

# Village Voices

## In Our Own Words

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### FULLING MILL

by Anne Baber

It's said an army travels on its stomach. An army also needs shoes and coats and blankets.

"You might have tracked the army to Valley Forge by the blood of their feet," Washington wrote. Of the 12,000-some soldiers wintering there in 1777, more than 4,000 on any given day were unfit for duty because they lacked shoes and clothes.

Here's where it becomes a Newtown story. Thomas Jenks, a Quaker, had bought 600 acres southeast of Newtown, built Jenks' Hall and erected a fulling mill on Core Creek, which ran through his property. In 1776, the military had taken over Jenks' mill to make textiles for the army.

A clue testifying to the mill's existence can be found on a street sign. If you turn right on 413 out of the Pennswood road and then turn left onto Tollhouse Road and drive to the end and turn left again, you're on Fulling Mill Road. But you won't find

the mill. In 1975, it disappeared under Lake Luxembourg in Core Creek Park.

It wasn't hard to find in 1777: You could hear the fulling hammers thumping away from quite a distance. Fulling is a crucial step in making woolens. Woven cloth is quite porous. Pounding it makes it shrink by one-third and become weatherproof. Today, we might call the process "felting."

Fulling is an ancient process mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. For centuries, the cloth was soaked in ammonia (stale urine) and the "pounding" was done by trampling the cloth for about 8 hours—surely one of the world's most disgusting jobs. On YouTube, a history buff has re-enacted this process, so you can see how awful it was (minus the smell). If you know someone whose last name is Walker or Fuller, chances are their ancestors had this nasty job. The first mills, using water power instead of human feet, appear in Europe in the 1100s. By medieval times, fuller's earth (a kind of clay)

was substituted for the urine. A soap bath followed to remove grease, dirt, and oil from the wool. The mill process took up to 65 hours for each piece of cloth.

When my mother washed our lace curtains, she hooked them onto stretchers to dry them, keeping their shape. Something similar happened to the cleaned cloth. It was stretched on tenter hooks (!) on tenterframes set up outdoors. Finally, the cloth was combed with teasels imported from Europe—until they began to be grown in the United States in 1833.

By February 1777 while Washington's troops shivered, the mill had produced more than 2,000 yards of cozy wool. Col. Walter Stewart of the 13th Pennsylvania Regiment rounded up a bunch of tailors and set them to work. Stewart wrote "my poor fellows are in a most deplorable situation at present, scarcely a shirt to one of their backs & equally distress'd for the other necessaries. . . ." He set a guard around the property where they sewed, Newtown's oldest tavern (1727), formerly the Bird-in-Hand, now a commercial establishment on State Street.

Two Newtown natives—turncoat Loyalists—were selected to lead a raid on the tavern from British-occupied Philadelphia. Accounts differ as to the size of the forces. One source says the raid was carried out by 30 horsemen and 40 foot soldiers, another

says 24 horsemen and 14 infantry. On the night of February 18, the raiding party passed through the British fortifications around Philadelphia and headed straight for Jenks' Mill. It was captured without a shot being fired. The Continental troops guarding it were taken, and the mill was set afire.

Silently, the Loyalists entered Newtown. Suddenly, a sentry spotted them and fired. The workmen and tailors were seized along with some 33 Americans—and all the wool, enough for 500 men's uniforms.

After the raid, Col. Stewart said, "My hopes of getting my regiment genteelly and well clothed this campaign are vanish'd."

Called "The Newtown Skirmish" by a Tory newspaper, this raid wasn't the only action Newtown saw in the Revolutionary War. The village of 400 souls had briefly served as General Washington's headquarters when he crossed the Delaware to successfully attack Trenton on Christmas Day 1776. Captured Hessian soldiers were imprisoned in the basement of the old Presbyterian Church on Sycamore Street.

What happened to the fulling mill? It was rebuilt by Thomas Jenks. He led an active life. At age 90, he walked 50 miles a week, and at 92 his eyesight and hearing were both remarkable. He died at 97 on May 4, 1797, after a fall

from his wagon. His son bought and ran the grist mill at the corner of what now is Bridgetown Pike and 413. He also built the house that, until recently, was the Bridgetown Mill House, a restaurant and inn.

Did Washington's shivering troops ever get uniforms? Not enough. The supply problems that were evident in the first weeks of the war continued until the end. Bureaucratic inefficiency, a lack of money and no credit, few good roads, and little manufacturing all combined with the natural obstacles of geography and weather to create frequent shortages of food for man and horse, clothing and blankets, tents, other military supplies, and even ammunition throughout the war.

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**ODE TO  
BENJAMIN  
GOODFELLOW**  
by John Wood

He was a fair boy,  
If a bit long in the tooth,  
That is, in Lab years.  
A big boy, weighing in at 85 lbs.  
Gentle and kind, yet  
A stalwart protector of the realm,  
His and also mine.  
When but a small tyke  
And fearful in the dark alone,  
He gained privileges  
In the tall antebellum poster-bed.

And, when the winter wind blew cold,  
In the antebellum house, snuggling  
close,  
A welcome warming pan.  
He learned the rhythm of the house  
And rose with the provider  
Six days a week, light or dark, at six,  
As that was the routine in this  
doctor's life.

Sunday was a different thing,  
Nearly half the time permitting a later  
sleep-in.  
As this was the day of rest,  
First light had passed when I felt a  
gentle bite,  
A nibbling of the nose, soft but  
insistent.  
There he stood astride, eye to eye,  
Myopic you might think.  
There simply was no choice  
But to start the day.  
We took the stairs together,  
And I opened the dog-yard door.  
He promptly exercised the necessities.  
Together we shared breakfast,  
The others still asleep.

Years pass—  
Beloved Ben, more properly,  
Benjamin Goodfellow,  
Rests in Valhalla, and it is I long in  
the tooth.  
Oh, what I would pay now for  
a measured nose bite  
Of a sleep-in Sunday morn.

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**A GIFT FOR EASTER:  
THE ADVENTURES OF A  
JEWISH GODMOTHER**

by Gaby Kopelman

On a gray April afternoon in 1995, I left London and took the train to Glasgow. That weekend I was to become the godmother of Flora Grace, aged five months “and a bit,” as the Brits say. My godchild’s parents had been somewhat apologetic about the protracted trip from London. “And then I’m afraid, from Glasgow, there’s still the ferry to the Isle of Bute,” Alison, the baby’s mother had said rather diffidently. “Are you sure you don’t mind?”

Yes, quite sure. I’d spent that week in London, and after a satisfying dip into the old and familiar—seeing friends and wandering through the museums—I was ready for the new, especially if it meant crossing a body of water. I love the water: the mere glimpse of a body of water, any body of water, even a small country pond or narrow city canal, is enough to stop me short, overcome with the pure pleasure of the sight. Venice, Amsterdam, and St. Petersburg are my favorite cities.

Even in my dreams, a leitmotif has always been water, or rather the complicated business of trying to find my way back to it. I attribute this urge to a primeval longing common to all, a

longing, in my case, perhaps re-enforced by my childhood memories of idyllic summers spent on the shores of the Baltic. But my psychiatrically-oriented friends assure me that these dreams are nothing but a thinly disguised sexual fantasy, and typically female. Well, maybe. But male or female, don’t we all swim before we walk? And are we not all dragged onto dry land, kicking and screaming, ready or not?

Be that as it may, some of my happiest memories are of ferry crossings. My earliest perception of beauty, of sheer beauty, as a thing in itself, occurred on the ferry ride from the port of Talin in Estonia over to Goteborg, the Swedish port where my mother and I were to get on the big ship that would take us to America. This was December 1939, and I was eleven. Our boat made its way through dark, ice-flecked waters, steering its way through an archipelago of variously shaped islands, a very maze of little plots of land, some quite sizable, others no larger than a table top, each with its own small landscape of weeds and grasses, now covered with hoar-frost, snow and ice. The winter sun, clear and hard, bounced off every icy shard, and overhead the sea gulls wheeled and cawed, attracted by the scraps left in the wake of passing boats. Though more than half a century has passed, I can still look up and see those gulls,

red legs tucked under tawny-feathered bellies, gliding through a sky of cerulean as blue as any ever squeezed from a painter's tube.

Though lacking in winter drama, the ferry ride to Bute was lovely, a fitting journey toward a baptism. The sight of the calm waters also helped to assuage my apprehensions about the upcoming event. I had, of course, been enormously pleased and flattered to be chosen as godmother, but my only other godmothering experience, the year before, had not been one of unalloyed joy.

It had started out well enough. Early one Sunday morning, under the benevolent eye of a young Anglican priest, we'd all assembled in New York's Church of St. James—the parents and infant, an aunt and uncle or two, and I, the putative godmother. Everyone but the sleepy baby had been in high spirits, and all went swimmingly, until at a certain crucial point in the ceremony, the young priest had turned to me. "And you?" he'd asked, his large, baby-blue eyes looking deeply into mine, "Do you promise to cleave onto the Lord Jesus Christ?"

I panicked. What to do? Tell the truth? Say "No!" Pack up the baby, and everybody go home? Impossible! So, somehow, I'd squeezed out a reluctant "Yes," and the ceremony had gone on

without a hitch. At the baptismal lunch that followed, the baby's parents pooh-poohed my feelings of guilt, but to no avail. To lie to a priest? And on such a subject! Besides, maybe that lie had invalidated the legality of the whole procedure! In the eyes of the Anglican church, was that poor baby really baptized?

The memory of this incident never left me. So, when my friends the Chrichton-Stuarts asked me to be godmother to their first-born, I consented happily, but on one condition: Anthony, the father of baby Flora, absolutely had to inform his priest that he'd be dealing with a Jewish godmother.

Anthony did as asked, and a few days later was happy to report that Vicar McMasters saw no problem in the choice of a Jewish godmother. The vicar had only one modest request: the godparent who handed him the baby, and then made a cross on the baby's forehead, that person should be a Catholic. Since Catholic baptisms call for multiple godparents, this proved to be no obstacle.

And what about "that question," Anthony had asked the vicar. "What should she say when that question comes up?" "Nothing," he'd replied, "tell her to just say nothing."

So, amidst much relief all-around, the preparations for the great day had gone ahead, and here I was, on my way to Mount Stuart, the Chrichton-Stuart's family home on Bute, a small island west of Glasgow. Flora's baptism, scheduled for Easter Sunday, was to be the climax of a large weekend party, a getting-together of the clan—parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins by the dozens!

The weekend turned out to be the sort of grand family gathering that I'd not been part of since my pre-war childhood, and I enjoyed every minute of it. Those dinners, with all ages seated helter-skelter around the huge table, the long ambles along the stony shores of the island, children and dogs scampering about, I loved it all! I was aware, however, that for the Chrichton-Stuarts, the joy of that get-together must have had bitter-sweet undertones, for this would be the last party of its kind—six months hence, Mount Stuart was scheduled to be opened to the public.

After a few days of merry-making, delicious food, and a good deal of wine, Easter Sunday arrived. Flora's baptism took place in Mount Stuart's chapel, an utterly charming replica of one in Valencia, Spain. The service was much enhanced by a children's choir—those high, little voices, all singing with that lilting Scotch burr, lifting the scene into a quite different

dimension. In this ambiance, the baptismal ceremony acquired a particularly touching seriousness.

As instructed, when the vicar's crucial question came, I just kept a dignified silence, ignoring the mischievous wink in Anthony's eye. Flora Grace, true to her name, had the grace to sleep from the beginning to the end of the ceremony.

But the best was yet to come.

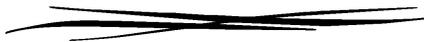
The baptism concluded, Vicar McMaster began his homily. This being Easter Sunday, he of course began by speaking about the resurrection of Christ and the meaning and significance of this great day. "But," as he soon went on to say, "this is also an important date, since we are within a few days of the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, where Anne Frank lost her life . . . and what a beautiful life it was . . . ." Then, while Flora Grace went on dreaming her baby dreams, the vicar preached a sermon on the life and the death of Anne Frank.

I was overwhelmed. Here he was, this good Christian, a lifetime removed from all that horror; and this was on the Isle of Bute, a spot the Holocaust had never touched, and preaching to an audience, who—but for me—had personally never known even one among those long-ago, lost millions.

Anthony was sitting to my right, a few seats away. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw his chest swell with well-justified pride—his vicar! His church!

As for me, I couldn't get over this vicar's kindness and generosity, and I still can't. "And what a beautiful life it was." Just thinking of those words, I tear up now, decades later.

It was the loveliest gift I ever received.



## **JESUS WAS A YOGI** by Norval Reece

"Jesus was a Yogi!" exclaimed my Muslim guru friend in her apartment. I was right out of graduate school, working at the Quaker Centre in New Delhi.

A Yogi in Hinduism is a highly respected spiritual practitioner and teacher or "a visible embodiment of accomplished spirituality," as Karel Werner puts it in *Yoga and the Rg Veda*. I had met several Yogis in India and was familiar with them.

But Jesus as a Yogi? It was a startling concept to me at the time. Since then, I've grown to appreciate it. Here's why.

In the early 1990s, I developed a communications plan for the Association of Catholic Bishops. It recommended producing several feature films for television. A couple of years later, I attended the premiere of their first production, *Faces of Jesus*, to be aired on PBS.

The film portrayed Jesus through the eyes of artists from around the world during the past two thousand years. It was funded by the Catholic Bishops with financial support from Jewish and Protestant groups, foundations, and private corporations.

Jesus was depicted as European, African, Asian, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern. In some paintings, Jesus was bearded; in others he was clean-shaven. In some, Jesus was ruggedly masculine; in others, he was the gentle shepherd. It jarred many people's well-established images of Jesus. It created some controversy.

The film reminded me of my experience in India in 1961. Debate and discussions at the Centre 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.

After one spirited discussion about the relative merits of science and astrology, my friends arranged a

meeting for me with a prominent Muslim guru who lived nearby in New Delhi. As a young Muslim woman, Rehena Tyabje had sung all over India at rallies with Gandhi, a Hindu, in the “Quit India” movement and was widely renowned as an elder spiritual leader. I went for my meeting with her, and she and I became good friends. We had many discussions from time to time, and I would often bring foreign visitors to meet her.

One day, she told me this story.

*Early one morning I had a vision of a man, a giant of a man, seven feet tall, of enormous strength, walking through a crowd of people carrying a huge wooden log on his shoulder as though it were a matchstick. People were yelling and shouting names at him as he walked.*

*He saw a child sitting beside the road crying. Without losing a step, while balancing the huge log on one shoulder, he swooped down with one hand and picked up the child. He talked gently, quieting the child until he found its mother in the crowd.*

*The whole picture was of a man of immense strength controlled by immense love.*

*I didn't know what it meant until a Christian friend told me days later that my vision occurred on 'Good*

*Friday,' and for the first time, I heard the story of Jesus carrying the cross up the hill for his crucifixion.*

*What a man! Great strength controlled by great love! He was a Yogi!*

Hearing that story, I was totally enthralled, and a bit stunned by the ending. Jesus as a Yogi didn't fit any image I had of Jesus while growing up as a Quaker kid in Indiana.

But that was Jesus to Rehena Tyabje. Thinking about it later, I found it a refreshing image of the Jesus of my childhood.

The chances are you have never thought of Jesus as a Yogi—“a man of immense strength controlled by immense love.” But Rehena Tyabje had a remarkable vision on that Good Friday morning, and to her Jesus was a Yogi.

It was another face of Jesus.

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## **OUR GREATEST FLEA MARKET TREASURE**

**by Judy Rubin**

Norm and I bought a small cabin in the Poconos about 30 years ago. Nearby is an indoor/outdoor flea market open on Saturdays from April until September. We visit the flea

market as often as possible when we are at our cabin.

Since Norm and I look for different things, we often wander around the flea market separately. On one occasion, my hand was in a cast after surgery. As I was walking down one aisle, a woman on a motorized scooter saw me and smiled. Her first words to me were, "Carpal Tunnel?" I replied "No, De Quervain Syndrome." We continued talking about everything and anything for about a half an hour. We clicked immediately.

Kay told me that she and her husband, Mike, were running a booth in the flea market selling books. Worried that our husbands were probably wondering where we were, Kay suggested we find them and introduce them. When we got to their booth, our husbands were together and had been talking for a long time. We continued talking as a foursome.

After enjoying each other's company, we said we had to get together again soon. I asked, "What are you doing tomorrow?" Kay explained that Mike was a minister and after delivering his sermon, he usually took a short nap. I said, "Okay, come to our cabin for dinner Sunday night."

Our greatest find in the flea market had no monetary value, yet was an unbelievable gem. It was the begin-

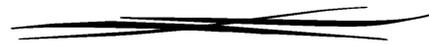
ning of a friendship that lasted over twenty years. Kay and Mike were generous, kind, and warm. We shared so much time together and were there for each other in both good times and bad. There was amazing trust among us. We felt comfortable talking about any subject and began to feel more like brothers and sisters than just friends.

Several years later, Mike and Kay had their life savings stolen due to identity theft. We helped them to get through this crisis, and they called us their "life savers."

Mike had been called to a new church. It was snowing heavily. Mike went out to clear the snow from his car. The day before his first service, while shoveling, Mike suffered a fatal heart attack. Norm and I delivered eulogies at two of his churches.

Kay was alone then and had advanced multiple sclerosis. We tried to help as much as we could. We visited, chatted, played games, and watched movies. We called frequently to see how she was doing. She died in December 2021.

All the time we shared with Kay and Mike was precious. Isn't it strange that this great treasure of ours was found in a flea market?



**ARS POETICA**  
**by Phyllis Purscell**

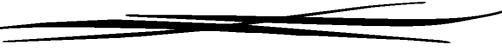
Was the play clever but empty?  
half the audience asked themselves,  
while the other half wondered how  
long  
they'd have to wait for the restroom.

Then the dog, reported missing  
in Act One, came bursting onstage.  
Collective delight. All reservations  
suddenly seemed niggling, petty.

From now on, I'm ending all  
problematic poems with a dog.

I want you to see him here:  
the color of a Kansas wheat field.  
Medium-sized, would fit comfortably  
into your easy chair. One ear erect,  
sure of itself. The other permanently  
folded, quizzical.

A rescue dog, of course.



**FOR YOUR CALENDAR**

APRIL Poetry & Prose 7:15 p.m.,  
Wednesday, April 20 in Penn Hall.

JUNE Celebrate Pennswood's 42nd  
birthday. Submit a story about your  
relatives who have lived here.

JULY Submit something funny by  
June 15 for this first-ever humor is-  
sue.

SEPTEMBER Submit fiction by Au-  
gust 15 for our first-ever, all-fiction  
issue.

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