Notes from the Office

What, exactly, is Spotlight? Ask that question of our members, and you’re likely to hear that it’s the “literary magazine” of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Tufts. Not an unreasonable answer, given that each issue includes a full spectrum of captivating writing: poetry, political commentary, short stories, personal essays, and more. That said, Spotlight also contains a wealth of exceptional non-literary content. Flip through the following pages, and you’ll discover a remarkable assortment of eye-catching photographs, captivating paintings, and delightful illustrations—each one as much a gem as the “literary” works that surround it.

If anything, Spotlight is more journal than literary magazine, not only showcasing the thoughts, feelings, and talents of our members, but also serving as a testament to their generosity of spirit, since the OLLI members whose work appears in each issue could just as easily have submitted their creations to professional publications instead.

Many thanks to everyone involved in the production of this edition, especially Kathy Scanlon, our hardworking program assistant, without whose design and proofreading assistance we might not have been ready to go to press for years! Posthumous thanks to Michael Martin, who enthusiastically contributed several pieces for this issue, but who passed away after a long illness before seeing his stories in print. Posthumous apologies to Janet Bohlen, whose short piece, “Taking Away the Keys,” we accidentally truncated in our last edition, but who agreed to let us reprint it in its entirety this time around. We look forward to sharing copies of their work with their family members, who know how much Michael and Janet enjoyed their OLLI participation.

Please remember that Spotlight is a reflection of our members’ generosity. Don’t keep your talents to yourself; share them with your fellow OLLI members by submitting something of your own for our next edition. Written works are always welcome, obviously, but we’d also love to see your drawings and paintings, as well as photos of your sculptures, quilts, needle crafts, etc. For more info, or to submit your work, email us at OsherLLI@tufts.edu. In the meantime, enjoy the issue that you’re holding in your hands, and revel in the talents and energy of this issue’s contributors!

—David A. Fechtor, Director
Osher LLI at Tufts University
**Spotlight**  
**Spring/Summer 2016**

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POETRY
Red brick façade baked in the fire of the Key West sun, tall arched windows raising their eyebrows beneath a classical pediment, cupola and clock tower. Eight stately Ionic columns frame the main entrance, a new Greek temple of order, symmetry, and balance, a new jewel of Justice in 1823.

But no longer. Painting the aged Courthouse in watercolor a century later, Elizabeth Bishop portrays time’s plunders with a darker palette, busy brushstrokes of thick gouache dominate the foreground, wilderness crowds in, unruly foliage blocks the entrance like a rush of attorneys seeking an injunction, power lines inked across the front of the courthouse like an electrified fence, communication cut off by downed wires from the nearby tower: all torts, briefs, and depositions moot, justice disbarred.

—David Ellis
The Dying Tree

An insistent rattling overhead
Disturbed my reverie.
Looking up I spied
Yolk yellow leaves,
Fluttering in arid air.

Their sun burnt edges
Like brown halos,
Translucent in the parched light,
With spindly stems holding tight
To branches bowed by thirst.

The tree seemed to gasp
From years of drought
Still clutching all its verdage,
Sounds like tinkling of bamboo chimes
Escaping from its leaves.

It’s just this tree emphatically
Clattering its leaves
Reminds me now
Unexpectedly
Of death’s musicality.

—Deborah Stavro Lapides
Every Last Thing

Taking a walk with three-year-old twins can be too slow and rather tedious unless I take the time to see the world through their eyes. A low wall becomes a perfect balance beam. A tangle of pokeweed plants behind the supermarket becomes a study in small, medium, and large, as well as shades of green and purple berries. Every last puddle on a drizzly day invites spirited stomping. The crossing light at major intersections inspires us to create a song: “Do you see the walking man, the walking man, the walking man…” The falling October leaves urge us to twirl around and collect colorful beauties. A visit to the library gives us new stories, cuddly stuffed animals, and giggles of delight when the elevator dings. Thanks to these young friends, on my solitary walks I often hum “Zip ah dee doo dah,” and smile for no apparent reason.

—Dorothy Allen May
I approach each day like a jigsaw puzzle without a picture on the box to guide me.

Grateful not to be starting from scratch I now pick up all the background pieces placing them in the foreground giving them the attention they deserve.

Books to peruse Piano to play Words to write Sketches to make Quilts to design Socks to knit Gardens to nurture.

With patient hands and observant eyes I relish the time for new discoveries diversions detours as I construct my borderless design.

—Irene Hannigan
To play with words
in a middle-of-the-night
reverie
is to know the splendor
of fertile ground.

While the censor sleeps and
the inspector is off-duty,
words drift and flow
in an uninhibited swirl
unencumbered
unfettered
agile
as they audition.

In night-time’s
mind’s-eye view
all words are worthy
contenders
stand-ins
understudies.

Hope abounds
as they brave
the scrutiny
of the daylight zone
when perhaps
a couple might just
get the part.

—Irene Hannigan
Third-Story View of a College Parking Lot

For the lapse of a moment
The small leaves rest
Then once again skitter
Across the gray pavement
This way and that
Touching with glitter
Wayward and random
As fitting their nature
Their dancing space.

Whence come the white ones
Blanched in the light
Like small bits of paper
Bearing discarded
Wafture of thought
Blown wayward and random
To no fixed direction
As fitting their nature
Cast to the breeze?

Straight through the whirl
The dark-clad professor
Strides to his classroom
With thoughts doubtless focused
On patterned coherence
Yet to disclose.

But surely some student
Early this morning
Stood tearing and ripping
To tiniest shreds
Her well-scribbled paper
With blank pages also
To see those shreds skitter
This way and that
At one with the leaves
As fitting their nature
And catching their glitter
Light-tossed to the breeze
While wishing her actual thoughts
Free-loosed as these.

—Margaret Gooch
HAIKU VERSES: NATURE IN THE 'BURBS

Turkeys in the yard
Two moms herd twenty toddlers
Startled, fly out, gone.

Kitten on the rug.
Hawk hits the glass, safe away
Bloody muddy print.

Red bird boy, brown girl
Cardinals trading shelter
Eat sunflower seed.

Tall fur lawn statue
Coyote on the snow crust.
Alarmed he moves on.

Cat in the hedges
Stalks walking winged wildlife.
Pffstt! Scamper. Pffstt! Gone.

Kids, dogs, people, bikes.
Cautious bunnies nibble greens
Long weed spaghetti.

Squirrels climb and dash
Hide acorns forgetting where
Raid the birdfeeders.

Owls hoot, skunks perfume,
Deer and woodchuck share the crops
Harmony attained.

—Sandra Bittenbender
Afternoon in the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mountains, 1957

ride from the stable one afternoon
toward the elephantine range
its wrinkled gray skin
shining under winter sun
note the green of creosote
weave a track across the Rillito’s
dry wash of blond sand
and stony droppings
wonder at the great saguaro
spaced, just so, across the land
the swelling fluted torso
and muscled fighter’s arm
climb the canyon
steep with fallen boulders
hear the narrow water tumble,
the shake of aspen leaves
on the return, hold tight
the tooled saddle horn
as shod hooves
skid the sharp descent
cross the soft Rillito wash again
and sit a gentle canter
on the flat homeward trail
toward Tucson’s setting sun
behind, see the range,
roising, and blackly cleft—
broken embers
of the desert hearth

—Susan Frey
**GUIDO’S SALON**

Wet hair wrapped in a towel  
I see  
A hound’s long face in the mirror  

Give it a smile  
I force  
The face of a charming pigeon  

Hope no one saw the dog  
I think  
Still smiling and taking my seat  

My grayish head blackly wet  
I sigh  
What would you like, says Rachel  

Her just dyed rooster coif  
I note  
Arcs around her chin  

Do I belong in this salon  
I muse  
Give me some fluttery wings  

While she snips and cuts  
We chat  
With Michelle who brooms the floor  

Hairstyles for different faces  
We compare  
Dough-round and Alpine-slant  

Their favorite songs come on  
I ask  
To hear them sing the words  

They laugh at one another  
I join in  
Laugh for the laugh  

Guido grins into the mirror  
I praise  
The day I found his shop  

Some mousse to give a lift  
I nod  
Gray feathers sweep lightly up

—Susan Frey
November Walk

Out our door
(cell in my pocket
should he call),
I lean into a cold wind, stride
the gray asphalt sheen. Somewhere
a blue jay throws a crusty call.
The curb gathers papery leaves
poured like bran flakes.

Overhead, black oak
branches vault the hanging wires.
Tousled rusty treetops
bounce beyond the roofs. The ground
ruffles like a brown choppy sea.
Clank goes the blue mailbox.

Coming about, I tack
into the wind. Rolls of gray cloud
admit a crack of blue. A slumped
jack-o-lantern leans on a porch. Queues
of obese leaf bags hug together.
I retrieve the lid of our empty barrel.
No one else’s around.

Into the dark of our juniper
swoops a crimson cardinal.
I clutch this gift
and go back in
to his chronic illness.

—Susan Frey
Outside the door there’s a voice I know: it’s the clinical lilt of his neurologist. She must be about to show.

White coat billowing, she sails in, flashes him her prettiest smile, “Hi, how have you been?”

In the corner, “How young,” I think, “and who taught her this script?” I force a smile to get in sync.

“Better,” he says (she’s drawn him in). “But, sleeplessness,” I interject, “and memory loss have troubled him.”

She turns his way: “You’re taking your meds?” “Sinemet and Lorazepam.” “I could refer you to the Sleep Clinic?” “No thanks,” he says.

She performs her roster of tests— checking and recording motor and mind; allows her attention only to rest

where science can be brought to bear, from her armamentarium. So, scrip in hand, we’re back to where people wait in need of care.

—Susan Frey
**TRASH DAY**

Frigid dark pinches my nose.  
We are locked in an arctic block.  
For miles around air’s freeze dried.  
I hug tight the flag-blue recycle bin.  
Snow dollops tower from the arbor vitae.  
Tight-rope stepping, I plod a deep-cut trench.  
Rubber boots squawk on tumbled snow chunks.  
Under my down coat and nightie air slinks.  
Glass and metal clunk a cold complaint.  
Dark rum bottle dreams of green sugar cane.  
Rasping slabs of Styrofoam—the un-snow.  
I lift and shove to the up-plowed palisade—  
four blizzards’ worth.

Out of shadow flops a bulbous shape of bag.  
My neighbor’s black glove salutes from the gloom.

—Susan Frey
14 years old and ready,
soon after nightfall,
I got my older brother
to row across the lake;
country music tingled
from the opposite shore;
I perched backwards on the bow,
slung the flashlight in my skirt,
propped my toes—in orange
dancing flats—on the forward seat,
bowed and leaned in time
with the pulling of the oars,
as my brother’s back dipped
into my lap and out.
We docked and climbed the hill,
zigzag, through shadowed
blueberry bushes, the near-
full moon overhead,
and laughing voices
coming closer. We stepped
into the open-air garage,
as people partnered up
to dance. “Square your sets”
the singing caller cried,
tuning the *Rose of San Antone*.
An older teenaged boy,
chubby (not my brother’s equal),
offered me his hand.
We sashayed, heel and toe around,
his grip firm on my waist; we spun
and spun again, my painted skirt
flew out; the cowboy song rocked
in my ears and out my feet:
shuffle-stepping, hips swiveling,
hands grabbing, smiling eye-
to-eye, weaving round
Grand Right and Left from one guy
to another; underarms
dark and rank, bodies dripping
sweat and turning just in time:
this one arched for an extra twirl,
I caught his lead and ducked;
another swung so fast and rough
he almost spun me off the set.
My brother—casual, graceful, tall—
still looked and danced the best.
Our parents, arriving late
by car, joined an older
people’s square. My father
tried (but never could
take music in and put
out steps); the other dancers
helped him ‘round; my mother
smiled unreadably.
But, they were not my concern
this summer night.
For me the dance was heaven.
I had no future plans—
only to use my mind and body.
No idea of how to partner a life.

—Susan Frey
FICTION
&
ESSAYS
MRS. WAKEFIELD
BY MARGARET GOOCH

AT RISE
At a small dining table, an elderly couple sit across from each other eating in silence. The man reaches out for a roll, opens and butters it, bites into a half of it.

WIFE: What do you think of the meal this evening?

HUSBAND (speech affected by munching) Much to my taste, dear, as always.

WIFE: You’ve always been appreciative of my cooking. Never a single complaint. I’ll say that for you.

HUSBAND No. No complaints.

WIFE: And in fact there’ve been few harsh words between us – ever. No outbursts of temper from you. When I’d hear friends complain of such from their husbands, I’d think of how fortunate I was.

HUSBAND Well, you gave me no reason.

WIFE: Yes, our marriage seemed always to run smoothly. And the thing is, I never wondered at that.

(Her husband slathers the other half of the roll with more butter, saying nothing.)

WIFE: I guess you wondered at that.

(He takes a generous bite in silence, head lifted as if staring above her.)

WIFE: So now I suppose it’s time to bring up that evening you came home so late from work.

HUSBAND Some years ago, that was. Why speak of it now?

WIFE: And just once, I know. Just one single time. Or perhaps I should say, one singular time. Still, I’ve wondered about it.

(He responds with raised eyebrows, slight shrug)

WIFE: You must have realized how much I wondered. Though you’ve never seemed the least bit aware. Just back to your normal routine from the instant you walked through the door. And every day since.
HUSBAND  Again I ask, why bring it up now?

WIFE:  You’d rather I didn’t?

HUSBAND  Over and done with. Nothing I can tell you.

WIFE:  Nothing you can tell me?

HUSBAND  Nothing I can explain.

WIFE:  Then let me tell you how I’ve thought of it. I think the time has come for that.

HUSBAND  If you must.

WIFE:  I was so stunned at first. So stunned, that I could say nothing. So many questions burst forth in my mind, but I held my tongue. I thought, who is this man I have married? And then I thought, there must be some innocent explanation, something a doctor can explain. I walked around in a daze, at a loss, total loss, to understand.

HUSBAND  (becoming agitated) We’ve let it go all this while. And haven’t we gotten along just fine? Why trouble the waters now?

WIFE:  Later I thought of consulting a lawyer instead. But the fact is, I’ve bided my time. And let me tell you what gave me the clue. A scrap of paper in the jacket you wore home that evening. I searched its pockets, of course, at my first opportunity. That scrap led me to a restaurant. And from there I got an address.

HUSBAND  All right, then.

WIFE:  Not far away at all!

(She rises.)

WIFE:  And let me tell you how I’ve coped all this time. I thought, maybe I can play the same game! I can be curious too. I can watch him. I can try to figure out what makes him tick. And no one, really, to question the oddity of it. We have no children to visit us. No one nearby who knows us from before. My closest friends moved away or passed on. Easy to explain I’d taken in a lodger, if I cared to. Or had a long-lost relative turn up. Or even to devise some rational seeming explanation of why it was you.

HUSBAND  You’d be doing better than I could there.
WIFE: If any tongues wagged, what harm at our age?

HUSBAND Well, that would be the day!

WIFE: (angrily) You think so! How sorry I am never to have given you occasion!

HUSBAND So all this time you’ve been angry.

WIFE: Have I been angry? Oh, yes. And the number of times I’ve thought of slipping something into one of these meals you’ve been so content to get back to. Although I never did, never have. But I thought, why not play the same game? Can’t I bear with following an easy routine just as you have? Having a man around the house to take out the garbage or unstop a drain? Even improving my status above that of a poor widow woman by having you stroll with me to the park or a store? What need for a fuss this very minute? Though of course you’re aware of what alerted me, right off, to your comprehension of the real situation. I’m referring to the fact that I’ve never rejoined you in bed. That I made up one of my own in its place. You never took evident note of it.

HUSBAND Wish that you would, or could. Not that I’ve asked.

WIFE: That would complete your scheme, wouldn’t it? Have all go wholly back to normal, hunky dory!

HUSBAND It wasn’t a scheme.

WIFE: (hands on her hips) Well, what was it then? Why, why did you do it? Walk out the door one fine morning and come back twenty years later?

HUSBAND I’ve told you, I can’t explain.

WIFE: Were you so curious about me? Finding a way to spy on me all that time? Should I even feel complimented by such interest, no matter how bizarre? Were you offended that I failed to suffer and grieve as much or as long as you thought your just due? Was that what kept you at distance? Yes, too bad I never gave you occasion to see I wasn’t just holding true to your memory. I suppose if I’d showed signs of remarrying, you’d have turned up instantly enough!

HUSBAND Can’t say.

WIFE: Or given you an actual thrill by embarking on a scandalous life,
though who knows what that could be. Or what if I’d come down with some dread disease? Would you have shown up to take care of me?

HUSBAND  (shaking his head in dismay, slightly shrugging.)
But that didn’t happen.

WIFE:  And why return at all?
HUSBAND  Again, I can’t say.

WIFE:  And no attempt at excuse, not the least. No claim of long-term amnesia! No, your absence was purely deliberate!

HUSBAND  Not deliberate. I see I can say that much. All that time, I felt some force beyond me held me in its grip. And as you’ve been speaking, it’s come to me: some force of curiosity about me held me in thrall. Until it let go. (pause) It suddenly, strangely let go. (pause) After so often thinking, I can go back anytime. Why does it have to be now? And other times thinking, it’s far, far too late. How odd it would be. How can I go back now?

(pause) And then one evening when passing our door, it suddenly struck me to walk up, turn the knob – use my key if I had to, and enter. (pause) So what shall we do, after having this chat?

WIFE:  I could throw you out of doors. Let you go back to that restaurant you worked for, that room you rented. You made out all right before.

(He waits for further word.)

WIFE:  (sitting again) The house is now in my name. But oh God, the embarrassment of making the thing in any way public!

HUSBAND  Especially as we’ve been back together all this while.

(She shakes her head in uncertainty.)

HUSBAND  You can’t tell me you’ve made no consent to the strangeness. Even savored it a bit since my return. (pause) Because I can see it, have seen it. That’s been my salvation in judging myself.

WIFE:  That first evening when I sat up awake, so stunned, I kept thinking: first thing at daylight I’ll rush out, tell a neighbor. When daylight came, I thought, no, first I’ll see what he tells me; soon after think-
ing: when will he betray some sign of knowing this can’t be normal? Curiosity took over, despite the creepiness. At some point I realized: well, rather late now to rush out and make a grand stew.

HUSBAND: So again I ask, why at this late hour speak of the matter?

WIFE: I always knew it must be sometime. Why this moment, though? The impulse just came. Perhaps from being so particularly struck by all that butter you’re spreading, with the look of smug self-satisfaction on your face.

HUSBAND: Then let me ask you, has your curiosity paid off?

WIFE: No more, I suppose, than yours.

HUSBAND: Are we so ordinary?

WIFE: I see I’ve joined you in being something other than ordinary.

(struck by a thought) Was that what drove you? The wish to be more than just that?

HUSBAND: I’ve told you, can’t say. But shall we proceed as usual? Forget we’ve spoken these things. Go back to beforehand, go back ... (he pauses, then tentatively) to what we were before?

WIFE: (bursting out) We can never go back to before. The man I loved I lost—the more, once again—from seeing he never was!

HUSBAND: (rising) Oh don’t say I never was! (pause) No need for revenge with these meals, my dear. You’ve spoken the poisoned word.

WIFE: (amazed) You’re asking me to pity you?

HUSBAND: Pity for love if possible, all that’s left.

WIFE: And all we can do is seem ordinary again.

HUSBAND: That is, with our story unknown.

WIFE: (joining him in standing) Shall you, or I, at some point make it known? Ever?

HUSBAND: Without knowing how to explain ...

WIFE: I could say it was some strange aberration of mind. Much worse than mere amnesia. That seeing the calamity that struck you overwhelmed me with pity, allowed me to take you back in ....
HUSBAND: As a loving spouse till death ....

WIFE: Don’t count on it! (reflecting) At least, not as you’re thinking.

HUSBAND: Just a pretense for you then.

WIFE: Of course. Only a pretense.

HUSBAND: (considering) So, at some point make known what I, what you, what compulsion of psychological circumstance or force of curiosity beyond us has arranged as our destiny!

WIFE: You the most, I’d say. Here or gone, I shudder at you. An outcast—all you are.

HUSBAND: And another, or others, more responsible, say I. But most to me, an enigma. Left for curiosity to decide.

(They both sit down. After some moments:)

WIFE: More bread, dear? Or seconds on anything you’d like? Seconds over and over, again and again, on and on ....

HUSBAND: No, I’ve had plenty for now. (pause) But tell me, could you be holding—something for dessert?
HENRY
BY SANDRA BITTENBENDER

“Every spirit builds itself a house; and beyond its house a world … Build, therefore, your own world.” — Ralph Waldo Emerson (Nature, 1836)

When I think of Emerson, I think of a big house in Concord; his pal Thoreau, of course, built himself a tiny hut. There is a replica of it and of Henry David in thin oak woods between Walden Pond and the ancillary parking.

After a fine swim in the pond one day my quite pregnant daughter, my not quite 5-year-old granddaughter, Olivia, and I passed by the place.

Straggling along like turkeys we met the modeled metal man there on the leafy path. Dressed in rumpled clothes of brown bronze alloy, he seems in motion, hurried. Startling to encounter.

I looked into the one room hut. It was spare and neat with a nice green blanket on the narrow bed. It was inviting to me so I invited Olivia to step in too. She did, took a deep breath, looked around and ran out screaming, arms waving cartoon style.

For now stuffed bears and painted butterflies populate her world. So much for Henry and the Transcendentalists until 10th grade.
Checkers, Sweetie?

By Michael Martin

Joe Morgan was depressed. As he figured it, he had a lot to be depressed about. He was old and sick. He would be 85 next week. He had Parkinson’s disease, painful arthritis, and high blood pressure. Moreover, he had little money. Living on his social security check and a small veteran’s pension, he was barely scraping by. Although he had two children they were a disappointment. Living in Guam with her Air Force husband, his daughter Mary seemed indifferent to his welfare and barely managed to send him a Christmas card once a year. Bill, his son, had been in trouble all of his life and was presently doing time at a correctional facility in Kentucky. Bill did not answer his letters and seemed to want to have nothing to do with his father. In addition, his two marriages were first class disasters. Ending in painful divorces and bitter feelings, they left scars that had not yet healed. Moreover, almost all of his old friends had died and the few that remained were senile. It was just a question of time when he would no longer be able to take care of himself and would have to move into a nursing home.

Yes, Joe Morgan had every right to be depressed. As he sat on the front porch of his decrepit bungalow and thought about his present situation, the depression settled into his psyche and his very being. By a sheer act of will he tried to think of something in his present life he had to thankful for. Yes, there was one thing: he had starting playing checkers with little Molly Kelly.

Molly lived two doors down the street with her mother. She was nine years old, had red hair, and was bright as a penny. To Joe she was beginning to become the grandchild he never had. Several times a week after school Molly would walk shyly by his porch, looking expectantly at Joe. He guessed that Molly had strict orders from mother to not disturb old Mr. Morgan and would never ask him directly. So he would smile and greet her by saying, “Checkers, Sweetie?” “Sure, Mr. Morgan!” she would say, her freckled face lighting up.

For an hour or so, the old man and young girl played checkers. Joe thought right away that she had a natural aptitude for the game. He should know. Joe Morgan had been a checker champion as a young man and had played the best players of his time. Even into his late seventies he played in local tournaments. At first he let her win. But Molly saw through him.“Mr. Morgan,” she said one day, a frown on he face, “How come you know so much about checkers and I always win? I don’t want to win all of the time. I want you to teach me checkers. Show me some good moves. You know what I mean, Mr. Morgan? Please!”

Joe was happy to oblige. From that day on Joe never let Molly win as he gently instructed her in finer points of the game. She loved it and Joe marveled how she soaked up his instructions and came back for more. He loaned her books on play-
ing checkers and was not surprised that she understood them. After six months Joe noticed that he had to be on his guard: little Molly came close to winning. After nine months she played him to a draw and after a year she had actually won a game.

After he assured her that he had not let her win, she blushed and broke into a wide grin. “Gee, Mr. Morgan! Really? Wait till I tell Mama! Will she ever be surprised!”

The question was what to do next with his young pupil. He asked Molly if she would be interested in entering a local children’s tournament. “Sure, Mr. Morgan! But do you think I am ready?” Joe said simply, “Sweetie, you are ready.” Since there was no tournament scheduled for several weeks, he had time to prepare Molly for the rigors of tournament play. Molly had to get permission from her mother and fill out an entrance form. There was a lot to do.

As Molly and Joe worked hard every afternoon as the day of the tournament approached, his health, his feckless children, and his poverty were forgotten. Joe gradually began to realize he was no longer depressed. Being Molly’s checker coach had change his life and given him a purpose. One day Molly said that she and her mother were going away for the weekend. But Joe made her promise that come Monday afternoon she would settle back into her rigorous training routine to prepare for the tournament. Molly was wild with excitement and said that she could hardly wait for Monday.

Monday afternoon came but Molly did not appear. On Tuesday he saw Molly walking past his porch. She did not slyly glance his way but walked straight ahead, her head down and her little shoulders sagging. Something was wrong. He called out his usual greeting: “Checkers, Sweetie?” Hearing his words she stopped and burst into tears. She ran to him and threw herself in his arms, sobbing bitterly.

“Oh, Mr. Morgan, I am so sorry!”

“Sweetie, what’s wrong?”

Through her sobs and tears she told him that her mother had remarried and was moving out of state at the end of the week. Her new father wanted her to take violin lessons—something she did not want to do—and did not want her to play checkers. Her new father said if she played any board game, it was to be chess, not checkers. She also said that her new father did not want her to go to “old man Morgan’s hovel anymore.” Sobbing bitterly, Molly gave Joe a big kiss and hug and ran home.

Joe sat quietly on his porch for about an hour. He got up from his chair, put away the checkerboard, went into the kitchen, closed all widows and doors. He put towels under the space at the bottom of the doors and turned on his gas oven and stretched out on the floor.
The king was in his counting house counting out his money.

The queen was in the pantry eating bread and honey.

The maid was in the garden hanging up the clothes. Along came a blackbird and nipped off her nose.
The Assignation
by Michael Martin

Wondering if he would recognize her after all these years, he tried to construct a mental picture of what she might look like. Undoubtedly her hair would be gray. She probably would have gained weight. But would her eyes still be deep and sad? Would she still have that strange appealing smile and regal carriage? What if she looked entirely different? He marveled at his faith that she would come at all. Although the promise to meet after forty years was made sincerely, he knew things had changed. Perhaps she had forgotten her solemn promise. Perhaps she had not forgotten but no longer thought it important. No, she would come. He knew her. She would come.

Sitting on the bench in the shade of the trees near the Swan Boats where he could scan the path to lake, he thought back to a Fourth of July forty years ago. It was the last time he had seen her. Tearfully she gave him back his ring. Explaining her commitment to her mentally retarded younger sister, she said she had a duty to return to Dublin and assume her responsibility. Since her mother was dying of cancer, and her father was an irresponsible alcoholic, there was no one else to take on the burden. Was there no way he could come to Ireland? He explained that he was being groomed to take over his father’s law practice in Chicago. No, there was no way.

Why did he not insist that she come to the States with her sister? In retrospect he hated himself for not doing so. But at the time he was not prepared to become involved with her burden. He loved her but perhaps not enough. Parting near the lake and swearing their undying love, they agreed to meet at the same place at noon on the Fourth of July forty years hence. He wrote her several letters but they were returned marked “Address Unknown.” As the years past and his marriage failed, he still thought of her. Instead of his love for her diminishing, it grew. He even went so far as to hire a private detective to locate her. But to no avail. The detective could not find her. Although he recently hired another detective, he was not hopeful. His only hope was that she would remember the promised assignation and still loved him enough to fulfill her promise. Oh if she would come! They could stroll hand in hand along Charles just like old times!! He had tickets for her favorite opera, Carmen, at the Wang Center! He would take her to four-star restaurants!

A glance at his watch brought him down to earth. It was now 12:20 and she had not arrived. With a deep sense of sadness, he began to realize that she would not meet him. He was living a romantic fantasy. With drooping shoulders and bowed head he held his face in his hands and cried softly. He finally pulled himself together and started to get to his feet. Glancing hopefully toward the main entrance to the
Public Garden for the last time, his heart stopped. In the distance he saw an older women walking rapidly toward the lake. She had white hair and walked with a cane. She was the right height and had the same dignified posture as his lost love. And there was something familiar about her walk.

His eyes filling with tears and his lips trembling, he sat down again on the bench. His heart nearly bursting with joy he repressed calling out her name and springing to his feet. She is here, he thought, she is here!! But her pace did not change and she walked ahead, her eyes on something near the lake. As she got nearer, he realized with a sinking heart that it was not she. The structure of her face was all-wrong and her eyes were not dark but light blue. Trying to gain his composure, he watched the woman pass. She proceeded toward the lake where she was greeted warmly by a young women and child.

He felt numb as he strolled back toward the Parker House. As he walked past the reception desk at the hotel he was so engrossed in thought he hardly heard his name being called. He had a long distance call from Ireland. Reaching his room with shaking legs he returned the call. The person who answered was the new private detective he had hired to trace her. After a long search the detective had located her. However, he was sorry to report she died three years ago of cancer. The detective learned that her sister died shortly after her return to Ireland. She married the next year but her husband died soon after they were married. She did not remarry. For the last 30 years or so years of her life she worked as librarian in small village in Southern Ireland and grew roses.

However, the detective did not tell him what he longed to know. Did she ever indicate that she remembered him? Did she have any plans to return to the Boston for their assignation? Was there any thing in her possessions that suggested she still carried the torch for him? The detective chose his words carefully. He said that nothing that he could find gave any indication of her regard for him. She never mentioned him to her best friends and coworkers. Although love letters were found in her possessions they were from her husband, long deceased. She did plan to travel after her retirement. But her plans included Europe, not the States. As far as the detective could discern, her only love was her roses.

He replaced the receiver without saying a word. He looked out the widow of the hotel room for a few minutes and then called his travel agent instructing her to book him a seat on the next flight back to Chicago. He took the two tickets to Carmen out of his pocket and dropped them in the wastepaper basket. He removed her picture from his wallet that she had given him forty years ago. Resisting the temptation to kiss it, he tore it in two and, as tears filled his eyes, flushed it down the toilet.
The Pencil

by Michael Martin

It was Mary’s favorite pencil. She carried it to school every day and home every night. It was bright yellow with a point she always kept sharp by regularly using the pencil sharper in the back of her six-grade classroom. It had a worn eraser, and two distinctive tooth marks on it. Indeed, it was these marks that enabled her to distinguish it from her other pencils. To Mary’s chagrin, it was becoming shorter as the weeks passed, and she made more and more trips to the pencil sharper. Sometimes she wondered vaguely what she would do when it was a short stub and no longer usable. Although she would eventually have to use another pencil, the prospect of doing so made her mildly uneasy, and she would quickly put this thought out of her mind.

Every day after school she would go home, stretch out on her bed with her trusty pencil and her old dog-eared notebook, a write a few pages of one her stories. Mary, you see, believed she was going to be a famous writer and had already a reputation among her classmates and friends. Even her teacher, Miss White, was impressed and told Mary’s mother that Mary had writing talent that should be nourished.

Mary’s mother took quick action. The only writer she knew was her second cousin, Betty Gordon, who in her younger days had several short stories published in Redbook. Although she had not spoken to Betty in years, she called Betty asking her if she would mind talking to Mary and even reading some of her stories. Delighted that Betty agreed, Mary’s mother set a date when the old pro and the prodigy were to meet.

Mary was less than pleased with this turn of events. She was not at all sure she was going to like Cousin Betty and was secretly afraid her stories would not be appreciated. Nevertheless, on Saturday morning carrying her notebook and favorite pencil she took the bus across town and arrived at Cousin Betty’s. Her concerns were groundless. Cousin Betty turned out to be warm and encouraging. After serving fragrant herbal tea and warm ginger bread, she borrowed Mary’s pencil and went through several of Mary’s stories editing them in a most professional and helpful way. Supporting Mary and praising her efforts, she chatted with the young writer for several pleasant hours.

When Mary left, she was floating on air. Cousin Betty was a true genius and saw her talent! Nothing could stop her now! She would start writing a new story at once. When she reached in her pocket it dawned on her. Betty had forgotten to return her pencil. At first this realization made her very anxious and upset and nearly induced her to get off the bus and go back to Betty’s house to retrieve it. But on reflection she decided against it. Mary knew from an objective point of view that the pencil was quite ordinary. Cousin Betty would surely think her odd to take all of
this trouble for a ten-cent pencil. But there was a more profound reason. Mary ob-
scurely sensed that she had become too dependent on this pencil. Great writers, she
thought, had to become free of such petty attachments and psychological crutches.
Although this pencil had helped her enormously it was time to move on and become
liberated from it. No, she would not go back and she would let Cousin Betty have
her pencil. If Betty said anything to her mother, she would simply say that the pencil
was unimportant.

For her part Betty noticed Mary’s pencil soon after she had gone. Should she
run after her or call her mother? Betty decided against either course of action. It was
obviously just an ordinary pencil and Mary, she was sure, had many others. There
was no need to bother.

While sitting in the kitchen holding the pencil in her hand, looking at its marred
and worn condition, her mind drifting back to her younger days as a writer, she
started having second thoughts about not making an effort to return the pencil. She
recalled that she had used an old beat up Underwood since she was a teenager and
could write nothing without it. One day in her late twenties just after she published
several of her stories she decided she should get a new typewriter. A Redbook au-
thor, she thought, should not be writing on a typewriter she was ashamed of. She
immediately went out and purchased a new electric typewriter.

After that she started to get rejection letters from publishers. She was never sure
whether or not the new typewriter was implicated. But it was true that she never felt
comfortable using it and after about a year she went back to the Underwood. How-
ever, things were not the same. Her spark was gone and she felt dried up. She finally
drifted into freelance editing and never published another story.

Mary reminded Betty of herself in younger Underwood days: talented, enthusi-
astic, with boundless ambition. She again examined the pencil turning it over slowly
in her hands and then reached for the telephone.
Heat rushes at Jean Marie. It’s hot for October, almost as hot as Mirabalais. He parks the cab in front of the school and turns off the motor.

What are they going to tell him now about his boy? Must be bad. Leroy maybe threw a chair again like last time, said he wouldn’t do his work. Three days they didn’t let him come to school. Three days he had him in the cab.

Teachers are all the same in the States. Back home they know what to do with a kid like Leroy who don’t want to learn. They knock that out with a stick. Here you try to bring up your kids right, and before you know it you got a social worker up your ass.

He pushes open the heavy school door. Woman at the front desk tells him where to go. He climbs the cement stairs and walks along the empty corridor. There it is, Room 207.

Funny, putting his hand on the doorknob gives him the feeling like when he was a kid at school. Like something’s wrong in his gut. Maybe it’s the chalk dust and the kids who come dirty in the morning and stink up the place. His people had no pipes for water, but his momma filled the buckets every day. “Strip and scrub,” she’d say to the kids. “Black skin’s got to shine.”

Momma always kept them clean. And his own kids are, too. They wouldn’t be complaining about that. Fresh underwear every day, all of them, and spotless shirts. Bromand’s school uniform cost a bundle. Little Dara, his doll, his angel, in her plaid jumper and her braids. And Leroy. None of them is as particular as him, always wanting to buy the crap they talk about on TV that make you smell good. Oh, that kid is funny sometimes.

Jean Marie turns the door handle. They been waiting for him, three of them sitting around the table. They look up quick when he comes in like they have a secret together. The teacher, Ms. Davis, he seen her before, white woman with crumpled skin like old newspaper. She stands up and puts out her hand.

“Come in, Mr. Bernard,” she says. “We’re glad you could make it.”

Sometimes the old ones know what they’re talking about. Not always. The first day he came here with Leroy she said, “I’m sure your boy will be happy with us.”

Happy? Who the hell cares if he’s happy? Is he going to learn something? That’s what matters.

“You remember Ms. Clark, our psychologist” the teacher says.

He nods to the redhead. He seen her before, too, when he signed the plan for Leroy, “Educational Plan” they call it. Very dressy woman, that. Thinks she knows everything about kids. “You got your own kids, Ms. Clark?” he’d asked her that time. He knew she didn’t ‘cause she didn’t have no ring. “Then how come you know so
much about them?” She told about the testing and all the courses she took at the college. She thinks that’s the way you get to know about kids.

The teacher turns to the bald guy. “Mr. Alonzo, this is Leroy’s father. Mr. Alonzo is Leroy’s Adjustment Counselor.”

The guy stands up and shakes hands. Jean Marie never saw him before. Adjustment. That’s the word the mechanic at the garage says. “Air conditioning needs adjustment.” Has to be fixed. This is the guy that fixes Leroy? Well, he’s got a good leather belt under his belly. Maybe he can do it.

Jean Marie sits down next to the man. “What do you do with my boy, Mr. Alonzo?”

“Leroy comes to me two periods a week with classmates.” The man looks down at the papers in front of him like he can’t remember what he does. “We - er - play games and just have a relaxing time.” Alonzo smiles, but his lids droop and almost hide his eyes. “He learns to interact with his peers. I mean - to get along with other children. He’s smart you know, Mr. Bernard. But he does have trouble learning, and he gets depressed.”

Depressed? That’s what this guy is. You don’t need no college to tell you that. Alonzo’s shoulders look like he’s carrying something heavy. Seems like he’s in the middle of a dream, like old Claude after his boy got killed in the riots at Port-au-Prince — maybe got that way from playing games with kids all day and listening to their crap and what the females hand out. A drunk, maybe.

The redhead sits very straight in her chair. “You see, Mr. Bernard,” she says. The words come out real slow and clear like you talk to a kid. “Leroy feels bad about himself, and that makes him angry, and when he’s angry he has trouble learning.”

Jean Marie turns and looks her straight in the eye. “Sure he has trouble learning if he sits and plays games when he should be working.”

How hot the room is. Jean Marie shifts in his chair. “You don’t need to teach him to get along with kids, missus. He got a brother and sister. I teach ‘em to get along.”

“What does he do after school? Whom does he play with?” the redhead asks. Why do they ask him those things? What he does after school, that’s the father’s business. “He plays with his sister and brother. What else should he do? You think he should run with the Yankee kids? Lady, you never lived in a project. My kids stay safe in the house with the wife and me. They won’t end up junkies.”

“They never go out?” Ms. Davis asks.

The hard metal chair makes him squirm. And inside of him, too, he feels like a kid, like these people are trying to tell him he did something wrong.

“Leroy goes to Christian Doctrine on Thursday. I come and take him in the cab, and I pick him up, too. He got to get his religion somewhere since they kicked him out of Saint Joseph’s.”

“And on the weekends. What does he do on the weekends?” the redhead asks.
“I got good color TV. They watch the cartoons and all.” He turns to the teacher.
“They don’t watch the bad stuff, Ms Davis. I don’t let ‘em.” The damn chair is too low for him. He stretches his legs under the table. “Sundays we go to Church. Then we go to my brother. He got a nice place and a couple kids. They play outside.” So why did you call me here, Ms. Davis?”

“Leroy is always getting into fights, Mr. Bernard,” the teacher says. “He doesn’t know how to deal with the other children except with his fists. We think it’s because he feels unhappy with himself.”

“He starts the fights?”

She has to think about that. “Not always. But I’ve seen him punch other children when he thinks I’m not looking, or he’ll give them the finger.”

“Must be a reason. You ask him, Ms. Davis?”

She shrugs. “He says they start it.”

“Maybe they do. Maybe ‘cause he’s black and Haitian.”

The skin round the teacher’s mouth gets tight. “He’s not the only black child in the room,” she says.

“What you do to Leroy when he fights? How you punish him?”

She relaxes a little. “We give him a time out. If it’s really bad, Mr. Alonzo takes him downstairs and talks to him.”

Talk, huh. So many times he talks to the boy. Only last week when he had him in the cab, he told him, “You gotta be good, Leroy. It’s hard here in this country for your Momma and me, so you gotta help us by acting nice. Compris?”

“I’m gonna try, Papa. I really am,” he’d said and looked at Jean Marie with such soft, smart eyes you’d swear he meant it. Next minute he started in with Bromand.

“Talk don’t do a thing,” he tells the teacher. “You gotta whip him,”

The teacher looks at him like he said something terrible. “The law wouldn’t let us do that, Mr. Bernard, even if we wanted to. And we don’t want to. We want to help him.”

Sweet talk. She got to teach him what’s right to do. That’s what helps him.

The teacher’s hands rest on the table top. They’re like his momma’s, the joints all swelled up, the skin rough-looking and dry. Must be hard for an old one like her to make the kids behave. Leroy’s near as big as her, stronger, too. “If he don’t do right, Ms. Davis, you take him out of his favorite stuff. Take him out of the animals stuff. That’s what he loves. He watches them animal programs and about the planets.”

Jean Marie stands up. “This why you called me?” he asks. “You got to know I’m not making money while I sit here. I got a family to feed.”

“This is a serious matter, Mr. Bernard.” The redhead looks up at him. “We don’t want to upset you, but we felt we had to tell you -.” She stops talking for a second. Then she says it right out. “Leroy has threatened to commit suicide.”

The room gets dark like someone pulled a blind. Jean Marie stands still while the words seep into his mind, filling it with their poison. Fear boils up in his gut and
rushes through his body. Oh, my good God, the fools! How dare they say that about his boy?

“Who heard this?” His voice is hoarse.

“He said it to Mr. Alonzo — said he wish he was dead.”

Jean Marie stands still, looking at them, trying to shove the fear and the rage back down inside of him. “You think he serious? You don’t know he trying to get you to feel sorry? You don’t know he want you to pay attention?” He swallows. “Listen, I tell you. He’s the middle one. His brother, Bromand, he does good in school, and behaves. And Dara, she’s a little angel. Leroy don’t do good. He’s like a fox, blames everything on the others.”

They sit there looking up at him as if they don’t hear what he’s saying.

“Listen,” he tells them. “I know Leroy makes trouble. All the time I talk to him. I tell him he got to be good. He says he’s gonna try. It don’t help. But suicide. Never!”

“Look at this picture, Mr. Bernard.” The psychologist puts a paper in front of him. “It’s a tall building. You live in a tall building. Look at the person Leroy has drawn. He’s jumping out of the window. Your boy draws this same picture all the time.”

Jean Marie stares. This drawing means his son wants to kill himself? These people gotta be crazy. The redhead completely nuts, and the guy a Zombie. He turns to the teacher. “Ms. Davis, you think Leroy made a picture of himself jumping out of the window? I see it different. I see the cartoons he watches all the time. People fly, got ray guns, make themselves so you can’t see them, all that stuff.”

The teacher, she isn’t as stupid as the redhead. Can’t he make her see? “You gotta understand,” he tells her. “For us, for Haitians, to take your own life is the worst thing can happen. You burn in hell. It’s the biggest shame for your family.” The palms of his hands are sweating. He wipes them on his pants. “Leroy got problems, feels he’s not so good as Bromand. But I tell him he can be just as good. He knows we love him. In the summer I got him a tennis racket. He went for lessons. Five dollars each time, and I took him in the cab. “You got to know my wife and I take good care of our kids, not like the Yanks, divorce, running around, no good food, staying up all hours in the night. What you say got to be wrong.”

Ms. Davis reaches up and puts a hand on his arm. “Look, Mr. Bernard, I know Leroy is well cared for, and he’s been taught manners, too. But the boy’s unhappy. You can see that for yourself.”

Jean Marie sighs and sits down again. “So what you want me to do?”

“We’d like you to take him to the Central Family Clinic,” the teacher says. “They work with groups of youngsters much more intensively than Mr. Alonzo can.”

“Central Family Clinic?” He looks at her in amazement. “That’s for the crazies. You think Leroy is crazy?” He shakes his head. “Oh, that kid is sharp. He got you people feeling sorry for him. Leroy’s got a good home, good momma and papa,
good clothes, good food, but he’s just like his granddaddy wants everyone to pay attention to him and stubborn.” He gets up again. “I’m going to take care of him myself. You don’t worry, Ms. Davis. I’m going to talk to him about the fighting and the crap but he don’t need no clinic. You excuse me. I got to go back to work.”

The three of them look at each other like they don’t know what to say next. The redhead rolls her eyes, and Alonzo seems like he’s going to be sleeping any minute.

Ms. Davis follows him to the door. “We’re sorry you feel this way, Mr. Bernard. Please think this over carefully. And don’t worry about the fees. They’re very understanding at the clinic. We might be able to get the city to pay.”

Jean Marie turns with one hand on the doorknob and searches the old lady’s face. “Listen, Ms. Davis. It’s not the money. If Leroy need something, I get it for him. I’m the father. I don’t need no city to pay for my family. He acts up, you take away what he like best. Soon he be happier. You gonna see.” Jean Marie walks out of the classroom and closes the door behind him. The afternoon heat is like a hand pressing on his whole body as he makes his way back down the cement stairway.
The captain comes over the speaker system and announces that the plane will be making a very sharp turn to the left as we approach the airport. He wasn’t kidding...it feels like a 75 degree turn which would be alarmingly frightening if we were not told about it in advance. We slice through a small gap in the mountains and then even out as we see the runway ahead. As we land we can look directly into people’s homes on either side of the plane as we approach Tegucigalpa International Airport in Honduras, the world’s second most dangerous airport.

We’re met by two Honduran men who will be our guides during our visit. They pick us up at the front door of the airport in a large black SUV with heavily tinted windows. As we pull up to the front door of the five-star Inter-Continental Hotel in downtown Tegucigalpa, the bellman takes our bags with a smile and next to him stands a serious faced young man with a rifle. I ponder that as we’re shown to our rooms. Peering out the window of my room, I see a mall across the street complete with American restaurants: TGI Friday’s, Ruby Tuesdays, and Kentucky Fried Chicken to name just a few. We’re warned to not even consider crossing the street to go to the mall. We are to remain on the property for security reasons ... apparently white people can be tempting targets in this part of the world. I decide I will have my picture taken with the bellman and the guy working the protection detail upon our departure. Where else can I experience this?

Next morning, we drive through the beautiful Honduran countryside, along mountain roads that have no guardrails. It is breathtaking and awe-inspiring on all accounts. On the steepest parts of the road I close my eyes and trust that our driver has traveled this route many times before and knows the road well. We’re headed to a small city south of Tegucigalpa to visit a slum area where a school is being built by contributions from a group of small American churches that sends teams of willing parishioners for a week at a time to continue the building process. They’ve been at it for five years so far and it looks like it will take at least fifteen more years to finish it. They have big hearts but the money for supplies is hard to find.

After seeing the school, I stroll through the slum where the prostitutes live with their children in tin roofed shacks, open to the outside. I have cameras with me and as I walk down one small dirt road two Honduran women wave to me to come and see them. I don’t speak Spanish but we can somehow understand each other fairly well. They are laughing and pointing to a small child sitting on the floor. He is filthy and looks to be about 9 months old, still at the crawling stage. He is completely white with blond, curly hair and blue eyes. They pick him up so I can take his picture. They call him “The Gringo.”
I’ve never seen such a sad looking child. His eyes are downcast and seem filled with sorrow. Is it from being laughed at and pointed out as being so different from others around him? Or is it born of the abject poverty he lives in. There are no toys, no positive stimuli that I can see.

His mother must have been shocked to see her white baby when he was born. Having no Honduran features at all, he must look just like his father. Who was his father, I wonder? Was he perhaps a bank executive visiting the downtown Honduran branch who decided to have a good time one night with a prostitute? Is he well educated? Does he come from Western Europe or America? Does he know he has left part of himself behind in Honduras? Does he even care?

Driving back to Tegucigalpa, we decide to stop at a Burger King for a light dinner. I get out of the car and as I turn the corner to enter the restaurant, there standing by the door is a man with a huge machine gun. It’s pointed to the ground but I figure it would only take the flick of his wrist to get it up and working. I enter demurely. As I eat my burger, I realize that until relatively recently, Honduras experienced years of insurgency. Perhaps with a generation of young men who fought instead of going to school, this protection business is the best way to employ those whose fighting skills are no longer needed on the front lines. I don’t even think of having my picture taken with this armed guard.

While in Honduras, we’ve been protected by our SUV with its tinted windows and by our five-star hotel. I survive having my picture taken with the bellman and the hotel’s rifleman. We’re dropped off at the airport for the trip home.

My mind goes back to the little white boy in the Honduran slum. I wonder what his genes will determine for him. Will he have educational abilities beyond what learning he can experience? Will frustration and anger rule his life? Will he always be upset about being the different one? Constantly wondering where his father came from and why he was left behind?

I have no answers… I only know that for his lifetime he will always be called “The Gringo.”
Today I want to talk to you about climate change, which is and will continue to be the most serious problem facing the U.S. and the world in the 21st century. I say this because solving this problem could allow us to solve most other major problems at the same time ... whether it’s national security and terrorism, or food insecurity, or toxic pollution. But more importantly, if we don’t stop climate change by taking immediate action, you and especially your children and grandchildren will face grave economic consequences. Business as usual is not an option because it will eventually lead to the extinction of millions of species including our own. Some say this could happen as early as 2030.

When I’m finished, I believe the vast majority of you will agree with me on the needed action—whether you’re a traditional conservative, a person of faith, a person angry over extreme income disparity, or just someone who wants future generations to have a good quality of life.

Let’s start by looking at climate science. Our climate is the long term average of all the daily and even yearly weather events. Climate scientists look at things like air temperature near the surface of the earth and see how it has changed over time. They figured out that over billions of years the earth developed a stable atmosphere with a specific proportion of oxygen, nitrogen, CO₂, etc. The earth also developed what we call the greenhouse effect—where greenhouse gases like CO₂ and methane form a blanket around the earth that traps heat. What’s amazing is that this effect gives us an almost perfect average air temperature of 59 degrees F. We also know that the more CO₂ and methane we put into the atmosphere the thicker the blanket will get and the warmer the air will get. Scientists have measured a steady increase in both CO₂ and temperature since the beginning of the industrial revolution when we started emitting CO₂ by burning coal, oil and natural gas. There is a direct correlation there between increasing CO₂ and increasing temperature.

But the actual cause of present global warming is a little more complicated than that. Scientists say there are actually about 12 different natural and manmade things that can cause air temperature to rise or fall—from changes in earth’s orbit to variations in the sun’s output. But after adding up all these effects, they say by far the largest effect is the emission of CO₂ and methane from man’s activities and the burning of coal oil, and natural gas.

Their conclusion is that man’s activities are the primary cause of global warming. And global warming in turn causes climate changes. As most of you have already experienced, this climate change comes in the form of more droughts, forest fires, bigger storms, floods, and species extinctions.
But here’s the really big problem. Climate scientists say if we continue to emit CO₂ and methane at the present rate we will reach *climate tipping points*—maybe within 15 years—which are points of no return. For example, if the Greenland and Antarctic land ice sheets *continue* to melt beyond a certain point, we won’t be able to stop them from melting completely. If this happens, sea level will rise 30 ft, 50 ft or more. There is uncertainty about exact sea level rise and over what time frame, but any way you look at it seacoast cities will be drastically impacted with huge economic losses and there will be mass migrations.

A second major tipping point will occur as the arctic *continues* to warm and the permafrost melts and releases huge amounts of trapped methane. Methane is 28 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than CO₂. The result will be a *sudden* increase in global warming.

The other big problem is that a third of our CO₂ emissions are going into the ocean—which makes it more acidic. As a result, coral, which is habitat for key marine species in the food chain, is stressed and getting bleached out. Under business as usual, the coral will eventually die, triggering major marine species extinction. No fish means no fishing industry and will result in economic disaster.

It’s not a matter of if we will reach these three tipping points, it’s a matter of when. Would you agree with me that we should prevent this from happening - especially if I told you the cost of doing so is equal or lower than business as usual and quality of life will improve?

By the way, who are these *climate* scientists who are telling us these things? They are people doing active climate studies and who publish peer reviewed papers in major science journals. They are the only ones who have credibility. We should pay attention to them and only them. 97 percent of them say climate change is a serious problem primarily caused by burning fossil fuels.

Is this settled science? To put it simply, science of any kind becomes settled when science specialists- in this case climate scientists- stop arguing among themselves. This has happened in climate science. That’s consensus. Of course, because science is always trying to get closer to the truth, new climate data and peer reviewed climate studies could come along to refute the consensus, but so far this hasn’t happened. Would you bet against the present consensus?

Now, you may be aware that there’s a whole industry of people, organizations and think tanks who spend full time trying to convince the public that global warming is a hoax or that some of the climate science is wrong. What you find is that these people are not active climate scientists and/or are being directly or indirectly paid by the coal, oil, or natural gas industries. This includes politicians. So I say to them, “We will listen to you once you publish peer reviewed climate papers in major science journals.” So far, they haven’t. The conclusion is: these people are sending out propaganda to confuse citizens. What’s the *morality* of that, given the dire consequences of business as usual?
So, what are the consequences if we continue emitting greenhouse gases at an increasing rate? We know that extremes of weather will lead to droughts, famine, extreme poverty, disease, forced migration for 1.5 billion people, and wars for resources. Africa will be the hardest hit. Disappearing glaciers will mean major rivers like the Ganges and the Colorado will go dry part of the year. This will affect drinking water supplies. As sea levels rise, waterfront property and whole cities will be abandoned, including New Orleans, N.Y.C. and Miami. There will be never ending wars in the Mid East and elsewhere over oil and gas. Most cities will have unhealthy air quality. Water supplies will be polluted. There will be no wild fish. Plus, there will be economic collapse for all but the wealthiest. Why would anyone choose this scenario if there was an alternative?

Couldn’t we just cut back our emissions a little bit, as a compromise, and try to adapt to the above consequences as they occur? No, because we’d just put off reaching the tipping points by a few years. And the costs to adapt would likely be as high as the cost of actually solving the problem by drastically cutting emissions. And we may panic and adopt “geo engineering” projects to keep the sun from hitting the earth—but they are unproven, will have unintended consequences, and won’t solve the fish extinction problem.

Here’s another thought: If we know we must stop CO₂ emissions eventually, why not do it now when the cost of doing so is the lowest it will ever be? And, we will save the huge adaptation and storm damage costs we would have had under business as usual.

Do you now agree with me that we need to solve this climate problem instead of hiding our heads in the sand?

If we want to solve this problem you need to know a few things. First, we have almost no time to act if we want to have a smooth transition to a new way of doing things. If we wait a few more years, we’ll be forced into an abrupt transition to avoid hitting the tipping points. That’s because transitions to new products and technologies take at least 10 years.

Second, you have to understand the magnitude of the challenge. To stop climate change and avoid the tipping points, we must essentially stop the rise in global air temperature. To do that we must reduce the atmospheric concentration of CO₂ to 350 PPM from the present 400 PPM. That’s a problem because the CO₂ is now rising fast. Here’s the bottom line: We must eliminate all coal use ASAP (because it has high emissions), and reduce all oil and natural gas use by 35 percent by 2030 and about 80 percent by 2050. Most oil and gas reserves must be left in the ground!

Can we achieve this goal? Hell yes. It’s already happening in California, Germany, and Scandinavia. We just have to change our way of thinking and our attitude. Existing technology can get us there but we can do better. And the marketplace will get it done. We just have to put the right incentives in place for companies and consumers. And in the process, our quality of life will improve. (I define QOL as hav-
ing a good paying job, affordable advanced education, affordable healthcare for all, comfortable housing, and a decent income in retirement. Isn’t that the real American dream?)

So now let’s look at how the tech experts think we can radically cut emissions. Later we’ll look at what policies and incentives we need to get it done quickly.

First we need to get companies and individuals to invest in ways to cut their energy usage. For example, by using more efficient processes, pumps, motors, boilers, refrigerators, lighting, and air conditioning; more insulation; and more efficient building design. As a result, instead of increasing our total energy usage every year we’ll be decreasing it significantly—without affecting the economy. And, there’s a good return on these investments. We’ll be able to phase out some fossil fuel plants and eliminate the need for any new ones.

Second, we must get electric utilities to replace their existing coal and gas fired plants with solar, wind and other renewable power sources. Once we cut our total electricity use by say 30 percent, there’s plenty of sun, wind, tidal, geo thermal, and hydro energy to meet our needs. Replacing coal with natural gas is not an option because it’s emissions are about the same as coal when you factor in methane losses from pipelines and gas wells. You could add carbon capture and storage to these fossil fuel plants, but this is unproven technology and would be more expensive than, say, wind energy. If we get rid of all special federal energy industry subsidies, which we must do to put all energy sources on an equal playing field, no new nuclear plants will be built.

Third, cars and light trucks use a lot of gasoline and we can cut usage by 80 percent by redesigning our vehicles. The first step is to radically reduce vehicle weight and then power them with electricity, bio fuel and/or hydrogen.

Fourth, we can cut electricity and natural gas use in buildings by 50 percent, while increasing floor space, by using integrative design. For example, using thick insulation allows use of smaller, cheaper heating /cooling units; and daylighting and spot lighting on work surfaces saves electricity.

These four strategies and others will allow us to cut fossil fuel use 80 percent. But, wouldn’t you agree that these things aren’t likely to happen on their own—and if we want to meet our deadlines of 35 percent by 2030 and 80 percent by 2050, we need some very serious incentives to switch away from fossil fuels? This is a necessity if we want a smooth transition. So here are the policies and incentives:

1. Eliminate all current energy industry subsidies. For example, special tax breaks, depletion allowances, loan guaranties, and free insurance.

   The result: It levels the playing field, makes renewables more competitive, and saves taxpayers $60 billion per year.

2. Implement a revenue neutral carbon fee and dividend.

   You could call this a greenhouse gas emissions fee which
is proportional to the amount of carbon emissions produced when coal, oil or natural gas are burned. It would be assessed at the well or mine source and would start at $20/ton of CO₂ equivalent and increase by $14/ton every year. The money would go into a dedicated fund and every month checks would go out from this fund to each U.S. household to compensate them for the higher energy costs they will pay. Companies and schools would also get a monthly check to offset their higher energy costs. To keep companies from buying high carbon components in China, a carbon tariff would be applied on imports until China had an equal carbon fee. No fee exclusions for specific industries.

**The result:** This fee, which represents a very real environmental cost to the taxpayer when fossil fuels are burned, would for the first time be built into the price of a gallon of gas. The fee must be high enough to make customers switch away from fossil fuels. It would be phased in to lessen the impact. There would be no effect on the economy because each household is made whole. Actually, if an equal check goes out to each household, low income people would come out ahead because they use less energy. Politicians couldn’t touch the money. Part of the revenue raised could go to subsidizing production of U.S. renewable energy products we will provide to developing countries to help them get off fossil fuels. A win-win for companies and aid.

3. All companies must bear the full cost of their pollution. For example, their oil spills, methane leaks, chem spills, fly ash spills, toxic waste, non-recycled fracking fluid, and farm fertilizer and pesticide runoff. EPA/DOE will monitor & assess fees.

**The result:** The price of fossil fuels may go up. Companies could no longer treat the air and water as their free sewer. Taxpayers would save billions. Companies would have an incentive to spend a little extra to prevent pollution.

4. An NO₂ and SO₂ fee. Similar to a carbon fee.

**The result:** Forces scrubbers on all coal plants. Solves the acid rain and asthma problems. Helps to phase out coal plants.

5. Make the federal gas tax flexible to create a minimum gas price of $7-8/gal. It would be revenue neutral and dedicated to specific uses: repair of roads and bridges, fossil fuel health costs, incentives for new energy technologies. If OPEC/oil companies decide to drop the gas price to hurt new technologies, then the gas tax adjusts to maintain a $7-8 pump price.
6. Add a fee-bate program of consumer incentives. When buying a car or light truck, buyers get an immediate rebate if they buy a high MPG vehicle in a given class (e.g. 4 person car) and pay an extra fee if buying a low MPG model.

**The result:** It will be revenue and technology neutral. No net taxpayer cost. Essential for innovation. Companies have assured demand. Retains consumer choice.

7. Change electric utility rules. Utility companies will make more money by moving to renewables and helping consumers save electricity than by selling more electricity. They could profit from building utility scale solar or wind farms. Each city or state could be its own utility.

8. The government will do the R&D on and coordinate a national smart electrical grid system.

9. The government will offer “x-prizes” and R&D subsidies to companies with the best new, low-carbon or energy efficient products. Prize is proportional to production volume.

10. The government would regulate electric energy instead of the states. This would allow feed-in tariffs and better grid coordination.


12. Fossil fuel workers must be given new jobs. Coal and oil states must be given incentives to create energy efficiency businesses, community based utility scale solar/wind projects, bio ethanol plants, etc.

Would you agree these policies and incentives would not be burdensome on the economy and households? Most of them give entrepreneurs, businesses and individuals the incentives they need to get us off fossil fuels. *Net* cost to the taxpayers will be very low. And doesn’t it make sense to put all real costs associated with pollution, NO$_2$, SO$_2$, and CO$_2$ into the price of products that use fossil fuels? Otherwise, citizens are subsidizing products like gasoline, which are sold at artificially low prices.

But, you’ll say, what will happen to the fossil fuel companies if we implement these policies? First of all, oil companies will be forced to end their very profitable practice of pushing some major costs onto the public in order to keep the price of gasoline artificially low. The lower the price, the more gallons they sell. It’s a nice business plan, but would you agree it is totally unfair and even immoral?

Secondly, they should be prosecuted for lying about climate change. Decades ago, Exxon scientists told management that global warming was being caused by their product. Management lied to Congress about this and has been spending hundreds
of millions of dollars to fund climate deniers ever since. Their present business plan is to extract as many barrels of oil reserves as they can find—even though they know this will lead to ecological and economic collapse. Would you agree this is totally immoral? They are using the same tactics the cigarette companies used to deny the link between smoking and cancer.

So, we must get the fossil fuel companies to write off their reserves. But we need to encourage them to have a new mission—which is to become leaders in the production and distribution of clean fuels like bio-diesel, bio-ethanol, hydrogen, and even electricity for cars. Couldn’t they utilize existing filling stations?

Would a transition to cleaner energy be costly for businesses? Not if they get a check to cover higher energy costs during a transition period. They would also get a good return on investments in increased energy efficiency. Many new businesses would be created to offer new green products and services. And most importantly, if we subsidize the new technologies, the companies have a chance to become world leaders in these new technologies before other countries can.

What’s the role of our government in the transition? It would set up the policies and administer the programs needed to stop climate change. It would design and coordinate the new smart national electric grid. And it would invest in some basic research.

Now, you’ll say, we can’t save the planet unless all major countries adopt the same climate policies. That’s true. We must be the leader and act first. Then we’ll adopt climate tariffs to force our trading partners to have similar policies to avoid the tariffs. And we’ll subsidize the export of the kind of U.S. green products developing countries need to cut their emissions.

What would life be like for U.S. citizens if the climate policies are adopted? There would be no net effect on our standard of living. We might use more mass transit, electric vehicles, car sharing, or autonomous taxis, but we’d get where we need to go. Roads and bridges would be fixed. There’d be less asthma and other health problems. By eliminating our need for Mid East oil and leaving the region, we’d lessen the motivation of radical groups to hate us. Thus less war and terrorism and a lower military budget. We’ve gone through job transitions before, but this time it would be away from some dangerous and unhealthy jobs to cleaner and safer ones.

Jimmy Carter says we live in an oligarchy, or rule by a relative few billionaires and corporations. If we removed the money from politics, we could again have a true Democracy. If we accomplished this at the same time we adopted the climate policies, we would be able to greatly improve quality of life for all Americans. For example, we could eliminate extreme income disparity and have affordable advanced education and universal healthcare for all.

But here’s where I must level with you. The truth is, we either get all of these climate and quality of life polices implemented or we will get none! And getting none will be a grim scenario.
It all comes down to a conflict between political interests. More specifically, the interests of the fossil fuel industry vs. the vital interests of we-the-people. Short term profits vs. human survival.

Is this a conservative vs. liberal issue? No. But we must distinguish between two types of conservatives. Corporate conservatives believe people and natural resources must be exploited for maximum profits, and there should be no restraints on corporate behavior. In contrast, traditional conservatives believe in environmental stewardship, truth seeking, prudence, fair market competition, and representative democracy. I believe traditional conservatives will consider the above climate policies to be bipartisan—because the policies are market-based, revenue neutral, technology neutral, and designed to level the playing field.

While it’s true each of us belongs to a local tribe of like-minded people, when it comes to stopping climate change we’re also part of a bigger worldwide tribe. We’re all in the same boat—which will become a life boat without quick action.

So, how can we-the-people get congress to act? We must form a massive, grassroots movement representing 70 percent of Americans. That will get their attention. The truth is, there are already hundreds of single issue groups out there. We just need to educate them with talks like this to see that most of the groups have shared values and economic interests. For example, if we can’t stop climate change, there will be a negative impact on their issue.

We also need to convince them we all succeed or fail together. Each group doesn’t have much clout—whether their issue is a rigged financial system, money in politics, exploitation and abuse of minorities, or rewriting trade policies to bring jobs back to the U.S. So we need a giant movement with representatives from each single-issue group.

Perhaps we could call it the “Bipartisan Climate + Prosperity Coalition.” The leadership of this movement would be made up of “experts and icons” and their primary goal would be to educate average Americans and get them to sign an online petition. They would give TV talks like this one and also organize marches on Washington, etc. The experts would be people like climate scientist James Hansen, tech people like Amory Lovins and Elon musk, CEOs, generals, economists, social media experts, and experts in each single issue. The icons would be people with credibility and celebrity like Oprah, Hollywood stars, Elizabeth Warren, Warren Buffett, various conservatives, young people, etc.

Individual Americans may not think they have any influence over politicians. But 70 percent of them do if they join together. This must happen before the Presidential election, to get the candidates to take a position.

* This piece is a summary of a fall 2015 study group that Rob led for our OLLI, presented in the form of an FDR-style radio address to the American people.
It was his picture in the Boston Globe that triggered the memory. He was in a tuxedo, looking confident and happy at a sailing party for the Tall Ships. As I stared at the picture, I recalled an earlier sailing memory of him.

He was 16 years old and newly diagnosed with cancer when I first took care of him. Brian was in a great deal of emotional distress as he tried to come to grips with his diagnosis. He was the son of privileged parents, and the diagnosis of cancer devastated his lifestyle. I was his primary care nurse when he was admitted to the hospital for surgery. Brian found it difficult to cope with the pain caused by the surgery, as well with the usual restrictions that come with being a patient. He regressed, and often cried and wanted to leave the hospital against medical advice. He wanted it all to go away.

Brian was angry with everyone, and his behavior alienated everyone. He was sad about the changes in his body image, so important to a teenager. He felt helpless and hopeless. I sensed what his struggles were, and tried to spend time with him to lend support. I acknowledged his anger and sadness, I began teaching about chemotherapy to give him a sense of control. My goal was to convey to him the belief that he could get through this— that he could survive, and there was life ahead for him. I wanted him to feel that he would not have to go through it alone.

When his initial hospitalization was over he left a note in my mailbox thanking me, saying that he would come back someday to show me his “true self.” He then began chemotherapy treatments in the clinic. To assist in the transition, I joined him for his first treatment. I found him crying with a towel over his head so no one could see him vomit. I sat with him, trying to lend support, and listened as he cried about losing his hair. Once again my goal was to give him strength and let him know that he would get through the treatments.

Months went by, and one day he appeared on the unit looking healthy and happy, his hair all grown back. His treatments were finished. Brian asked if I would go somewhere with him, and since my shift was over, I agreed. I found myself walking with him to the Charles River. When we reached the sailing club, he brought me into the locker room, and introduced me to all his high school friends who were waiting to sail. There I was, an adult in a nurses uniform in a locker room filled with teenagers—an interesting sight. They all came up to me and talked about Brian’s experience in the hospital, as he looked on. After a few minutes, Brian brought me out to the dock to watch him sail and asked me to wave to him until his boat was out of sight. As the boat pulled away from the dock, he said, “Thank you, Kathie.”

I never saw him again after that day.

It was a magical moment, one that I had to process as I walked back to the
hospital alone. I think Brian wanted to share a piece of his world with me. He was showing me that once again he was in control. As he told me earlier, he was showing me his “true self.” I felt honored that he wanted to share with me on this level. It reinforced how beautifully complex adolescents are, and to be a part of their world is a privilege.

Fast forward to the picture in the *Boston Globe*, 15 years later.

Seeing Brian living his life, still with a love of sailing, was comforting to me. It made me understand how important it is to keep trying with a patient, to help them believe, even in their darkest moments that there is a life to be lived—even with cancer. And it confirmed for me why I love what I do.

**Note from the Author:**
The patient’s name has been changed to maintain his privacy.
“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.

Just then his phone rang again. It was Althea. “I’ve had the tires done and I’m back home,” she said. “Now I’m going to take Mrs. Trowbridge to her dentist appointment.” She sounded self-assured as ever.

Adam nodded, “Okay,” and hung up.

Althea collected her gloves and purse and walked over to 220B. “Are you ready, dear?” she asked, standing in her friend’s front hall. She clutched a piece of paper with the address and time of the appointment. Mrs. Trowbridge, although younger by just a few years than Althea, was unable to drive herself. Macular degeneration in both eyes had made her almost blind. She gathered up her things gratefully and tottered toward the elevator.

Some time later Althea called Adam again. “Mission accomplished,” she said with an audible flourish.

“I am so glad I can help my friends.”

Adam realized she was her old self, in charge again. Even so, her lapse of memory earlier in the day nagged at him. “Why don’t you think about moving in with us,” he blurted.

“Why ever for?” Althea was outraged

He tried to explain what fun it would be to share households (he had not yet asked his wife). He told her what an enormous help she would be around the house. She could water the flowers, pick up the mail, greet the children with hot chocolate when they came home from school.

“But on your tintype!” replied his mother, using an expression of her own mother’s. “I like it here. Besides, I’m independent.” He listened silently as his mother ranted on.

There’s the rub, thought Adam. Independence. When did she become the child and I the parent?

He didn’t like the feeling. Carefully he said, “Well, if you don’t want to leave your apartment right now, maybe you should consider giving up your car keys.”

There, he had said it. There was a long silence. Then, in a voice like thunder: “I’ll give them up when I’m good and ready. Not before.”

That’s where it stood for several weeks. Adam worried about his mother driving around town and Althea fumed about his lack of trust. Then one day she took another frail friend to a nearby appointment and got lost. The two elderly ladies finally made it back to their apartment building, clearly shook up over the episode. When Althea’s contemporary suggested she take a taxi to her appointments from now on, Althea gasped. Then she drew herself up.

“What is, is,” she said later as she handed Adam her keys. “Suck it up.”

And she did.
While working as a newspaper delivery person in Newton Center the routine each morning consisted of going into the basement door, picking up your papers, folding them and then taking them out for delivery. The basement area was rather unkempt with extra papers piled along one wall and a barrel full of old string, and papers that were too old to be returned for credit. There was a stairway at the side wall leading to the second floor but we never went up there except to collect our weekly pay. At the top of the stairs was a fenced in office with a slot for us to collect our pay. Between the office and the front of the building was a store where items like candy, comic books, magazines and the like were sold.

The wall separating the store from the office did not extend up to the ceiling and it was all that separated the goodies in the store from the back area. Mr. Rafferty, the newspaper distributor didn’t arrive until after 8 AM so the back area was accessible to any of us who might go up the stairs and the store itself was reachable by climbing over the wall. If one could get over the wall and back the items in the store were able to be “lifted.” A group of four to six guys found this out and began “lifting” candy and comic books from the front area.

As those things inevitably work it wasn’t noticed at first but the regular shortages of some items was noticed. The store manager set up a watch and soon the perpetrators were noted. The people who participated in the enterprise, either actually going over the wall and those who received the pilfered goods were called into the principal’s office at Weeks Junior High, there to be confronted by a police detective and the principal. It was pretty easy to break the suspects. They were told that someone else gave them his name and they would go easy on them later if he gave them all the names.

I believe there were about six suspects including my brother. While this was not a heinous crime there had to be a punishment. It started when all the boys had to show up at school with their parents and admit their guilt. The total take of this crime syndicate was probably less than $50, but punishment had to more than fit the crime. The principal and the detective were the prosecutors and the jury. Here was the punishment. One dollar per week for ten weeks. Since they only made $2.50 to $3 per week this was a significant amount. In addition they were to appear at police headquarters every Saturday for ten weeks and sign the “parole” book. This was far worse than the money. Newton Police Headquarters was in West Newton, about five miles from Newton Center, so it took a ten mile trip, and this was back in the days when our parents, if they had a car, had to work on Saturday. Thus a fleet of bicycles left Newton Center for the 1½ hour trip to West Newton and back each Saturday. Incidentally, these were not ten- or even five-speed bikes. It was totally leg power.
I don’t know about the other boys but my brother got more punishment at home. It was a lesson that I’m sure impacted them for the rest of their lives. It also demonstrated how a measured response to a relatively minor infraction can produce a lesson for a lifetime.
We are visiting “Sun City,” a 55-plus community. It sounds like a place where you are left to walk off into the sunset, doesn’t it? But we are looking at it get closer to our only grandchild. This is our last night here. We walk around the Lake House out to the dock over the water. We are all alone out there and it is very peaceful. Just us and the turtles hanging onto the 2x4s that hold up the deck. One big turtle swims out from under the walkway with his head all of the way out of the water. It makes me think that he is looking for food. Do people here feed the turtles? Of course they do. This is not normal behavior for a wild turtle. Lots of things here are meant to look natural but are artificial. We are waiting for my daughter and granddaughter, “Chicky,” to come for a visit. Grandchildren are great—maybe because you get to go home and then miss them instead of having to be with them all of the time. As a parent you are worn to a frazzle and cannot enjoy them as much because you cannot escape.

“Chicky” is so cute now. We have been worrying for so long that she is not talking as much as you would expect for an 18 month old. But today she is saying her favorite food “cheese” over and over. And tonight she is saying “table” and “duck.” She says a lot of things for Grandpa. Grandpa expects more and he gets more.

After dinner in the apartment we get out the golf cart and my daughter, husband and “Chicky” head for the playground. Only a two-seater golf cart so I run behind. It is a peaceful playground near a pond—a perfect size for “Chicky” and older kids. But now no one else is there but us.

“Chicky” is slow to do anything new. She is like her grandfather who is very tech savvy but never buys new technology until it is fully tested and already adopted by half of the rest of the population. They are both LATE ADOPTERS. Their philosophy is “Never try something early. Let others work out the bugs.” So “Chicky” is slow to do anything new. She was so slow to crawl. She hated to be on the ground on her stomach. Like a fish out of water. She hated holding her head up just to see anything! This is so much more of a problem today than it was 30 years ago. Now, because of the concern over SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), kids are not supposed to sleep on their stomachs. They do not get the practice pushing themselves up with their arms so when you put them in the position to start to crawl they believe that you are torturing them. Grandpa, however, is not going to let that deter him. He gets down on the ground with her. He lies on the floor, facing the crying frustrated “Chicky,”
with his arms out, arms and legs off the ground like superman taking off in flight, and he reassures her that it is all ok. “See, it is not so bad.” he says.

On the playground “Chicky” is having so much fun. Grandpa says she can walk across the rickety swinging bridge by herself. “Let her do it,” he says. Grandma is cautious. But “Chicky” crosses it over again and again just fine. Grandpa expects more. So much energy—such a happy child. But this is taking a lot of adult energy so we go down the dock to the water. Dark water. Bouncy dock. So quiet. Just at the horizon in the west a faint glow from the sunset. Black silhouettes of trees against the thin orange band of light. Just above it a thin fingernail of a moon. All you can hear are the katydids. I have been telling “Chicky” about the katydids since she was an infant when I would take her out for walks at dusk. Then she was too young for her eyes to focus on far away things but she could hear well. I would carry her around the block at sunset and I would tell her about all of the things that we would hear – birds, katydids, lawnmowers, etc. Now “Chicky” listens intently for the katydids.

“Chicky” did eventually crawl—army style at first—like a soldier on maneuvers crawling through the mud on his stomach using only one arm and one leg to propel forward. She crawled like this for a very long time. Slow to crawl on all 4’s. Slow to walk. “Chicky” does not like to try and fail. She is going to wait till she can do it well. Then she just DOES it. And she then does it very well! Shortly after she started to walk she was running—stable and smooth.

Slow to start but fast to catch up.

I expect talking will be like that too. She is just being slow to start. But she is a child that makes you worry! She just makes you worry each time she has to try something new. Each time she makes you worry, and I think she always will.
The Train Station

by John F. Murphy

People talked as they waited for the train at the station. What I call a station is actually just an elevated platform with a couple of open wind shelters with a roof. It was cold in the winter and hot in the summer. The weather was always a topic of conversation. It was too cold, too hot, too wet, or too dry. Some times the pedestrian tunnel to the inbound train platform would flood and we would have to drive to the inbound parking lot to catch the train. I can remember the cold winter winds that seemed to blow especially hard on the days the train was late. Occasionally someone would say “What a nice day it is!”

I miss the people I had talked to at the train station. It has been over two years since Helen, my wife, and I took the 6:00 AM train from Bowie Station in Maryland to Union Station in Washington DC. From there I would take the red line Metro to Farragott North and walk to my office on K St. Helen would continue on to the Bethesda station and walk to her job as an administrative assistant with a pharmacy trade organization. In the evening we would meet at Union Station and take the train back to Bowie. Since then, she and I have retired and moved to Florida away from the hustle and bustle of our nation’s capital.

We met people at the train station or on the train who had a variety of jobs necessary for the functioning of the government and the nation’s capital city. Mary was in her late thirties, I believe. She was a plain woman who dressed almost manly wearing baggy pants and shirt, although she seemed to be happily married. I never saw her wearing a skirt or dress. She worked for the IRS designing and publishing pamphlets and books. She seemed to like her job and was recently promoted. She had a mother who lived in Florida whom she would visit from time to time. We told her we had a daughter who lived in Florida and might retire there some day.

Another man, I forget his name, worked at the government printing office. He was in his early to mid sixties with glasses and wore a red parka in the winter. He teased me about losing my gloves on a cold winter day. “Where are your gloves today? This isn’t Texas.” I had told him that I had lived in Texas for twelve years before I started my government job. The next day he presented me with a strap with clips to attach my gloves to my coat sleeves so I would not lose my gloves again. The other waiting passengers all laughed. He talked about retiring and moving to the Maryland seashore. One day he was gone and we never saw him again. He must have retired. I wish him well in his new home and his new life on the beach.

I met another train passenger who recently started a job as the chief financial officer for a trade union. He wore a suit jacket and tie every day and a long trench coat. He looked like a CPA. He was grateful for the new job. Like me, he was over fifty years old and had been unemployed for nearly a year before taking this new job. He had two teen age daughters who did not want to move again. I told him about my job investigating chemical plant accidents for the federal government. The agen-
I worked for conducted public meetings that were shown on the web. He would watch the webcast and compliment me on my presentation. He was always worried about keeping his job. One day he was missing from train station and I never saw him again. I hope he still has his job. It is not easy finding a new job when you are older than fifty.

Often in the evening on the train ride home, Helen and I would talk about the problems of the day. She was well liked at the trade association she worked at and had few complaints but did talk about the office gossip. My job was in a state of change and I would talk about my frustrations. An older lady, some what over weight in her sixties, over heard us one evening and interjected that she was going to retire in January. She worked at the Pentagon for the generals. Apparently the generals presented the same kind of frustrations as other supervisors. She told us that she lived alone with several birds for pets. We called her the bird lady. January came and the bird lady was missing from the train. I trust she and her birds are living a happy life.

On the train there was a black conductor in his fifties named Jonesy. He had a white beard and wore a blue conductor’s uniform. Jonesy was always cheerful even when the train was late and the passengers were unhappy. He had a smile on his face which seemed to make things better for every one around him. Occasionally I would leave my boarding pass at home and he would wink and say, “Be sure to bring your pass next time.” I miss the sun shine he brought every day. “All aboard!” he would shout as we left the station.

I met two bankers, at the train station, Tom and Bill. Tom was in his fifties, short and wore a shirt with no tie. He worked for a banking trade association and talked about retirement. His wife had recently received a large sum of money from a job change that made retirement a real possibility. We would occasionally see him at a restaurant in Bowie and we would buy each other a beer. My sister in-law, Betty, also worked in banking in Michigan and was unemployed at the time. Bill gave me his business card. I gave Betty Bill’s telephone number and she called him. Betty told us that Bill’s advice helped her find a new banking job in Wisconsin.

People at the station and on the train were friendly and helpful. Bill, the other banker, was a vice president for a small bank. In the banking business every one seems to be a vice president. He was also short and had a small white beard. He wore a shirt and tie and a black hat with a brim every day. He was always friendly and talkative. He recently got a new boss and sensed that things were changing at the bank and so he found a new job with the Smithsonian as an accounting supervisor. He was just a few years from retirement and the new job suited him just fine.

Things were also changing at the agency I was working at. I was only fifty nine years old and planned to retire at sixty two. But plans change. I had the opportunity to retire early and the time was right. One day in March of 2005, I was also missing from the train station. Mary, Tom, Bill, and the other fellow passengers probably asked, “What happen to John?” I am sure that others have taken my place and there are new stories to share while waiting for the 6:00 AM train to Union Station.
I had not been back to the Tufts campus in Medford for fifteen years. The last time I was there was May of 1994, the twenty-fifth anniversary of my graduation from Tufts. On that weekend none of my close alumni friends attended the alumni events. My friend Jeff, who served as an usher in my wedding in 1969, had planned to be there, but job priorities got in the way. Helen, my wife, and I had fun anyway. We had lunch at the clam bake with people that we met there. I ran up and down the campus hills in the 10k race. I did not win, but I did finish.

2008 was the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of my graduation from Tufts. I have been retired since May of 2005 and moved to Punta Gorda, Florida from Bowie, Maryland. I had just completed five years with the U.S. Chemical Safety Board where I investigated chemical plant accidents. My wife insisted we move here to be close to my daughter and a potential grandchild. Just as she planned our first grandchild, Allison Claire Rice, was born October 18, 2006, the day after my wife’s birthday.

I convinced Helen that we should go to the alumni weekend, but this time I was determined that my close alumni friends should be there with me. Surely they are retired or nearly retired and should have the time and the money to be there. I went to the alumni directory and made a list: Bob, my roommate for four years; Jeff and Dave E., fellow chemical engineering majors; John, Jim, and Dave L., friends who lived in West Hall; Richie, Jeff’s roommate; and Ken, a friend of Bob and me who majored in mathematics.

I wrote each of them a letter or sent them an email, including my telephone number and email address, inviting them to attend alumni weekend in May. I did not receive a reply from Dave E., Jim, or Dave L. even after following up with several email messages, but I heard from the others.

The first to respond was John. He called me one Saturday night while Helen and I were watching a DVD. His voice sounded just like the last time we had talked, forty years ago. John and I liked to play tennis while we were at Tufts. Neither of us was very good, but we liked to play. John reminded me of the time we rented bicycles and rode to my mother’s apartment in Quincy, over twenty miles from campus. I had forgotten about the trip. John told me that after Tufts he went to medical school at the University of Vermont and received his medical degree. He was still practicing in Vermont. He had cut back to working only forty hours per week, but was thinking about retirement. He and his wife Martha lived on a small farm with cattle. It had a wooded area where he tapped maple trees in the spring and made maple syrup. He and Bob, my roommate, had kept in touch over the years. John said he would try to make the reunion.

I received an email from Bob and later talked to him on the telephone. Since
Tufts, he served time in the air force and received a master’s degree in electrical engineering from the University of Maryland. He met his wife, Martha, there and his son, Tony also graduated from Maryland. After several jobs including one as an entrepreneur developing satellite imaging technology for TV, he was now an IT manager for the City of Charlotte, North Carolina. Bob said that he would try to attend the lunch on Saturday.

I received an unexpected telephone call while planning for the alumni weekend from Kevin K., a fellow chemical engineering graduate. Kevin had read an article I had written in a chemical engineering magazine and called to talk about the article and renew acquaintances. Kevin had recently retired from a management position with a major chemical company. I remembered Kevin from my Tufts days. He was one of nineteen chemical engineering graduates in 1968. I talked him into attending the alumni weekend. He said he would try to contact some of the other chemical engineers that graduated in 1968 from his home town of Woburn to see if they might attend.

Next I heard from Jeff. Jeff was still working in the chemical industry. He was a supply chain manager, the modern terminology for purchasing manager. He had children still in college so he hoped to continue to work a few more years. He contacted his roommate Richie, who also said he would attend the Saturday lunch. Richie was an environmental engineering student at Tufts, but upon graduation he joined the Peace Corps and spent time in India. He became interested in Indian studies, married an Indian woman, and is now a professor of Indian Studies at Harvard.

I later contacted my friend Ken by email. He graduated from Tufts with a degree in mathematics, but after graduation obtained an MBA from Harvard. Ken owned his own management consulting company in New Jersey. Ken had not been back to the Tufts campus in years, but would consider coming to the reunion.

I have spent my career in the chemical industry with jobs in manufacturing, process safety consulting, and government. During my career, I learned the need to include process safety concepts in the undergraduate chemical engineering curriculum. With the help of Ron W., a professor of chemical engineering at Northeastern University, I set up a meeting with the chair of the Tufts chemical engineering department to discuss the issue of including process safety in the undergraduate curriculum at Tufts.

I also set up a meeting with Marilyn, the director at the time of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Tufts, to discuss the operation of the online book club I started and coordinated.

Helen and I arrived at Logan Airport on Thursday morning. Kevin picked us up outside of baggage claim. I recognized him immediately. He hair was grey and he was somewhat heavier and slightly bald, but he looked very much like the Kevin from my undergraduate days. He and his wife, Claire, were staying with their son and his family in Charlestown. We drove to the Mayer Campus Center and registered. Kevin then drove us to South Hall where Helen and I were staying for the weekend. Dormitory life had changed since 1968. Men and women share the dormitories in-
Kevin and his wife Claire met Helen and me at the pre-Pops buffet at the Dewick-MacPhie Dining Complex, and then took the bus to Symphony Hall for Tufts night at the Pops. At the Pops I learned that Kevin had recently retired from a management position with a major chemical company. As I did, he was struggling with what to do with his time now that he was retired.

On Friday morning, Helen and I climbed the hill to Carmichael Hall where we met with Marilyn and David, Tufts IT manager, to discuss the operation of the online book club. Walking up the hill to Carmichael Hall, I realized that I had forgotten how steep the hill is. Marilyn was a Tufts graduate and has been the director of the Osher Life Long Learning Institute for eight years. After the meeting, Marilyn invited Helen and me to lunch with the 55 and over reunion celebration. Marilyn’s husband belonged to this group, but was at home with a terminal disease.

Friday evening, Kevin, Helen and I attended the Cirque d’Elephant at Gancher Center. We ate, danced some, talked and mingled with alumni from all classes.

On Saturday morning after breakfast, Helen and I walked around the hill to Medford Hill Side where we drank coffee and read the local paper at Dunkin Donuts. From there I walked to the Science and Technology Center where I met with the chair of the chemical engineering department and two other professors to discuss my proposal to include process safety in the undergraduate chemical engineering curriculum. They listened to me politely for about one hour. The chair said that the curriculum had no process safety content, but he hope to hire a PhD from industry to teach a design course where process safety could be included. I volunteered to assist the new professor with making contacts with others teaching process safety. I recently emailed the chair to check on the status of the new hire and design course, but have received no reply.

John, Bob, Jeff, and Richie had agreed to attend the lunch at the quadrangle in front of Houston Hall. Ken decided not to attend. I met Bob, his wife Martha and their son Andy, and John at the Mayer Campus Center. I recognized Bob and John right away as they approached the building. Bob had aged well. He was still tall and slim. His hair was slightly grey. John had aged and was balding, but then again he was balding while attending Tufts. We walked up the hill to the picnic tent at the quad. We had lunch and drank some beer. Jeff was late but joined up with us at the tent. I told Jeff he was better looking than I remember. He said he had broken his nose and since then his nose had lost the hook it once had. I told him he had become better looking with age. John and Helen got along well. They both grew up on poor farms and worked hard as they grew up. I talked to Bob about his life after Tufts. He and Martha had lost their son Tony to cancer in 1997 when Tony was 25. John had been a great counselor during this time. Bob had developed some satellite imagery technology that is now used in TV, but sold the business for a nominal price. Not all inventors profit greatly from their inventions. John asked me if I had Parkinson’s disease. He had diagnosed my condition by the way I walked up the hill. John was a good doctor. The gathering ended too quickly. John had to drive to Connecticut to
visit his brother. Bob and his family left to visit family who also lived in Connecticut. We pledged that we would stay in contact and visit each other.

Richie, the Harvard professor, finally showed up after the others had left and he, Jeff and I reminisced. We talked about playing basketball. He remembered my jump shot from the corner. He mentioned that he met my girl friend from my senior year, Linda, while he was attending Berkeley. He mentioned my name to her and she replied she did not remember me. So much for college romance! Helen and I went back to the dorm to rest. Jeff and Richie continued to talk. I met Richie and Jeff later that afternoon. Richie promised to take me to the North End for clams and lobster the next time I was in Boston.

Jeff, Kevin, Claire, Helen and I attended 40th Class party at Alumnae Hall that evening. We met others from our class, including another chemical engineering major. Four of the nineteen chemical engineering graduates attended. Not a bad percentage. We met a good friend of Dave E. and he said he would talk to Dave and have him contact me. I still have not been contacted by Dave. We had a class picture taken. Kevin said that he would visit when he wintered in Florida.

Early the next morning Jeff dropped Helen and me off at the airport on the way to visit his mother and promised to keep in touch.

I am glad we had a chance to get together one more time. Life is too short and you do not know how many days you have left.

Two months after the reunion I received word of John’s death from Bob:

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**OBITUARY for Dr. John Hall Elliott, MD, A68; country doctor in Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom**

A public gathering of remembrance was held July 13 on the green at Bandstand Park in Lyndonville, VT, for John Hall Elliott, MD, A68, of Lyndon, a family doctor much beloved in his Vermont community who died in a logging accident at the age of 62.

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Tufts classmate Bob Went, E68, sent the following tribute: “John died July 9 as a result of a tragic accident, doing what he loved: working in his sugar woods where he harvested maple sap each spring.”

“He was a quiet giant in his community and his profession. When he died, his community newspaper ran the headline ‘Community Mourns Loss of Beloved Doctor.’ It was the most read article on their web site for several days.”

“John loved his classic cars. He took a community college course in auto repair and rebuilt the engine of his 1957 Pontiac Super Chief, then drove it all the way from Vermont to Greenville, South Carolina, in 2005 for a national car convention.”

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“He was a family doctor who still did house calls.”
“He was a survivor of prostate cancer.”
“He was a lifelong runner, despite knee injuries and surgery.”
“He climbed Mount Kilimanjaro.”
“He loved his family.”
“He was a vegetarian.”
“He became certified in massage therapy, and looked forward to practicing it when he retired from medicine.”
“He was a compassionate advisor during the fatal illness of our son Tony.”
“The last time we saw John was at our 40th class reunion on May 17th, 2008.”
“Rest in peace, John.”

John Elliott was born in St. Johnsbury, Vt., Jan. 16, 1946, and after attending St. Johnsbury public schools, graduated from Lyndon Institute in 1964, Tufts University in 1968, and University of Vermont Medical School in 1972. While working in the emergency room at Putnam Memorial Hospital in Bennington, Vermont, he met his future wife, Martha Romlein. He joined friend and colleague Dr. Lloyd “Tim” Thompson at The Doctor’s Office on Main Street in Lyndonville, and they went on to establish Corner Medical.

He is survived by his wife, two children, and a large extended family. Memorial contributions may be directed to the Lyndon Institute for the renovation of its library (attn. Development Office, PO Box 127, Lyndon Center, VT 05850), or to Catamount Arts, PO Box 324, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819.

I hope those of us who are left can gather one more time. John lived a full life and had time to help others with their lives. I have tried to do the same.
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