

Village Voices

In Our Own Words

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THE THREE STEINWAYS

by Maria Eisner

My father-in-law, Hans Eisner, was a chemist, but a musician at heart. He especially enjoyed playing four-hands on the piano with friends or with his son Thomas, long before Tom became my husband.

Hans took piano lessons as a teenager while apprenticing as a pharmacist in Berlin, Germany, but he dreamed of learning and practicing on something more ambitious, larger, and fuller in sound than the small upright in his parents' living room. It so happened that there was a Steinway showroom located on his way to and from work, where he could stop in and "try out and listen" to some of the instruments. And eventually, some time before World War I, he made his decision and bought one of them, probably with some financial help from his parents. Even though it was a grand piano, it was not a concert grand. It became the instrument that accompanied the Eisners on their travels around the world, even though it came *auf Umwegen* (the

long way around).

The first time the Eisners moved was in 1933, when they decided it was time to leave Nazi Germany, because Hans was Jewish. They moved their small household to Barcelona, Spain, and spent several happy years in that sunny country. But when the Spanish Civil War started in 1937, the Eisner family decided to leave again, this time with only some suitcases. The piano had to stay behind.

After a voyage from Barcelona to Marseille, a train ride to Paris, and eventually an Atlantic crossing, they ended up in Montevideo, Uruguay. This small country welcomed foreigners and provided comfortable living conditions for the next ten years. It did not take Hans long to look for another piano, and it was again a Steinway grand that became the favorite instrument in the Eisner household. Tom and his sister learned to play the instrument. They attended international schools and grew into young adults.

The war ended, and the Eisners decided that the United States should be the place for the college education of their children. Even though Uruguay had provided well for them, some of the local

customs remained unfamiliar to them. After three years in the country, when it became possible to request Uruguayan citizenship, Hans found out that a bribe was expected. He refused to pay. That is why, in 1947, the Eisner family entered the United States as “German Enemy Aliens” thanks to some understanding American embassy official. The transition was not easy, but eventually things fell into place.

Everybody adjusted again to a different style, but an altogether happy life. One day, a letter arrived from Spain, with the news about a “deserted” piano that supposedly was the property of Hans Eisner. “What would he like to have done with it?” Within a few weeks, the Berlin/Spain piano was delivered to the Eisner household in New York to join its Uruguayan cousin. Tom remembered that he came home from college for this joyful occasion. He told me that he played a Bach chorale, while the piano was lying on its side in the living room and the movers were screwing in its legs.

This could have been the end of the story, Hans enjoying the instruments with his family and with musical friends in New York.

But how could Tom survive in Boston without a piano, living so far away from home, especially since he and I had already made it our favorite pastime to play piano duets. After

our marriage in 1952, we first bought a small upright piano. A few years later we bought a grand piano, a Miller, that we moved to Ithaca when Tom got his first job at Cornell University. This instrument was so monstrously large it made it impossible for me to whitewash the living room walls around it. But one day, Tom saw an ad in the *Ithaca Journal* for a Steinway grand. It turned out to be an almost new piano; at least it had been barely used. There were not even hammer marks on the felt. And it cost \$1,000. When Tom called his father for a loan, Hans asked only: “Do you own a double bed?”

We got rid of the Miller, and this piano remained our companion. When we later built a house in the woods, it fit perfectly into the big, sunny living room next to its Uruguayan cousin. The pair provided many hours of happy music-making with family and friends.

Actually, the three Steinways never shared a home, but they seemed to be part of the Eisner family. After Hans died and Tom and I moved into a retirement home, the Uruguayan piano was donated to the Cornell University Music Department. The Berlin piano was shipped to Philadelphia and sits now in our daughter Christina’s home, waiting for somebody to play it again. We actually Googled it. Its identification is imprinted on the inside of the piano: “Steinway & Sons. New York. Patent Grand Construction, Oct. 3, 1899,” plus its production number. The recommendations by Steinway include

replacing the sound board and other vital parts at the price of \$54,000. We decided to leave the overhaul up to the next owner.

And the Ithaca cousin is happily used in our daughter Vivian's house, mainly by our granddaughter Anya, when she comes visiting her mother over a weekend.

P.S. The Ithaca Miller piano ended up—at least for a while—in the home of Cornell University faculty member Karel Husa, a famous composer and conductor, originally from Czechoslovakia.

BINOCULARS

by Diana Deacon

Because of the pandemic . . . we were not away this year at the end of June as we often have been.

Because of the pandemic, I had the leisure to sit and read on my patio on a warm summer Sunday afternoon—with binoculars at my side.

Because of the pandemic, I was able to see the babies of the wrens who made a home in my birdhouse leave the nest and fly away! It took only about ten minutes for all of them to move on. About five minutes before, a parent bird had pushed into the house with one last bug, alive and wriggling.

Then Chick #1 got his head and chest out of the entry hole and “fell” to the base of the house. In a panic, he struggled to fly back in, a few inches. When he succeeded, he turned right around and put his head and chest out again and, with the wind fluffing his remaining baby feathers and a glint of freedom in his eye, he took off to the nearby locust tree.

Then Chicks #2 and #3 clambered over each other in a great noisy tumble to see who would go first, and then they flew together to the same tree. Were there more? Oh yes! Chick #4, looking a little panicked, took a deep breath and launched himself—you guessed it—to the same tree.

Chick #5, who looked smaller than the rest, was not going to be left alone and accused of cowardice, so he drew himself up and, with a great swoop that was deeper than the rest, flew to the same tree. I got up and looked with binoculars at the tree to see if I could see any of them, but they were nowhere to be found.

And that was the fitting end of a great saga that began several months ago when one day the wrens threw out all the soft, fluffy stuff that a pair of chickadees had used to build a nest and began to build their own nest of twigs. I have been aware of this happening in other years, but I have never before seen this dramatic ending.

But because of the pandemic

BAKING BISCUITS: 1918

by Dorothy Jackson

My father was a great storyteller. At dinnertime, he often regaled my brother and me with memories of his childhood.

He was a mechanically minded boy, always wanting to do whatever his parents were doing. He learned how to operate the printing machinery in his father's newspaper office, while his more gregarious brother was happier collecting weekly fees from subscribers in their small North Carolina town.

Because his mother was left-handed, he learned to thread a needle just as she showed him, holding the needle in his right hand and aiming the thread through the eye of the needle with his left. And, he was so enamored with their new washing machine with its ingenious wringer attachment that he stayed home to do laundry while the rest of the family went downtown to celebrate the end of the Great War on Armistice Day.

One of his stories was about the 1918 flu epidemic, when everyone in his family except his father became ill—thankfully not all at the same time. He was one of the earliest to get sick and had recovered by the time his mother came down with the disease. Their neighbors helped out by

leaving big pots of soup on the porch. One day before supper, his mother called him to her bedside to ask if he would be interested in baking biscuits to go along with the meal. He was eager to take on the task. Returning for instruction one step at a time, he soon had a pan of hot biscuits to put on the table for the family dinner.

Weeks later, my grandmother bragged to her friends (as mothers will do) that her 12-year-old son could bake biscuits. My father was absolutely mortified that his own friends would hear about that and tease him, since baking biscuits was strictly “girls’ work”!

THE CAFÉ-LINE BLUES (if Edgar Allan Poe lived at Pennswood) by John Means

Once upon a morning dreary,
While I waited, weak and weary,
Head still splitting, spinning, ringing,
Remembrance of the night before.

While I nodded, nearly napping,
Suddenly there came a tapping,
The man behind me, gently rapping,
“The line,” he said, “has moved some
more.”

I filled the gap, my eyes still bleary,
No one near me feeling cheery,
My heart still heavy, feet still sore,
To wait in line for food some more.

BEFORE SUPERMARKETS

by Kathy Hoff

A recent run to the Shop-Rite set me to wondering: how did my mother manage to feed our family of four before supermarkets—before The War? Supermarkets were invented during the Depression, but didn't proliferate until the post-War burst of civilian prosperity and mobility with its suburbanization and consumerism.

In the four years before my father enlisted in the navy, 1939-1943, we lived in a rented single-family house in the south end of Hartford, Connecticut. It was in a modest, lower-middle-class neighborhood—real middle class was across New Britain Avenue and up the hill, Forster Heights. Real lower class was down the hill, Charter Oak Terrace, called simply The Project, hastily-built public housing for an influx of wartime factory workers. Uphill or down didn't matter as far as groceries were concerned; the whole area was residential. That made assembling provisions more complicated than it is nowadays. Neither we nor our neighbors had so much as a Victory Garden. We did have a car, but wartime gas rationing severely limited its use, and it was never available for getting groceries. So how did my mother feed us?

The one exception to residential zoning in our area was a one-story brick building over on New Britain Avenue. The building housed not just one, but three thriving businesses: Glassman's Drug Store on the corner, Joe the barber behind Glassman's in a single small room off the side street, and, largest, the Community Market.

The Market, as we called it, is where my mother walked to get shelf goods. It seemed big to me when I was starting elementary school, but it couldn't have been. My mother would walk up to a central wooden counter and read off her list of canned goods and cleaning supplies. Then one of the two men in heavy white aprons would reach down the desired cans from high shelves with a grabber. If my brother and I had been really good, she might then treat us to penny candy from Glassman's.

Canned goods and candy would not have sustained us, of course. The offerings of The Market were supplemented regularly by home delivery of dairy, baked goods, and fruits and vegetables. For milk and eggs, we had the A. C. Petersen Dairy. Our milk must not have been homogenized, because we could see the separation line in the glass quart bottles between cream and milk. Mother would pour off the cream to use in coffee or cooking; our milk went into little flowered glasses that had come with processed cheese in them. On very cold mornings, the milk might freeze outside before Mother brought it in; the cream

would pop the paper top and rise up above the glass rim of the bottle.

For baked goods, we had the Viking Bakery, perhaps twice a week. Mother raised us on forgettable fluffy white bread, but what was memorable were the Viking “treats” she indulged in—Danish, crullers, and on really good days, jelly doughnuts.

A fruit and vegetable truck came around, too. Probably that was seasonal; I can’t imagine that restricted wartime transportation permitted the wealth of year-round fresh vegetables we get now. I certainly remember getting canned peas, green beans, and corn pretty steadily throughout my childhood. Coleslaw was the main salad.

The most interesting of the street businessmen serving Broadview Terrace before the war didn’t sell food. He still worked with horse and wagon and used an old-fashioned street cry, a drawn-out, musical (sol-me-sol) “R-A-A-A-G pick-ER!” I don’t remember ever selling him any old clothes or rags. Mother made quilts and rag rugs or cleaned the house with the remains of any outgrown or worn-out clothing.

As for meats, I don’t remember. I don’t recall a meat-man coming around in a truck. The Market must have had a cold room so that Mother could get her regular cuts (pot roast,

pork roast, ham) there. We weren’t a poultry-eating family. Or fish—the rare times we had fish, Mother bought it at Honiss Oyster House after taking the trolley downtown. Honiss had a retail fish counter in addition to its primary restaurant business. The only fresh fish Mother ever bought there was swordfish. Salmon and tuna came in cans.

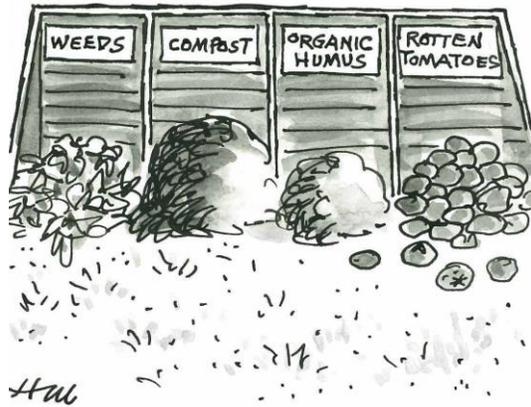
Our only home-grown food came from the Concord grapevine sprawling along the fence. Annually, we would have a grape harvest. Mother made juice and put up grape jelly. I remember the mess of juice dripping through cheesecloth as she strained juice from pulp.

For both economic and historical reasons (Depression, then war rationing), our diet was far from the well-balanced, fresh, whole-grain food supply available today. Then, too, my otherwise excellent housewife-mother found cooking the only part of homemaking she did not especially enjoy or excel at. She did not bake her own bread, make fancy sauces, or season with herbs. In her later years, she was quite content to let my retired dad do the shopping—using her list—at the supermarket, where he enjoyed chatting with the checkers. Maybe something had been lost for Mother without the milkman, the Viking man, the friendly aproned clerks grabbing groceries down from the shelves at the Community Market.

AT PENNSWOOD

by Henry Martin

COMMUNITY GARDENS



HELLO, FEET

by Glenna Follmer

I never noticed you much
except when I discovered you as a
baby and tasted you, better than
puree of squash, I, sweetly innocent
and laughing with delight.

Toddling, you tripped over one
another. Pigeon-toed, the old moms
said. A truce finally called, you
skipped into kindergarten.

Schooldays, I tested you in
playground sports, stubbed you,
muttered, returned to the arena.
Summers, you ran under the
sprinkler in naked glee.

At ten, your nails were on exhibition.
There were tears over unsuitable tints,
fuchsia was so fashionable, chartreuse,
too.

In my teens, I sifted sands through your
toes, furrowed you under the sand, self-
aware in my two-piece bathing suit,
giggling at him.

In my twenties, an odd lover focused on
your high arches, more impressive than
my breasts. He wasn't around long, thank
goodness.

In my thirties and forties, you took me to
Appalachian trails, then the boulder-
filled Rockies, blisters and headaches for
my pains

In my fifties, I styled your nails, clipping
and buffing—just a weekly routine of
non-fanciness. You were still normal,
way down at the bottom of my world.

Now, in my senior years, I have time to
reflect. When I glimpse you way beyond
my belly, I see my soles are cracked, and,
oh dear, a fungal invasion has begun . . .
while I was just living life.

Elsewhere, other babes are just finding
their feet.

I shall not alert them to the path ahead.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Dedicated to Patti
Fedirko, who chatted about her love of
poetry while giving me my first ever
pedicure.

CORONA NOT VIRUS

by **Bob Gross**

When the name of the virus first appeared, it jostled my memory from years ago, at least the word *Corona* did. Code names were used for various projects/programs we were working on, since we could not use any words/terms to describe our work. I don't know who or where the code names came from, but our classified program was named CORONA.

I was associated with CORONA in the 1960-1970s, when you could not use the term anywhere or anytime unless you were in a secure area and you knew everyone "on the program" in the room.

The CORONA program was declassified around 1995 by President Clinton, after I had retired. At last I could tell my family what I had worked on. It was a Satellite Recovery Vehicle (SRV) which was sent into space, took photos, and returned to earth via a parachute, and then was captured by recovery aircraft during its descent over the Pacific Ocean. The SRV provided critical photo intelligence to the National Reconnaissance Organization (NRO), especially important during the Cold War.

It was the first man-made object sent into orbit and later recovered. It gave a new view of the earth, especially

important because it provided the U.S. with visual information about the Soviet Union. That intelligence had previously been obtained from flyovers by airplanes like the U2.

The visual information showed that the Soviets had a lot fewer nuclear capabilities than previously assumed. CORONA helped the U.S. be in a better position when negotiating with the Soviets.

CORONA involved a number of companies and was the first program in many engineering and technical intelligence areas. It was exciting working on the program and knowing what the "product" was and how it was being used to provide important photo intelligence to the NRO.

I happened to be at the Vandenberg Air Force Base on a trip to the West Coast when the lead officer asked if anyone wanted to watch preparations at the launch site. Most of the attendees quickly accepted the offer. Driven out to the launch site, we got on a "shaky" elevator and were taken up about 30 to 40 feet (that's how far we were allowed to go). We wandered around the scaffolding to get a close-up view of the next SRV launch. About a week or so later, there was a small note in the newspaper that a mysterious, classified launch had been made at Vandenburg AFB. We knew that it was the SRV that we had seen close up.

THEN. . . AND NOW
by S. W. Burkman

*Opening the door of the winter-shut
cottage, the stale air craving the
fresh air and sunlight;*

Opening the slider on a fresh April
morning, a faint mist shrouding the
greening European Linden tree.

*Getting the outhouse ready for
another summer;*

Cleaning the cat box.

*Listening to the lake, lapping at the
dock;*

Hearing the water slapping the sides
of the spa pool, starting my walk
around.

*Paddling the old red canoe into the
cove, seeing the big bass in shallow
waters;*

Meandering along the Neshaminy,
hoping to get a glimpse of that red
fox again.

*Running through the summer fields,
hunting for butterflies;*

Sitting peacefully on the patio,
waiting for the monarch to come
again.

AGING GRACEFULLY
by Ruth Roeper

Aging gracefully is quite an
encompassing phrase it seems.
To some it says stamina, while others
also think of means.

Health is predominant, for all we know,
Guess I surely don't have to tell you so.

Friendships also play an important part
For they provide support dear to the
heart.

Keeping busy with things we like to do;
Feeling needed is an important aspect
too.

Family becomes more special as we age,
Though they mean much at any life's
stage.

Being content that we can't do all we did
in the past,
Knowing through memory these
experiences will last.

A sense of humor is necessary of that I
am sure.
Being able to laugh will any "down day"
cure.

Giving thanks for blessings should be
part of each day;
As for all the less fortunate, we need
earnestly to pray.

As I think of all these things,
Pennswood does come to mind,

For the answer to “aging gracefully”
is here I do find.

They keep us healthy or try their
very best,
Though at times PT puts our bodies
to the test.

When we think of friendships we
have here, we feel so glad,
Though we know losing them also
makes us feel sad.

There’s no doubt we keep busy as
our talents we share
And show about each other how
much we all care.

Our travel programs remind us of
trips we have made,
And memory keeps them vivid
so they do not fade.

We laugh and cry together as
experiences change,
Realizing for all, life has quite
a different range.

We give thanks for our blessings
perhaps each night—
And keep our love for all people
always within sight.

So we’re grateful to Pennswood and
we honestly can say
We’re “aging gracefully” here,
‘tis sure, in the very best way.

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Kathy Hoff, Jane Perkinson,
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