother was an Acker and was born in Shelburne. She was very interested in the Ackers. We arrived on a Tuesday and the lady said that the genealogical society was hosting a reception for the Acker descendants on Thursday. Our schedule did not allow us to stay but we did learn about the Acker family tree. We reviewed and updated the information on my mother and her immediate family for the society records. For fifteen dollars the society sent us the Acker genealogy back to the 1700’s.

As I grew up my Irish heritage was something that interested me. What was Ireland like? Why did my grandparents leave Ireland? Where did they live in Ireland? What did they do there for a living? How has my Irish heritage affected my life? I read Frank McCourt’s memoir, *Angela’s Ashes*, and have visions that the abject poverty described in his book might be why the Murphy’s left Ireland for America. The book also describes a culture that revolves around the tavern and drinking. I believe the tavern and drinking is also part of the Murphy heritage.

Helen and I are retired now and have the time to complete my journey back in time to understand my ancestry. We had planned a trip to Ireland several years before, but life got in the way. We had plane tickets and booked with a tour group, but I lost my job and there were other priories. As an Irish American I need to understand my past so my children and their children, Helen and I can appreciate our heritage as our lives moves forward.

This past March 29, 2009 was our fortieth wedding anniversary. I attribute the longevity of our partnership primarily to Helen’s tolerance. We had reason to celebrate and had the time and the money so we planned our trip to Ireland. A colleague of mine had taken a coach tour of Ireland a couple of years ago and strongly recommended the tour group that we went with. The tour was thirteen days from departure to the return home. We left sunny Punta Gorda, Florida for Shannon, Ireland on May 9. We flew coach and were crowded in the middle and window seats and could only cat nap. After six hours in the air we could see the emerald isle below us. As we approached the runway at Shannon airport we were overwhelmed with how green the country side was.
We were met by the bus driver, Tom Flannigan, after retrieving our luggage, well, almost all our luggage. My bag did not make the trip. The airline had sent the bag to Shannon by way of San Diego. It could have been worse. It could have been Helen’s bag. We met up with Ken O’Connor, our tour director, at the bus. We told him about the lost bag and he said he would take care of it. “You must have flown Delta, they lose at least one bag every tour.” He was right, we did fly Delta. The lost bag found us several hotels down the road.

The visit was all that I had hoped it would be. The bus trip started at the Bunratty Castle near Shannon and continued clockwise around the coast of Ireland and Northern Ireland arriving back to Shannon thirteen days later. There are many lasting memories including the Cliffs Of Moher, Belfast and Saint Patrick’s grave, Dublin and the Guinness Brewery, and the Irish singing and dancing at the Merry Ploughboy Pub in Dublin. At the Trinity College in Dublin I purchased the Murphy code of arms and a short history of the Murphy family. I learned that the family name Murphy is derived from the Gaelic personal name “Murchadh,” which is composed of the elements “muir,” meaning sea and “cadh,” meaning warrior. I grew up by the sea in Germantown, but cannot relate to being a warrior. The surname Murphy is the most common name in Ireland. Although there are Murphy’s throughout Ireland, there are many living in County Cork. Perhaps that is where my grandparents had lived.

I was impressed by the beauty and history of Ireland. The government is socialistic now and provides for its citizens. Perhaps if the socialistic government had existed in the early twentieth century, my grandparents may never have left and I would not have become a Canadian Irish American.
A dreary rainy day finally cleared a bit at last, so I went to the dam to see the sun set over the Upper Mystic Lake. The lake was teeming with herring come from the ocean to spawn. Seagulls, black crowned night herons, Canada geese were all finishing up for the day. Just a few people were about.

A woman with dark blue eyes and dark blond hair came to talk to me, startling me just by looking so much like my sister, dead five years now, from Alzheimer’s. We agreed the evening was a fine one. I didn’t know what to say to her, about my sister, so I didn’t say anything. It hurt and pleased me at the same time, to have her standing talking to me. Boo and I were ‘Irish twins’, and she would have loved the lake, the dam, the birds, the herring. We had traveled together to the Caribbean, to Utah, canoed the Green River for four days with her husband and friends.

The woman left with her friends. I settled into drawing the birds, my sketchpad resting on the dam’s iron railing. Four Canada geese families, about 40 in all, traveled from the grassy bank below the dam, down to the water, past the dam and around the boats moored on the other side, then continued on down to their resting place. Night was very slowly coming on. The vision of Boo was still with me.

After a while I was interrupted by a man who turned out to be a regular fisherman on the lake. We were the only ones left at the dam now. We shook hands, introduced ourselves and talked. I showed him the sketches I had made. He recognized a boathouse I had drawn one day but hadn’t labeled and couldn’t remember. He was waiting for friends to join him at dusk. As we talked he would bump into me sometimes, or touch my shoulder, but didn’t seem drunk, just a little off kilter.

I’ve been feeling off kilter too, newly retired and trying to figure out how to do it--be retired. I’ve lost my work companions, but haven’t found replacements. I liked talking with him, but after a while, a little uncomfortable alone with a stranger in the near dark, I told him I had to go. I left him waiting for his friends.

I know my sister would have stayed to talk, maybe kept him company till his friends came. We were different that way. She wouldn’t have thought of being hassled, or even mugged. She lived in a world where people could be like puppies, tumbling about and bumping and nipping and frolicking together. She had many friends. Our mother said she was like a warm fire in the fireplace.

I follow the rules I made a long time ago, about being careful not to get hurt and watching out for the edge you might drop off of. Really, though, there’s not so much to risk, since I’ve lived most of my life already! I imagine being like Boo, smiling and laughing and jumping into life. Just shed my old skin like the snakes we collected as kids. Sprout new legs the way our polliwogs did, transforming from
water to land animals. Swimming upstream against my cautious nature, who knows what might happen.

Herring eggs hatch in the Upper Mystic, later swim to the ocean, come back to spawn each spring for a few years, going back to the ocean each year, until their time is done. The dam has a fish ladder to help them over it. Maybe I can construct a ladder of many small steps up and over. Maybe I just have to figure out the steps.
Several years ago, I accepted an assignment to research the genealogy of a bi-racial family from Mississippi and Louisiana for a theatrical production that would illustrate the crossing of racial and religious boundaries. I had never been to the South, and had never researched an African American family, let alone one that connected to a white landowner and a Jewish merchant. For 20 years, I have been addicted to finding American history in the stories of ordinary lives. I like poking around in old records, piecing together family stories, unlocking mysteries and secrets, even exposing family legends for the half-truths they usually are. I started with my own New England ancestors who had arrived in the 17th century and moved steadily west. I moved on to my husband’s immigrant ancestors, Jews who came from Bavaria in the mid-19th century and faced all the problems of assimilation into American culture and life. Soon, I was following the stories of 19th century women who had broken through the gender barriers. I had my frustrations and dead ends. Genealogists remember forever the elusive ancestor. Mine is my French great-great-great grandfather whose parents were massacred on St. Dominique in the mulatto uprising during the French Revolution. He was rescued, adopted by a French sea captain, and given a new name. His daughter, Julia, whose name I carry, was last seen in New Orleans in 1870.

Tracing a family whose stories of black-white relations began post slavery, and progressed through emancipation and emigration to the North was an exciting challenge. I knew that there was great interest in mixed race persons as the latest group to be identified in the census. Although I knew some of the difficulties—the lack of records and missing surnames— I felt confident that I would uncover something new and illuminating, especially about relations between Jews and former slaves, about which there was little written history. Yet, looking back, I realize that I, like many other Yankees, came to the assignment full of preconceptions and prejudices. In my case, I was strongly influenced by the stories of my great-great grandfather, a fiery abolitionist who, as an agent on the Underground Railroad had hidden fugitive slaves.

The deep South was an unexpected culture shock. Mississippi was hot and humid with a stillness that seemed smothering. Trees and vegetation had grown over what used to be fields of cotton. Moss hung from the trees, dusty dirt roads led into the back country where some of the old shave shacks still stood silent, decaying and overgrown. Deteriorating wooden crosses, the name of the dead almost obliterated, marked the graves of slaves and former slaves. Hidden on land still known by its antebellum plantation name, the crosses themselves will soon vanish, rendering the lives and deaths of these Afro-Indians even more invisible. Once in
a while there was a tree lined avenue leading to a beautiful, but slightly rundown former plantation home. Nothing seemed to move, even the mighty Mississippi River. In the county court house, the first African American to be elected as county clerk presided over a staff of African Americans, including convicts who acted as file clerks. Despite the fact that everyone, white and black, was cordial and in some cases, very helpful, there was a certain edginess to the atmosphere, a sense that the overgrown landscape hid secrets and unspoken truths that could not be uncovered, a sense that neither black nor white would be truly candid with an outsider. Relationships, both old and new, seemed as tangled as the moss hanging from the trees. I felt like the intruder that I was.

One evening sitting in a restaurant overlooking the Mississippi, River, I listened as the Southern and Northern family members told stories in which, much to my surprise, skin color and hair texture played an important role. The slave woman, whose liaison with a Jewish merchant after the Civil War produced the first mulatto children, was apparently a dark skinned woman whose most prominent feature was her long straight black hair, casually referred to as, “Indian” hair. “Indian?” That was a surprise I had not expected. Suddenly, this family was tri-racial, a fact that the southerners seemed to take for granted. Most puzzling was that no one, except for me and my colleague, seemed to be curious about the origins of such a mixture. The Indian heritage was not only taken for granted but rendered so commonplace as to be almost invisible.

The following day, one of the relatives miraculously produced a photograph of the father of the slave woman. Photographs of former slaves are rare. Here was a dignified black man, clad in coat and tie, with high cheekbones and kinky hair. No one seemed to notice or care that he looked Indian. I fled to my books. Who were the Indians that had populated this place? When did they leave? Why did they leave? Could any of them have fathered or mothered this strong looking black man? The full story of the Trail of Tears was new information to me. I had never heard of the Choctaws, the Indians of this region of the country who had left following a treaty of 1836. Something had clearly been left out of my understanding of southern history, perhaps left out of my western oriented history books. Worse, it seemed that even African Americans looked down upon, or at the very least ignored the Indians. How could one ever trace this heritage, if no one black or white seemed to care? Who were this man’s Indian ancestors who had left only their straight hair and high cheekbones as reminders that once there had been a rich and complex life, with multiple relations that crossed so many boundaries in Mississippi and Louisiana. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall describes this “tradition of racial openness” set down in colonial Louisiana as one “that could never be entirely repressed.”

Even though the descendants showed little interest in tracing this heritage, I didn’t want to give up. I used every fact that I knew to make the leap back in time, hoping to have a breakthrough. According to the censuses, the male former slave
had been born in 1833 in Mississippi. The Choctaw had left in 1836 so it was possible that one of his parents was Indian. Then I discovered that he claimed his mother was born in Virginia and his father in New Jersey. And there were vague memories among the descendants that his family had originally come from Maryland or somewhere “back east.” This heritage was most unusual. Most of his neighbors, former slaves and their descendants were born in Mississippi. New Jersey? Were there Indians there mixing with African Americans as late as the 1830’s? Virginia? Maryland? If these were indeed Afro-Indians, how did they become slaves in Mississippi? I had no names, no connections, no birth or death certificates in the time when blacks were as invisible as Indians. I had only one friend who knew and celebrated her tri-racial heritage. Every two years she went to a family reunion in Georgia. She was light skinned and straight haired, and although she was proud of her Cherokee heritage, she knew more about her Irish grandfather and ex-slave grandmother than she did about the Indian ancestors. Suddenly her history seemed even more interesting. I began to think there were many more tri-racial descendants in America than anyone cared to acknowledge.

In the end, I knew I had come to a dead end in my research and I felt sad and unfinished. I had uncovered some mysteries and secrets, and exploded a few family myths. I had helped introduce the Jewish descendants to their African American cousins, puzzled that the mixed race group was interested in pursuing the Jewish connection but not in tracing their Indian component. I was saddened that the other white descendants refused to admit what they and every mixed race African American knew— that their grandfather had sired two families, one white and one black. Finding the Indian link was not only impossible and uninteresting to all, but if the white family was threatened by a story that they knew, how threatened would they feel receiving this news about Indian blood? I began to think of this genealogical trail as another kind of a “Trail of Tears”— a trail on which men, women and children had walked and talked, where connections, both loving and hateful, had been played out, severed and then disappeared. All that was left was a photograph of an ordinary African American slave and the appearance in every generation of a high cheek boned, straight haired descendant. Invisible roots? Not entirely.


**Notes from the Author:**

“This piece was written for Terry Straus’s book on Black Indians. 2004.”
Defining the problem is the critical and difficult part, because once all Americans can agree on what kind of a society they want, I believe the solution becomes fairly straightforward.

Aspects of the Drug “Problem”

First ... The demand side. Since the beginning of time, humans have consumed stimulants, intoxicants and hallucinogens. Andeans have chewed coca leaves, Mesopotamians consumed opium poppies (the “joy plant”) in 3400 B.C., the Chinese used cannabis to cure rheumatism in 2700 B.C., the Persians smoked hashish in the 12th century, native Indians ate peyote in ceremonies, the most primitive villages have their basic grain alcohol and homemade beer, Freud prescribed cocaine for depression, suburbanites are abusing prescription pain killers, the Germans have their beer halls, and Europeans in general seem to smoke like crazy. I would conclude that consuming these things is a basic part of human nature. It’s also human nature to experiment with different substances. The fact is the demand for drugs will always be there.

Why do people want to be stimulated or get intoxicated? For some it’s part of their culture’s normal social activities or ceremonies. For young people it may be peer pressure or the urge to rebel. I believe some people inherit an “addictive personality” from their parents. Some people seek escape from a bad family or work life, or don’t have coping skills, or live in poverty and don’t see a way out. This is human nature.

You can pass laws against drug sales and consumption, but there’s no evidence that law enforcement ever changes usage. Alcohol prohibition just made people go to backyard stills, bathtub gin, or homemade beer. Prohibition doesn’t work. It just leads to the rise of underground organized crime entrepreneurs who will fill the demand.

It’s interesting that most illegal drugs have medicinal properties. Cannabis can treat M.S., cancer, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, nausea, etc. and relieve pain. Coca is a stimulant that can relieve altitude sickness and when used in Coke it was the original energy drink. Opium poppies relieve pain and are used in Morphine. Amphetamines are used in No-Doz to keep people awake. So, if there’s inherent good in most substances, what’s the problem?
• Addiction or even death from overdose—if you use too much or too high a concentration of some substances.
• Lack of knowledge. People can get into trouble if they experiment with substances they know nothing about.
• Lack of safety regulations. When you buy something on the street, you have no idea what the concentration is or what impurities or poisons it contains.

For the most part, these are very solvable problems.

You can minimize addiction and treat it, but 0.1 percent of a population will become addicted. People can become addicted due to ignorance, bad luck, or because their particular body has low tolerance for a specific substance. Some drugs like meth, cocaine, heroin, cigarettes, prescription pain killers, and alcohol can be physically addictive, while others like cannabis can be psychologically addictive.

Addiction is a problem for society because it leads to lost work hours, lost jobs, crime, prostitution, and destroyed families. So, if we can come up with the money, shouldn’t one of our goals be to prevent and treat addiction, so people can be productive citizens? Plus, crime would decrease, police costs would drop, and citizens would be safer.

Americans have the freedom to become addicted to alcohol, cigarettes, and prescription opiate-derived pain pills. So shouldn’t all adults have the freedom to consume any intoxicant they want in the privacy of their property as long as they don’t harm others? Shouldn’t that be a basic right? Would drug decriminalization or legalization lead to increased drug use? Not if it’s done right. Portugal decriminalized all drugs in 2001, and their most popular drugs are cannabis and alcohol. After legalization, cannabis use went up slightly, and there is no data, but I assume alcohol sales dropped slightly. Hard drug usage declined 50 percent—due to aggressive and free addiction treatment programs.

Second ... The U.S. spends over $40B per year on eradication and interdiction, plus about $14B for federal, state and local drug law enforcement, plus $40B to house drug related prisoners (about half of 2 million prisoners x $40,000/year), and billions for the part of the judicial system that is dealing with drug crimes. The stated purpose of this activity is to reduce the quality and quantity of meth, cannabis, heroin, and cocaine that is reaching U.S. end users, and this was also expected to lead to an increase in drug prices. By those criteria, this has been a total waste of money, since drug quality and quantity are up and prices are down.

The other aspect of this “war on drugs” is that it’s been a war on average Americans. For the victimless act of possessing and using drugs you can become a convicted felon and be given a stiff, minimum sentence. So, instead of treating users
as patients, we punish them as criminals. Not only is this a waste of police and court resources, but when you add in the unintended or intended racism, it has destroyed whole minority communities.

Clearly the criminal justice/police/prison industrial complex is too powerful, has the wrong incentives, and their actions are causing genocide among blacks, minorities and poor Americans:

- Police get overtime pay for increased arrests; drug arrests are the easiest ones to make; and the black community is the easiest place to make them. Police can keep property they seize.
- 13 percent of both the black and white populations use crack, but 90 percent of those arrested are blacks.
- Most prosecutors are white and pursue blacks 16 times more than whites. Whites are offered better plea bargain deals. Prosecutors can choose all-white juries. Black felons can’t be jurors.
- Prison towns and prison companies both make more money if more people are arrested.
- Most people who become convicted drug felons lose the right to vote, or live in public housing, or get loans, or even get a job. And most don’t get skills training in prison. Some weren’t even guilty.

Third ... We are concerned about young people using drugs. Their brains aren’t fully formed and in extreme cases drugs could prevent brains from fully forming. Also, immaturity can lead to poor decision making, susceptibility to peer pressure, and urge to rebel. We also know they now have access to any drug they want through the “local dealer”, their parents, or their friend’s parents. 20 percent of 12 to 17 year olds smoke cigarettes. We also know we can’t keep them from experimenting. And they’ll try something because it’s illegal. So, what’s our realistic goal here? (the same goal applies to adults)

- Have healthy, productive citizens who use drugs safely and moderately
- Keep them from becoming addicted
- Make sure their brains fully develop
- Make sure they don’t start selling drugs or committing crimes to pay for drugs
- Make sure they don’t engage in unsafe sex or driving while under the influence
- Introduce intoxicants to youth in a controlled way

As we’ll see, the solution basically comes down to education, a way out of poverty, and good parenting.
Fourth ... Injection drug use accounts for 1/3 of all new HIV infections outside sub Saharan Africa. This could be prevented by addiction treatment and needle exchange programs.

Fifth ... The $400B/year worldwide and $70B U.S. underground drug revenue has a major negative impact on the real economy. The $100B/year spent on U.S. DEA/justice/police/prison activities sucks money out of federal and state budgets that could be better invested. Courts are clogged with drug cases, delaying other cases. Police aren’t spending enough time on violent crime. Nationally, we are losing $7B/year in cannabis sales tax if it was taxed like alcohol. We are losing the economic activity drug prisoners could be producing. We would like to destroy the underground drug economy.

Sixth ... There has been a large growth in non-medical use of prescription pills. Most are opiate pain relievers and amphetamine stimulants like Ritalin. In 2009, one third of people over 12 who first used drugs began with prescription pills. They think it’s safer than underground drugs. In 2007, unintended overdose deaths were 12000 from pills, 6000 from cocaine and 2000 from heroin.

Seventh ... In 2010 the government prohibited the scientific study of the effects of “illegal” drugs. DEA won’t even allow growing cannabis for study. The only NIH study was on synthetic THC.

Eighth ... Many South and Central American countries are becoming failed states due to all the narcotic-related violence and the fact that the traffickers are buying off police and politicians.

Ninth ... Cannabis is not a dangerous drug and is not even physically addictive. In 2011, 750,000 Americans were arrested for cannabis, which was 50 percent of all drug arrests. 87 percent of cannabis arrests were for personal possession. 60 percent of Mexico’s $13.6B drug income, or $8.6B, comes from cannabis.

The Proposed Solution

If experimenting with intoxicants is part of human nature and if there is zero evidence that police enforcement of laws prohibiting the use of drugs will decrease the usage of drugs, then it makes sense to immediately decriminalize the use of all drugs. Decriminalization means we will treat drug users as normal citizens or patients, not criminals. Users will no longer be stigmatized as undesirables or deviants to be shunned or locked up. It also means we will release all prisoners who are now locked up for using drugs. It will also begin to end the genocide experienced by minority and poor communities. And it will save tax payers the tens of billions per year now wasted on prisons, court time and police activity.

If we wish to decrease the usage of “hard” drugs like cocaine, meth, heroin, prescription opium derivatives, and alcohol, the only proven way to do that is with
free medical addiction intervention and detox programs. This will also reduce the number of AIDS cases and reduce the mostly theft crime associated with getting the money to feed addictions. The billions saved from decriminalization would cover the cost.

If we wish to keep our young people, and adults, from excessively using drugs to the point where they become dependent, the best way to do that is through honest education on the properties and risks associated with all drugs—including cigarettes, alcohol, and prescription pills.

If we wish to end the vast, violent, criminal, underground economy associated with producing, importing, distributing and selling illicit drugs, the only way to do that is by legalizing the sale of all drugs. Eventually, as the underground markets disappear, we will be able to save the tens of billions of dollars per year that we now spend on the DEA and other enforcement and judicial activities. These savings plus the tax revenue from drug sales can be used for drug research, regulation and education. Selling drugs in specific concentrations will also make drug consumption much safer. And isn’t it hypocritical to now allow some addictive drugs to be legal while others remain illegal? It makes sense to start the legalization process with relatively benign cannabis and then eventually expand to all drugs as we get more experience.

The Specific Proposal

Steps at the national level:

**First ...** Immediately begin NIH studies and scientific drug trials on cannabis, cocaine, alcohol, meth, heroin, basic poppy paste, etc. The goal is to determine the medicinal, intoxication, and negative effects at each of several concentration levels. For example, from a previous study on synthetic THC they found that a concentration of 2.5 -3 percent was ideal for pain relief. Also, compare one drug to another, e.g. 10mg synthetic THC= 60mg codeine for pain. Also determine psychiatric effects and withdrawal period (for THC it’s about 48 hours). It’s also critical that there be a fast response to study all new drugs that come along. The information from the studies will be used to determine what concentration levels should be offered for retail sale, what info on effects will be put on the packaging, and what objective, scientific, truthful information will be used in our education programs (it will be useless if it’s not credible).

**Second ...** Immediately change the federal laws so that: end users and small dealers of all drugs will not be arrested or prosecuted; present users in prison will be released and all related felony convictions will be erased; and make it clear that the government will not interfere with the states, which would determine all decriminalization/legalization and taxation regulations.
Third ... Continue interdiction activities until such time as a drug becomes a legally imported product and has import taxes and tariffs applied.

Fourth ... Federal law enforcement will only go after underground traffickers and major distributors, not small dealers and users.

Fifth ... If Obamacare is implemented properly, there could be many local, low overhead clinics set up. These could be used for disease prevention and for treatment of chronic conditions like diabetes. They would also be designed for cost effective early intervention and treatment of drug addiction.

Sixth ... Change police and prosecutor incentives so they don’t overly target minorities.

Seventh ... Reduce income inequality in the U.S. since that’s a major driver of drug use.

Steps at the state level:

Step 1 ... Each state decides what its drug policy will be. Once one state comes up with an effective one the other states would likely follow (like what would happen if states were allowed to offer single payer healthcare). For now, states should continue their experiment with cannabis legalization. Here’s my proposed variation on the Colorado and Washington plans:

• Regulate cannabis like alcohol. The existing alcohol board does the following: it licenses growers, processors and stores, it sets the same sales tax as on alcohol (or cigarettes?), and it regulates the system. Medicinal cannabis would be taxed like other medicines.

• Voters would decide whether to set up state run “intoxication stores,” using the New Hampshire liquor store model, or allow private stores. The store could sell hard liquor, cigarettes, recreational cannabis, paraphernalia, medicinal cannabis and any future drug that was legalized.

• Packaging would be tamperproof, with standardized label and health facts.

• Since the goal is to stabilize or reduce the use of any legalized drug, drug branding and advertising must be forbidden—since these are known to increase demand. Hopefully that would keep out big tobacco and big pharma.

• Hemp would be legalized and treated like any industrial product.

• 21 year old individuals could possess 1 ounce of cannabis in public, or 10 days supply at home, or one pound of infused product, but not use it in public or grow their own without a special hardship or medical permit. Harming others, such as by driving under the influence, would result in harsh penalties such as loss of license or state hard labor duty proportional
to the harm. If found with a large quantity, the drug would be taken away and the person would have to appear at the treatment center where they could be fined etc.

- To increase jobs, preference would be given to in-state growers if they can meet specifications and price. Otherwise, other U.S. growers could be used. Processors would provide verified standardized concentrations of each drug so customers know what they are getting and to distinguish the legalized product from underground versions.

- Sales tax and license fees would not be excessively high. The goal is to put the underground dealers out of business. Would state run stores be better able to handle a price war? Once the underground sales stop, the tax could be raised.

- The state would like to make as much revenue from cannabis, alcohol and other drugs as possible, because it’s critical that there be enough money to fund the following:
  - An aggressive state addiction prevention and detox program—maybe in conjunction with Obamacare. This would produce a good return on investment.
  - A state education program whose goal is to decrease drug use, especially among young people. They will be given honest data on the risks, benefits, and levels generally needed for addiction (although each person is different).
  - Since poverty frequently drives people to drugs, and the best way to get out of poverty is to get a good education, we need to use drug revenue, law enforcement cost savings, and reduction in state prison costs to really boost our local and state education programs

**Step 2 ...** Once the NIH studies and drug trials are completed, we can get a better idea about how drugs like cocaine or coca-derived substances could be legalized for recreational use. The key would be to sell it in non-addictive concentrations. Don’t forget, the demand will continue to be there whether the state sells it or not. One hopes the education program would convince people that cocaine, like heroin and crack, is a “dead end street drug for losers.” If we can’t figure out a way to legalize drugs, we have to keep a very expensive, useless, enforcement force in place. Perhaps we could make these hard drugs available in the treatment clinic by prescription as part of an addiction prevention program. Portugal has used their clinics to cut hard drug use by 50 percent. People need a way out of the vicious cycle of drug dependence.
On December 1901, two men were seated in a room of an old barracks at the harbor mouth a half a mile from the city of St Johns, Newfoundland. The location of the place had been selected as it was the northeastern point of the North American continent. Arranged on the table were delicate receiving instruments connected to a wire that ran outside a window, to a pole, then upwards to a kite swinging high overhead. Similar arrangements had been made in Cornwall, England nearly 2000 miles away.

The two individuals were waiting to hear a signal that was to originate in England. Up to that time the only way to send a communication was by means of a tangible and material connection between one speaker and one hearer – by cable. The cable had been laid throughout the world in the middle of the 1800s.

The test of the proposed “wireless” connections was to simply click three times-sending a Morse Code letter “S.” The English Station had been instructed to send these same clicks at a fixed time each day from 11:30 to 2:30 o’clock St John’s time. Initially, for an hour and half not a sound broke the silence of the room. Suddenly, the St John’s receiver faintly yet distinctly and unmistakably sent the three little clicks tapped out from England. Ten minutes later more signals came until there could be no mistake. Guglielmo Marconi had developed a communication revelation that flashed across the world from high and low alike, from investors, scientists, statesmen and royalty. He was only 27 at the time.

Marconi was an Italian inventor who became known as the father of long distance radio transmission and for his development of a radio telegraph system. He was not the inventor of radio. Much of his work in transmission explored the ideas of many others. He was an entrepreneur, businessman and founder of the Wireless Telegraph & Signal Company. His success was in his ability to commercialize radio and its associated equipment.

At the age of 20, he began his own experiments in science and electricity first in his home and then outside. He developed an interest in wireless telegraphy which numerous individuals had explored but none had proven commercially successful. He assembled and improved a number of components and then adapted them into his systems. He soon was able to ring a bell across a room wirelessly. He then began a series of experiments and demonstrations with the objective of increasing the distance of the wireless signal. He was able to obtain more financial resources especially in England as he sent signals over greater and greater distances. Finally he became confident to set a goal to wirelessly communicate across the Atlantic in order to compete with transatlantic cable.
There was no independent confirmation of his original reception and transmission between England and Nova Scotia which left a lot of questions. As a result,

Marconi challenged his skeptics by personally installing his equipment aboard a ship sailing from England to Canada and repeating his communications with his English contacts as they moved further and further toward Canada. Finally on December 17, 1902, the ship had travelled about 2000 miles and reached the Canadian coastline. The Nova Scotia Canadian wireless station became the first to confirm the receipt of a wireless message across the Atlantic.

He formed the Marconi Wireless Corporation which began to set up and operate numerous pioneering wireless radio stations to communicate with ships at sea in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Newfoundland, the United States and finally throughout the world. Other companies were also developing networks. And they became a source of patent disputes which were tied up in the courts for many years.

Marconi built his first US installation in Wellfleet, Massachusetts in 1903. Unfortunately, its location was subject to erosion and wind damage. As a result, in 1914, he built a more inland and sheltered location in Chatham. Its complex had 15 buildings, a 447 foot antenna tower, an operations building, power house, employee residences and a hotel for visiting guests. By 1921 it was acquired by RCA. It
eventually became the world’s largest, busiest, best known ship to shore commercial station in the hemisphere. It had a great sensitivity in picking up ship messages around the world. Chatham Radio WCC (Wireless-Cape-Cod) was world famous.

After 1930, communication traffic increased dramatically. During this period, the station employed more than 30 people most of them top of the field radio operators. They worked around the clock handling as many as a 1000 messages per day. As many as 10 operators were on duty during a busy period sending up to 100 messages in an 8 hour period. The communications were in International Morse Code.

Guglielmo Marconi died on July 20, 1937 in Rome, Italy, but the benefits of his work continued on. There were a wide variety of classes of radio telegrams for ocean liners and commercial ships. They included arrivals and departures times, cargo and other details. They also handled personal messages, hotel reservations and gift services. The various messages were charged using a per word rate. Special clients and emergencies had to be handled immediately by telegraph and telephone. A free medical service to relay doctor and medical information was also established.

The station handled communications for many historical events including:

• Communications for Richard Bird’s South Pole expeditions
• Graf Zeppelin’s first trip around the globe
• Weather information for Charles Lindbergh’s global flight
• Last Hindenburg contact before its crash
• Amelia Earhart’s ill-fated flight
• Santa Maria during hijacking

The US Navy took over the facility in 1942 in World War II. There were about 400 people including WAVES stationed there. Activities were classified and only recently have been revealed. One of the projects revealed related to the huge role the facility played in detecting and assisting in the elimination of German submarine operations in the Atlantic.

The Atlantic was full of ships mostly in convoys moving in the Atlantic to provide a flow of materials to England and Russia. Ship losses were very high from torpedoing by German subs. Washington used the unique resources at Chatham and a number of selected other stations to deal with the problem. They requested the stations pinpoint the radio transmissions of the subs as they surfaced to transmit messages while their batteries were being recharged – a daily need by all subs. The transmission monitoring provided the angular bearings from the sub from each station as well as the transmission text from it. Although the sub’s outgoing messages were in code the allies had broken the German Code (this fact was highly classified) so the text was readily available for analysis.
They used the intersecting bearings from the stations as a triangulation to determine the sub’s location. The convoy courses were modified as the sub locations were reported to them. This contributed to a major reduction of ship losses. The sub population was almost eliminated as naval ship building programs took place and small aircraft carriers became available. This permitted anti-sub carrier planes to fly off them in the Atlantic, sinking surfaced subs at the supplied pinpoint locations.

As technology changed it was necessary for WCC to do so also. Despite a substantial investment in the facilities by MCI Global, which purchased RCA Global Communications in 1988, business continued to decline. U.S shipping slowed. The whole maritime communications field was changing with less emphasis on radio telegraphic traffic. In 1993 MCI decided to automate the station and moved it to another location. After long negotiations, MCI sold the entire property to the town of Chatham. In 2002, a diverse group of local residents, engineers, educators and members of the international wireless community came together to form the Chatham Marconi Maritime Center. In 2010 they opened in the modernized WCC Operations Building to serve as a museum, a maritime wireless historical and educational center. It has since become one of the most popular visitor locations in Chatham and Cape Cod.

Notes from the Author:
“I used a number of resources in writing this including the staff of the Maritime Center, local newspapers, ‘Unknown Marconi Station Preserving Chathamport’ by Roslyn Colman, McClure’s Magazine, Wikipedia, and the Internet.”
Setting the Record Straight:
The Worcester Revolt of September 6, 1774

by Melvin H. Bernstein

This is a story largely untold, unknown and under-appreciated. It began in the wee hours of the morning of September 6, 1774, seven months before the first shots were fired at Concord and Lexington. 4,622 militiamen from 37 Worcester County towns in Massachusetts marched to Main Street in the town of Worcester, determined to shut down the courthouse that day before the new Crown-controlled courts could open to sit for a new session.

Thomas Gage, commanding general of British forces headquartered in Boston, was just as determined to keep the Worcester courts open. General Gage had vowed in an August 27 letter to his superior in London, Lord Dartmouth, “I apprehend that I shall soon be obliged to march a Body of Troops into that Township, and perhaps into others, as occasion warrants, to preserve the peace.”

By September 2, General Gage had actually begun to rethink the wisdom of his vow to march on Worcester. He confided his misgivings to Lord Dartmouth in a letter that day, acknowledging that he had intended to send a body of troops to Worcester to protect the courts, but had been informed “from undoubted authorities that the flames of sedition had spread universally throughout the country beyond conception…and that no courts could proceed on business.”

As dawn broke on the morning of September 6, an advance party of militiamen seized the Worcester courthouse, barricaded themselves inside, and awaited the arrival of 25 Crown appointees. That morning, the well-organized, well-trained, and highly disciplined militia force of nearly 5,000 men poured into the Main Street area fronting the court building, assembling themselves into 37 town military companies. The militia lined both sides of Main Street, forming a kind of gauntlet for the King’s men to pass through. When the court officials arrived at the courthouse, they were denied entry and escorted to the nearby Daniel Heywood Tavern.

All 25 court officers, faced with 4,622 hostile militiamen, knew well the stories of patriots tarring and feathering Tories who they deemed traitors to their cause, ransacking of their homes, and even the occasional use of death threats. General Gage and his troops were nowhere to be found in Worcester that day. Left to their own devices, the Crown’s appointees reluctantly signed documents disavowing their appointments by King George III. The court officials were then marched publicly, hat in hand through the gauntlet, in a procession toward the courthouse, recanting out loud their oaths of office and repeating their disavowals so that all assembled militiamen could hear.

The spectacle of the Worcester rebellion against British authority and public humiliation of its officials sent a shock wave across the Massachusetts colony, all the
way to Philadelphia where the First Continental Congress was in session. Worcester’s militiamen had irreversibly set the stage for an inevitable later, larger confrontation with the British military. In the meantime, these colonial forces had exceeded even the most optimistic expectations of the patriot resistance movement.

• Not a shot had been fired.
• Bloodshed had been avoided.
• British authority had been demonstrably overthrown for the first time in the American colonies.

Considering the memorable events of September 6, 1774, it remains a mystery why the City of Worcester has yet to honor or commemorate such an extraordinary day, unique to America’s heritage. Unlike Worcester, the towns of Concord, Lexington and their surrounding communities proudly celebrate annually their revolutionary heritage with painstakingly authentic reenactments, eloquent narratives of the events, and colorful parades in honor of the historic battles fought on April 19, 1775.

Taking note of the odd revolutionary historical vacuum that persists in Worcester, a local initiative has been launched in 2012 to organize a commemorative day for September 6, 1774, planned for that date in 2014. The initiative encompasses the following core group of revolutionary, historical and cultural organizations: Massachusetts Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, Worcester Daughters of the American Revolution, Preservation Worcester, Worcester Historical Museum, and the national Congress of American Revolution Round Tables.

After the passage of 238 years, the timing has never been better for Worcester to recognize and honor the remarkable events that took place on September 6, 1774.
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