

Village Voices

In Our Own Words

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HONORING WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

by Deidre Crumbley

Tears would not come; neither would sleep.

Filmmakers Sadoff, Sadoff, and Lipson had done their job too well. Their 2002 film, *Standing on my Sister's Shoulders*, distributed by Women Make Movies, was about the Black women who led the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement. It left me deeply inspired but also deeply disturbed. The film documented the wise, determined, and skilled labor of these women for fair voting rights; but it also detailed endlessly clever strategies of circumvention and obstruction, devised by those dedicated to racial segregation and human inequity.

The resultant cycle of gain, followed by loss, followed by gain, broke my heart, especially for these women who had paid such a high personal price. So, I wrote the following poems as homage to the ancestors, hoping to appease them. And it worked, somewhat. The tears never came, but they let me close my eyes—for a while.

REDEEMED?

Taking flight at the call of a night bird
Lining out hymns hidden between
 keys
Perpetuating myths almost forgotten
We flavored the pot of hope with
 bones, bare and sweet
And gave the soul of our nation one
 more chance to resurrect—
Or was it to be born at last?

HOLY GROUND

Fanning herself
With tatters of well-worn dreams
She conjured beads of wonder
Hung them around the necks
 of children
Carelessly playing where
She dared imagine
A water fountain.

EARLY ONSET

I've never known what it's like
 to just-walk
Or maybe I did. Once
Very small feet
Pronating me
Into childhood—and forgetfulness

I've never known what it's like
to just-walk
Or maybe I did. Once

PAID IN FULL

Take a seat Hattie Mae
Move nowhere slowly
No bending—no lifting
No fretting—no keeping account
Breathe this breath
Sense this wisp of now
You owe nothing to no one
Not even to yourself

WRITING ONE'S WAY INTO HISTORY

Shattering the topiary
Of ever-branching tales
Each taking their shape from the teller
Claiming universal truths
Covering the face of the many
Confusing polyphony for cacophony
Fleeing the manifold
And missing all the fun
Of just being human—
Like everyone else

A VIEW FROM THE HILL by John Wood

An early April day, warm, more like
the end of May. I parked at the crest
of a considerable hill where one could
see a broad expanse of open land; the

Neshaminy, flowing at the foot, cur-
tained by a regiment of woodland
trees, nakedness concealed by
Spring's new dress.

Pathway down to the bridge quite
steep, challenging to aged legs. But I
knew just where along the way
Dutchman's breeches would awaken
from their winter sleep and was re-
quired in the quest. Then found it best
to rest a time or two ascending back
to where the car awaited in the shade.
Leaving doors ajar, I paused before
the start to home.

My room was hot; so, lemonade in
hand, I chose the balcony to sit, over-
looking a fully flowered winterberry
bush, finding comfort in a gentle
breeze and shielded from the setting
sun.

As eyelids gained weight and drooped
a bit, I released my newly found bal-
loon. (In truth, I know not from
whence it came or why it chose to set-
tle on my balcony.) I invited it to soar
in space with energy the breeze sup-
plied. From its lofty height, it
scanned, reporting back a catalogue of
past events, the loves and losses over
years now passed, the bitter and the
sweet attached to life along the way.
That is, until my eyes shut tight.

Believe I'll wait a spell before I climb
that hill again.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ADSHEAD HEALTH CENTER?

by George H. Kurz

The story I told about the Quaker work camp in Ozone, Tennessee, in the summer of 1949 caught the attention of two Pennswood residents, Bob and Peggy Anderson. They were preparing to visit a daughter in New Orleans and would be driving through Knoxville. When they heard that college students had constructed a building that would be a health center, they wondered if that building were still standing. They determined to stop in Ozone to see for themselves.

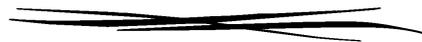
Ozone is a small village in eastern Tennessee's Cumberland Plateau. I had tried unsuccessfully to locate the clinic building on Google Maps and concluded that it must have been torn down. Remarkably, Bob and Peggy connected with the curator of a museum, Sharon Weible, in the village of Pleasant Hill west of Ozone. Sharon had heard of the clinic, but had failed in her attempts to learn details of what had become of it.

Sharon and her husband drove to Ozone and found the building. The Andersons arrived in Pleasant Hill the very next day. Sharon gave them a tour of her museum and a copy of a book by May Wharton, M.D., the doctor who had been largely responsible

for establishing a hospital in nearby Crossville and several satellite rural health clinics, including the one in Ozone. The Andersons brought that book, *Doctor Woman of the Cumberlandlands*, to Pennswood for me. More important, Sharon knew for sure that the building, although unoccupied, was still standing. She gave Bob and Peggy directions to it.

The Andersons found the building and identified it by the cornerstone with "1949" clearly inscribed on it. Windows were broken, but the stonework was intact. Despite a "No Trespassing" sign, they went inside. The condition of the interior left no doubt that it had been unused for quite some time. Through Sharon Weible, they knew that after it no longer served as a clinic, it had been used as a polling place. Eventually it was abandoned.

When Bob and Peggy shared their photos with me, I was absolutely certain that it was the building we students had constructed 72 years ago. Alice Adshead, for whom the building was named, was a nurse who joined with Dr. Wharton in medical care, in health education, and in establishing the hospital described in May Wharton's book.



**MY FATHER,
THE AMERICAN**
by Gaby Kopelman

My father was an enthusiastic American. He had been a long-time anti-communist liberal first in his native St. Petersburg and then in Berlin. When my father finally came to New York, he thrived on the optimism of this new land, where it was thought possible to work and hope for a better country and a better future for all.

I must have been fifteen or so, when my father called me away from some soap opera, to come into the living room and listen to Sam Herman, his American-born friend, talking about his poverty-stricken childhood on New York's Lower East Side. At age ten, Mr. Herman told us, he'd had to leave school and start working in a sweatshop somewhere in the garment district. When, two years later, his appendix burst, the men in the shop had gotten together and collected two dollars, enough to send this child to the country for two weeks to recuperate.

"It was wonderful," said Mr. Herman. "Unbelievable! For the first time, I saw trees, cows, open country, grass"

"You see," said my father, "that's America! Just look what Mr. Herman achieved, and he's not ashamed to tell

you where he started! Just look where he is now!"

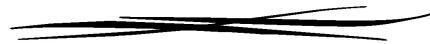
I was impressed, since now Mr. Herman and his wife and two daughters were living on West End Avenue in what seemed to me the very lap of luxury.

"That is America!" my father repeated insistently. "Never forget it!" And I haven't, to this day.

I BELIEVE
by Elaine Ferrara

I believe in rainbows,
Even when darkness falls.
I believe in the sun,
Even when clouds enshrine the sky.
I believe in spring,
Even when leaves tumble from trees.
I believe in flowers,
Even when winter brings the snow.
I believe in forests,
Even when cities take their place.
I believe in castles,
Even when I'm surrounded by ghettos
I believe in windows,
Even when shades are drawn.
I believe in animals,
Even when men waste their lives.
I believe in people,

Even when there are none nearby.
I believe in women,
Even when men dominate society.
I believe in happiness,
Even when I feel sorrow.
I believe in love,
Even when hatred pervades the air.
I believe in wisdom,
Even when ignorance prevails.
I believe in music,
Even when airplanes deafen my
ears.
I believe in harmony,
Even when wars seem endless.



SALAMANDER RAIN by Anne Baber

No, salamanders aren't streaming
down from on high.

A salamander rain acts as a signal to
the lizards and critters. The drops pound
down on the dead leaves that shelter
and hide the salamanders on the forest
floor. If it's nighttime, if the tempera-
ture is 55 or so, if the rain is heavy
and constant, then, the yellow-polka-
dotted males awake and head out for
their favorite vernal pool.

You know vernal pools? Those are
depressions in the ground that fill up
with spring rain. They are tailor-made
for salamander nurseries because they
are empty of life—of anything that

might eat the salamanders or their
eggs.

They appear just when the salaman-
ders need them. They'll disappear as
summer heats up.

With the rain's drumbeats as their
alarm clocks, the salamanders wake
up and head off across the road.
Here's something new to ponder. Pos-
sibly you've been wondering
throughout your long and busy life
"Why does the chicken cross the
road?" Now you can wonder "Why
does the salamander cross the road?"

It's because the vernal pool is on the
other side, duh!

And that creates a problem. Volun-
teers are monitoring the salamander
rains beginning in mid-February in
places like New Jersey's Sourland
Mountains, so they can sound the
alarm. Finally, the Internet crackles
with breaking news—salamander
rain.

Mr. Rogers said, "When I was a boy
and I would see scary things in the
news, my mother would say to me,
'Look for the helpers. You will always
find people who are helping.'"

Enter the salamander crossing guards.
The helpers are dressed in rain gear
and reflective vests and rigged with
miner's headlamps. They monitor the

seven or eight tended crossings throughout the Sourlands, for example. (Amphibians are on the move all along the East Coast, from Maine to North Carolina.) To find the sites, teams drive, very slowly and carefully, along the back roads scanning for the neon yellow polka dots marking the backs of the eight-inch-long salamanders.

Once they find where the salamanders are crossing the road, they begin their watch duties. They have big, camping flashlights. What do the helpers do as the hundreds of salamanders slither by silently, intent on their trysts? Mostly, the guards just watch. The salamanders are joined by frogs, toads, and tiny peepers who are also going to the vernal pool. If a car is coming on the road, the guard picks up the critter and carries it across. Still, some 70% of those crossing die in the attempt. The guards, who are counting the suitors, pick up those DOR (Dead on Road) and dispose of them. Taking a census of the various amphibians helps determine their environmental stability.

As the parade peters out, you may wonder what's happening in the pop-up pond. The males, having deposited their sperm on the bottom of the pool, are dancing in groups called congresses (!). Later, the females arrive, enter the pool, watch the dancing, sink to the bottom and pick up the

sperm. They loll about for a while enjoying sort of a spa day, then release great globs of thousands of fertilized eggs which float to the top of the water. The ladies straggle back across the road, but only a few at a time. No parade for them.

Two weeks later, the eggs hatch into baby salamanders. They stay in the safe vernal pool until they are grown, then eventually wander off into the forest to hide under the leaves until next spring.

See Sourland.org to sit in on a recorded Zoom crossing-guard training and find out more about this fascinating activity.

THE TWO-FOOT RULE

by Kathy Hoff

Tutoring is learning, I've found. In recent sessions, I've learned from a Communications graduate student about the frequency of Instagram use in the Taiwanese financial services industry and, from a research composition student, about the ideal pool-water temperature for competitive swimmers. Not all the learning is this enriching, however. A few years back, I learned from a rather doleful freshman the meaning of the then widely-current expression "friends with benefits." Though I gave her a moment of

levity over my ignorance, she did not seem cheered at homesick heart by the brave new world of liberated sex she was experiencing (or at least writing about) in her first semester at college. And she was quite incredulous at my reciprocal description of what college dormitories were like—and I hope I didn't begin with that groan-producing opener—"back in my day"

Anyway, back in my day, college dorms were not co-ed—not even floor-by-floor, never mind room-by-room with co-ed bathrooms, as some are now. On my wintery northern Ohio campus, the men's dorms were at the opposite end of campus from the women's, with plenty of classroom buildings in between. Although men took their meals in small dining rooms in the women's dorms and were permitted to visit in the lounges during sensible daytime hours, they definitely did not penetrate the more intimate reaches of second floors or above. When a male custodian toting a trunk or a repairman addressing a plumbing problem had to mount above a first floor, he would be forced to herald his arrival with repeated loud shouts: "MAN COMING!" whereupon we women would scurry virtuously into our rooms and shut the doors against any unwanted sighting.

Though the "man coming" call seems simply silly now, what seems serious post-women's-liberation are the disparate rules for female and male resi-

dents back in the Fifties. Men were free as birds to come and go from their dorms 24/7. Women, in contrast, had curfews: freshmen women 7 p.m. weekdays, midnight Saturdays; upperclass women 10 p.m. weekdays, midnight Saturdays.

Curfews were strictly enforced by vigilant housemothers who locked dorm doors at the witching hours. This was serious business. A dorm-mate of mine in her sophomore year was expelled when she missed a Saturday midnight lockdown by five minutes and resorted to spending the rest of the freezing Ohio night at a motel with her visiting fiancé.

Our same housemother who locked out the unfortunate sophomore patrolled our dorm regularly for house-keeping infractions. (Men had at least minimal room-cleaning and linen services provided. No such services for the female side of campus!) My roommate and I felt relatively virtuous, because we changed our beds periodically, made them daily, hung up our clothing, and made regular runs to the laundromat downtown. Nevertheless, we were chided by Mrs. H*** for dust-bunnies under a dresser, which she spotted one day through our open door.

These stories were not what amused my twenty-first century tutee, though. It was my account of the day my college decided to live up to its ultra-lib-

eral reputation and allow one upper-class male dorm to hold a two-hour Sunday afternoon Open House in celebration of the impending demolition of the building. Even *women* (gasp) would be allowed into the rooms of their male friends and boyfriends. Unheard of! But there were caveats: besides the strictly enforced time limit, two other rules were set:

The Two-Foot Rule

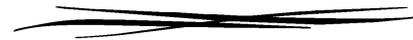
The Wastebasket Rule.

When I tell my students the story, they are, at this point, perplexed, so I have to explain. The Two-Foot Rule stated that all parties had to keep two feet on the floor at all times. The Wastebasket Rule stated that each door had to be kept ajar by at least the width of a waste basket. My punch line to what post-Sixties students take as a joke, though it really happened: we devised some ingenious contortions to keep both feet on the floor and some very squashed wastebaskets.

Though my students laugh, I have reflected seriously on the differences between then and now. Then: on a Fifties campus with precious little privacy—no room visitation, no cars, nowhere to go most nights but the library, nasty winter weather—there were frequent public displays of hormonal urges—or honest affection, as the case may be (many of us did get engaged as undergraduates). One forced one's way to the doors of women's dorms as curfew approached

through ardent couples clutched in fervid final goodnights. The most embarrassing display I recall, though, occurred before a Sunday dinner. A couple lay prone on the carpet under the grand piano in the back lounge of my freshman dorm all but coupling as the rest of us queued alongside the piano waiting for the dining room doors to open. Now: one never sees public display. I have heard tales of roommate wrangling about sex going on in one co-ed's upper bunk while the other was trying to sleep in her lower, but the greater public is certainly spared. Overt demonstrations? Never. I simply have not seen since my undergraduate days public goings-on like those of the Fifties.

Though today's campus public may be spared unavoidable voyeurism, however, I wouldn't trade my co-ed experience for that of the freshman woman who tutored me joylessly on "friends with benefits." Despite being constrained by curfews, cold weather, and zealous housemothers, deprived of privacy, forbidden fulfillment, we nevertheless back then seemed to find sex, well . . . sexier.



SWEET PRESERVES

by Alice Warshaw

We moved to Pennington during The War. The lot next door was nearly empty except for a few trees. The

owner of that corner lot lived several blocks away and agreed to let my dad tend it. He put in a Victory Garden and attacked the scraggly apple tree.

The apples were tasty, but wormy the first year. Watching Dad burn out the bag worm nests with a foul-smelling torch was interesting, but netted minimal results. The following year, spraying helped.

Mom didn't bake much during The War, because of sugar rationing. However, there was a special sugar ration for preserving fruits and vegetables. Fruit preserves became her specialty, shared with friends and family. There was always a jar out for our breakfast toast, pancakes, or oatmeal.

She loved making jams and jellies—finishing each jar with a quarter inch of hot paraffin. The primitive shelves under the basement stairs held apple butter and jelly and choke cherry jelly from the tree way out back. Scavenging around the neighborhood, she found beautiful crab apples, wild strawberries, and even blackberries. Over beyond Metsger's on Sked Street was the field of wild strawberries; and on the way to the railroad tracks down West Welling Avenue, the meadows were covered with masses of blackberry brambles.

For jelly, a gauzy bag of sweet smelling boiled up fruit pulp would hang for hours from an upper kitchen cabinet knob, the juice dripping its goodness into a bowl on the counter.

“We never squeeze the bag. We never hurry it,” she said. “That will make the jelly cloudy.” I sensed there was something sinful about cloudy jelly.

Clearly more sinful was one of the neighborhood boys my age—about eight—who followed us as my Sister and I picked baskets full of blackberries. He persisted in squishing them on my shoulders and sunsuit.

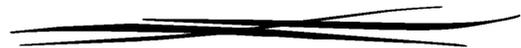
“Don't do that! It'll stain . . . I'm telling.”

Later Sister explained he just wanted to get my attention.

“Strange way of doing it,” I grumped.

“Get used to it,” she said.

She was a wise 15, beginning to notice the ways people try to attract attention and savoring the sweetness of the attempt no matter how goofy.



FOR YOUR CALENDAR

APRIL Save the date for Poetry & Prose—7:15, Wednesday, April 20, in Penn Hall. Take this opportunity to celebrate the written word. Read aloud something that speaks to you. See the *Bulletin* and the Bulletin Boards for information on how to sign up to present a piece (by you or someone else). Don't want to present? Make a note to be in the audience for this beloved Pennswood tradition.

JUNE Celebrate Pennswood's 42nd birthday in June. As a way to remember our history, *Village Voices* is asking you to submit reminiscences about your relatives who have lived here. If you have a story to share, but don't feel up to writing it down, get in touch with Editor Anne Baber by May 1. She'll have someone meet with you and write down the story of your Pennswood family connection.

JULY Make us laugh with submissions of humorous articles, fiction, or verse. Go ahead. Tickle our funny bones! Please send us your piece(s) by June 15, so we can consider it/them for our July issue.

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