

# Village Voices

## In Our Own Words

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### LATE WINTER by Glenna Follmer

These late winter weeks—  
another round of Mohs treatment,  
the library claims I've lost a book,  
mean mutterings about the milk left  
out again.

I grumble over dwindling civilities:  
reluctant thank-yous for a gift,  
cigarette butts on the sidewalks,  
doggy deposits on the nature trail.

Worries wander into my dreams:  
the classroom rabbit escaped again,  
Wall Street bounces back, but not as  
high,  
I'm running out of sympathy cards.

Awake, I dwell on our besieged  
democracy,  
with festering biases, centuries old;  
elsewhere, wars are born to newly-  
empowered bands that boast  
odd acronyms, in countries with  
different names than I'd learned.

I consult my huge old map  
on the wall  
Soon there may not be a democracy or  
any nation  
on which to stand.  
Icebergs have given up the ghost,  
rumbled southward,  
and flooded our shores.

In jungles, rain forests are thwarted  
in their reach toward heaven.  
There are raging forest fires, roaring  
tornados,  
quickly mutating viruses with scien-  
tists racing behind.

Yet when things seem hopeless,  
Nature rights itself,  
urges snowdrops to emerge, and  
crocuses to declare themselves.  
Witch-hazels flame a fluffy branch,  
and sweeter smells waft  
on a hopeful breeze.

Spring keeps its before-Time promise,  
bursting from the dank earth.



## WONDER

by Jenny Hollingshead

Beauty, like Tinkerbell, is seen felt heard touched smelled. And, like Tinkerbell, sometimes it gets trapped in a box. But somehow, in a wondrous way, it always escapes and sparkles over the earth.

And I wonder at it.

My father would say, “Hark, do you hear the lark?” as it rose from the ground with a quiver of song. He paused to see the dewdrops caught in the sunlight as they hung from the petals of a rose or from the delicate threads of a spiderweb.

I met the Peace Pilgrim one evening. She had given up all possessions and personal money. She wore navy pants and a tunic with small pockets around her waist. She carried a comb and a toothbrush but not much else. She walked from coast to coast across America sleeping where she was offered a bed and eating when she was offered food. When I went into the living room of the small stone house where she was a guest, I felt her presence. It seemed to fill the room, and her piercing eyes carried a welcoming twinkle. Tinkerbell. She spoke to us of her vision of peace among people, all people. Is Truth wrapped in beauty?

“I have a dream.” Martin Luther King was speaking on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. My spirits were lifted to exultation. His words ring through the years.

I feel the patience and fortitude of aging friends. And I wonder at it.



## GRAN’PA TAKES A WALK

by Paulina Brownie Wilker

In the years preceding the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05—in 1897 to be exact—my grandfather, a happily married young man living in the Ukraine, received his orders to report to the Russian army.

Like many of the young Jewish men living in Russia who received such orders, he decided to leave the country instead. Without telling his wife and father-in-law, with whom he was living, under the pretense of going on a business trip, he left his home and started to walk out of Russia. On his trek, he did manage to walk to his parents’ village some distance away, to say good-bye to his mother. Then he proceeded to walk to the border, where he bribed the border guards, walked to the Black Sea, and boarded a ship for England. He stopped in England for a few months, where he worked building ships, but he was not

happy there, so he boarded a ship to Philadelphia in America. Once settled, he wrote his wife, telling her where he was and asking her to join him.

She did not answer him. He wrote again.

She did not answer him. He wrote again. Still she did not answer him. (Could she have been angry?!?)

This went on for some time before he wrote a somewhat different letter.

In desperation, he told her that if she did not join him, he was going to move to Spring Garden! This time, she answered him and told him she was coming. She thought Spring Garden was in South Africa and preferred living in America. She packed up her bedding and her samovar and came. He never did tell her that Spring Garden was simply another street in Philadelphia.

She joined him in 1901, and my father was born in 1903, the first of five children born in Philly. My grandfather was happy. (I wonder what he told her—and when? I wonder how long she took to forgive him?)

As time went by, my grandfather became unhappy. Living in a big city did not please him. He became attracted to a “Back to the Soil”

movement that was sweeping through Jewish communities all over the world, particularly in major cities. He learned of a group of Jews in Philadelphia and New York who were organizing an agricultural community that would take people out of the cities and move them to open places where they could farm and be self-sustaining. The head of the growing community was Benjamin Brown, a passionate and charismatic leader. Initial shares sold for \$250 to \$300 a family. Each settler was promised 40 acres of land, a house, wagon, team of horses, cows, and the necessary tools to work his farm, with repayment scheduled over a 10-year period. The total loan was estimated to be a little less than \$4000 per settler.

A wide range of people was attracted: socialists, idealists, Zionists, anarchists, labor unionists, those attracted to the West, Talmudic students, Orthodox Jews, brothers, cousins, friends, the economically insecure (those who wanted to escape the slums and sweatshops and those for whom it offered a steady income that would raise living standards), those who wanted a better life for their children, and those who wished to live in a community.

In 1911, my grandfather packed up his family, and they moved to Clarion, Utah. They were met by a few of the settlers who had moved there early

enough to lay out the community, start building some of the roads and homes, a community kitchen, and, of course, their synagogue. There were also some welcoming Mormons who volunteered to teach these “tender-feet” how to farm and care for their animals. Most of the community knew nothing about such things, particularly since Jews in the Ukraine were not allowed to own land. My grandfather was happy. How the community came to be built in Mormon country, how these “innocents” got along and managed to live in log cabins with dirt floors and no electricity, and how long it lasted is a story for another time.

Time marches on. The family eventually moves back East. The kids grow up, all eventually living in Philly or its suburbs. My grandfather’s first wife (the mother of all his children, and my grandmother) dies. He remarries and after many years, she dies. My grandfather, at 80, moves to a high-rise senior citizen building, notifies his five children that he has done so and needs them to pay his expenses, buys himself a bright pink sports jacket (the kind the teenage boys are wearing), and meets many interested ladies.

He is happy, until, at 93, he develops a chronic and painful condition. He sees a number of doctors for help with the pain, but none can help or offer

him hope that the pain will stop: “There’s nothing we can do.”

My grandfather is unhappy. He takes matters into his own hands. He decides to resolve this the only way he knows how—and jumps out the 18th-story window.

*I love you, Gran’pa!*

*As always, you were willing to figure out a good answer to a difficult problem, always willing to depend on yourself, always willing to take a risk, and always, always, yourself.*

—Paulina

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## **“CHERRY RIPE”** by Yoma Ullman

“Come on,” yelled my roommate. “We’ll be late for class.”

I was halfway out of the window, leaning into the cool London morning, listening to the buskers down in the street. I couldn’t see them, but I could hear them.

“You go on,” I yelled back. “I’ll catch up with you. There’s a trumpet playing ‘Cherry Ripe’.”

Fast forward some forty years. My train pulled into the station at Rams-

gate, a seaside resort in Kent, England. It was the home of my mother's family for generations—the one place I felt I had roots. But this visit was different. I was going to see a cousin I'd never met to discuss a family heirloom. She would be waiting for me on the platform. How would I know her?

Lugging my suitcase, I stepped onto the platform and looked around. The crowd was thinning, eager to get out of the bitter wind. One woman was going against the herd. She was small in all dimensions, she looked tentative, but she was smiling. I smiled back. It was Cousin Catriona. We had met.

We left the station in Catriona's tiny car. Her house was close by. She drove the car over the sidewalk into her front garden between sharp and narrowly placed gateposts. The car took up the entire garden but for a shrub or two.

Inside, Catriona introduced me to her husband, equally diminutive and with a thin beard. He was a well-known engraver, had watched Catriona grow up, had painted many portraits of her as a girl, and married her.

We had dinner in the front hall, sitting on three sides of a large table with its fourth side against the wall. What should have been the dining room was

taken up with a grand piano. After dinner, we went to visit the piano, standing in the narrow spaces between its gleaming wood and the wall. At my request, Michael and Catriona played for me, she on her recorder, he on the piano. Both were clearly experienced musicians.

When we gathered in the kitchen for a nightcap, I asked Michael if he played other instruments.

“Oh yes,” he said softly. “I play the trumpet.”

“Do you have a band?” I asked.

“Not now,” he replied. “I used to when I was younger.”

“Where did you play?”

“Oh various places. We used to busk around Brighton and London.”

You see the punchline. We worked out that Michael was busking in London when I was there. He had played “Cherry Ripe” on his trumpet almost every day. So it was his trumpet I had heard when I hung out of the window that long-ago morning—and was late for class.



## FACE-TO-FACE WITH REINCARNATION by Norval Reece

Delhi, India, 1960: I tapped on the door of a modest apartment and was greeted by a small, older woman with a big smile.

She was Rehana Tyabje, one of the most famous gurus in India.

I was there for her to read my hands. She invited me in, offered me a seat, took my hands in hers, and turned them over and over, scrutinizing the lines. Among many things she said was, “I can tell you like children. You have two brothers and two sisters. You will get married and have two children.”

I kept good mental notes and analyzed all of her comments afterwards. I put into a “general” category (80% of what she said) such statements as “you like children,” which I thought were broad enough to find agreement with most people.

I classified 10% as specific and incorrect. Another 10% I found specific and correct, such as “You have two brothers and two sisters.” She also predicated what was to become true: “You will get married and have two children.”

I remained unconvinced of foretelling the future by hand-reading, but I was impressed with Rehana Tyabje, and we became good friends over the next two years.

She was from a prominent, wealthy Indian Muslim family. As a young woman, she was known nationally for her beautiful singing voice and traveled all over India with Mahatma Gandhi to sing at his rallies during the Indian independence movement. Now, she considered it her duty to be a bridge between India and the West to help people from each culture better understand the other.

That’s why I was “sent” to see her in the first place.

I was Assistant Director of the Quaker Centre in Delhi, and my debates among students from the University of Delhi nearby were frequent and animated—often punctuated by comparisons of aspects of the Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian religions. I was just out of graduate school, confident of my wisdom, and could not understand why people with PhDs from MIT and Yale still believed in astrology, hand-reading, and “auspicious times” for weddings and investing in the stock market.

After one particularly spirited discussion, my Indian friends, exasperated

by my “Western biases,” arranged the meeting with Rehana Tyabje. “Go and decide for yourself whether you think there is a scientific basis for hand-reading. We will tell her only your name—nothing more.”

Rehanna Tyabje was a riveting storyteller, and during our numerous conversations, I learned much about India and people. Sometimes I would bring along visiting Europeans or Americans who wished to have their hands read. She was graciously accomodating and never accepted offers of payment. “The only gifts I accept are chocolates and Agatha Christie novels.” I would bring both.

One thing we discussed occasionally was reincarnation—the religious or philosophical concept that the soul or spirit, after biological death, begins a new life in a new body that may be human, animal or spiritual depending on the moral quality of the previous life’s actions.

I knew some people in the West who suggested reincarnation as one way to explain child geniuses like Mozart or to explain a vivid memory of having “done this before” or meeting someone for the first time and having a clear sensation of having known them previously.

I had studied reincarnation in Comparative Religion in graduate school

and considered it interesting but highly improbable.

But I was totally unprepared for what happened.

At the end of my two years in India, I stopped to say goodbye to Rehana Tyabje.

As our brief conversation was coming to a close, I said, “I have often wondered why you refer to me as ‘Norval, my son’ when we speak, and you don’t seem to refer to others I bring to visit you in the same way.” I was expecting her to say something about it being a term of endearment or symbolic of our special friendship.

After a long pause, she said, “I am told by my guru to tell you that you were a European Roman Catholic writer in a former life, and I was your mother.”

To say I was stunned is to put it mildly. I felt highly complimented then—and still do.

And, who knows, maybe she was right.



## **A VISITOR FROM ANOTHER WORLD**

**by Norman Rubin**

In the summer of 1980, my wife, three children, and I decided to spend our two-week summer vacation in Parry Sound, Canada, at a small fishing camp on Georgian Bay, about 80 miles north of Toronto. The bay is noted for having crystal clear water, thousands of small islands, and great fishing. It is particularly noted for its muskellunge, a very large aggressive fighting fish with very sharp teeth. My wife's sister and husband Gary, with their 18-month-old son met us at Camp Wawanaisa.

At Camp Wawanaisa, we met Jim, a postal worker from Toronto, who came to Georgian Bay to relax and try his hand at fishing for muskellunge. We learned that he was interested in renting a small power boat and spending an entire day on the water. Since Gary and I had similar plans, the three of us decided to get away together for a day exploring the islands in the bay and trying our luck at fishing.

We picked a beautiful clear sunny day with temperatures in the mid-70s. We explored several of the islands, ate our packed lunch on one of the islands, then swam in the crystal clear (but very cold) water. We fished on and off throughout the day, but no one was lucky enough to get even a nibble.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, we packed our gear and started heading back to camp. The wind, barely noticeable during the day, had stopped completely; the sky was a beautiful deep azure color; and the water was as smooth as glass. As our open boat headed slowly southeast for our return to Wawanaisa, the blue of the sky continued to darken, and the stars slowly began to appear in the cloudless Canadian sky.

It was now about 9 p.m. and, as we headed back to the dock, my brother-in-law was handling the motor at the stern, Jim was in the center on one of the seats, and I was at the bow, lying on some floatation cushions gazing up at the stars. The discussion shifted to how small our planet is and how highly likely it is that there are other intelligent life forms on other planets somewhere up there.

As we were nearing the end of this discussion, which focused on the possibility of non-earthlings occupying our vast universe, suddenly, and without warning, the star-studded sky, quite dark by now, was brightened by a white glowing object due east of us and very close to the horizon. We all saw it and watched in silence as the object, which clearly was not an airplane or helicopter and was clearly larger and brighter than any star, traveled from east to west across the clear, cloudless sky. At its peak, when it

was due north of us, the object was about 30 degrees above the horizon and appeared to be moving at a constant speed and in a straight line. Its tail was also clearly visible and extended to the east in a smooth continuous arc of about 25 degrees. The “head” of the bright white glowing object appeared to be burning, and pieces could be seen breaking off behind the head as the tail formed.

We were speechless. This object (whatever it was) appeared during our discussion of the possibility of extraterrestrial life. When we got back to the dock, we were all wondering if we had witnessed the approach and perhaps landing of a visitor from another world. We all had trouble sleeping that night, pondering what we had seen and what it might have been.

The following morning, Jim, fellow witness to our suspected ET sighting, called Toronto, only to discover to our disappointment, that what we had seen, was also seen by millions of people in North America and Canada and was not a visitor from another planet. It was only an old Russian satellite that had fallen back to earth and disintegrated as it entered earth’s atmosphere. Not a visitor from outer space, but still an exciting and amazing coincidence.



## CATS IN THE COSMOS by John Means

The federal government’s recent interest in the numerous sightings of UFOs since the 1940s has stimulated scientific interest in the nature of extraterrestrial propulsion and its seeming disregard for the laws of physics. To that end, a basic principle of inter-planetary travel warrants our attention.

It is a well-established fact that a slice of buttered bread, if dropped, will always land buttered-side down. Also, cats always land on their feet. That being the case, what would occur if a slice of buttered bread (buttered side up) were strapped to the back of a cat and they were then dropped from a significant height—say, from the Chrysler Building or similar art deco structure?

Two immutable laws of physics would become juxtaposed in a counterbalanced suspension of gravity. The Law of Butterology (Newton’s 4th Law of Motion) states that the buttered side of bread must hit the ground. The Law of Feline Aerodynamics (Bernoulli Principle, 3rd Corollary) states that a falling cat cannot land on its back.

If the combined construct of buttered-bread-on-cat’s-back were tested, it would become evident that conflicting

gravitational forces would become counterbalanced. Therefore, the buttered-feline construct could not fall. Stated simply, this is the basis of anti-gravity levitation.

A cat with buttered bread tied to its back will, when released, move to a height at which the forces of cat-twisting and butter-repulsion are in perfect balance. This equilibrium can be modified by 1) scraping off some of the butter, which provides lift, or 2) restricting one or more of the cat's limbs, allowing descent.

Most advanced civilizations in the universe use this basic principle to control travel within the gravitational field of any given planetary system. The humming noise heard in most credible sightings of UFOs is, in fact, nothing more than the purring of several thousand other-worldly tabbies.

There is one theoretical danger that should be noted. If the cats were able to eat the buttered bread on their backs, they would instantly plummet. Although the cats would land on their feet, this would be of little practical value if, after their graceful four-footed landing, several tons of red-hot spaceship crashed on top of them—as happened in 1947 at Roswell, New Mexico.

## ***POETRY & PROSE*** **ON EARTH DAY**

*Poetry & Prose* will air on Channel 970 at 7 p.m., Thursday, April 22 —Earth Day. To participate, pick a piece of prose or poetry about nature. Send a copy to Marguerite Chandler or Anne Baber by April 4. Plan to read on Zoom at 1 p.m., Saturday, April 10. *Poetry & Prose* is sponsored by *Village Voices*.

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