

Village Voices

In Our Own Words

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POPCORN, PEANUTS & A PRIZE

**by Anne Baber, Nancy Miller,
and Sue Ellen Miller**

Are you thinking Cracker Jack? Yes, you can still buy what someone has called “The first junk food!” Its slogan says it all: The More You Eat, the More You Want. A lot has happened to the brand over the years. You used to get 25 to 30 sweet/salty peanuts in a box; today, you’re lucky to get six.

German immigrant Frederick William Rueckheim and his brother were selling popcorn from a cart. They needed something special to attract customers. They invented molasses-glazed kernels. It took a while to figure out how to keep the popcorn from sticking together. They also invented the waxed box to keep the treat fresh. Cracker Jack made its debut at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago. In 1908, the concoction got a boost when songwriter Jack Norworthy (who had never been to a baseball game), wrote the lyrics “buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack” in his long beloved song, “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.”

In 1912, the promise of “a prize in every box” made the snack even more popular. Since that date, America’s children have delighted in more than 17 billion toys. Early on, the prizes were baseball cards. Then, metal toys, made in Japan, were used until 1937, when an American manufacturer was found. Tootsie Toys of Chicago picked up making the metal toys until 1942, when all metal was needed for the war. During World War II, the toys were paper or plastic—miniature books, expanding fans, whistles, paper horns, and the like. In 2016, Frito-Lay, the current owners of the brand, abandoned toys altogether and have substituted a QR code that allows kids to download a baseball-themed game. So sad.

I had no idea of the history of the tiny toys when I met resident Nancy Miller in the hallway outside Seasons and admired her necklace made of five wee watering cans. She told me, “Back in the day, when Princeton had wonderful, unique shops, before the arrival of chain stores, there was a little store named A Little Bit of What You Fancy, right on Nassau Street. It was a collector’s paradise, filled with unusual, and sometimes odd, things.

Mary Anne, who owned the store, had an eye for finding things that she knew would please her customers, and she'd often greet me by saying, 'Oh Nancy, I have just the thing for you!' One time, she brought out the watering can necklace. I was entranced. I was a gardener, so it seemed the perfect choice.



YOMA
ULLMAN

"I've never had a piece of jewelry that has caused so many comments, even from strangers. Once, on 5th Avenue in New York City, a man coming towards me stopped and said, 'I love your necklace!' It gives me great pleasure to tell the story of how it came to be.

"Before WWII, supposedly, these watering cans were prizes in Cracker Jacks. After the war, boxes upon boxes were found in a [Tootsie Toys] warehouse in Chicago. They should have been melted down for the war effort as they're made out of lead and are very heavy. Someone clever bought the boxes and boxes of toys, saw the opportunity to turn these little trinkets into money makers and strung them together for necklaces."

As I was saying goodbye, Nancy said, "Sue Ellen has a Cracker Jack to necklace, too." Aha, I thought, I wonder what's her story

Resident Sue Ellen Miller said, "About 30 years ago, my husband and I were shopping in an antique store in Frenchtown, New Jersey, when my husband spied a necklace made from old metal Cracker Jack prizes. The dealer claimed that his wife had worn the necklace for years, but wanted something new and different, so it was on sale for a ridiculously high price." [Sue Ellen thinks maybe a couple of hundred dollars!]

"David purchased the necklace of five red planes—high price and all. It was mine! I enjoyed wearing it for several years; suddenly it took flight never to be seen again. I hope it landed around another neck.

"When I moved to Pennswood, I happily joined my fellow residents looking for treasures at our Flea Market. I was on my way out of the door, when I spied, to my great delight, another airplane necklace. This one had 28 multicolored airplanes, and it came to ground on my neck for the grand price of \$2. What a serendipitous find!"

I've never had a Cracker Jack toy necklace, but I hold very dear a verse my mother used to say to me.



KATHY HOFF

*I love you more than peach
ice cream.
I love you more than candy.
I think you're just a Cracker Jack
I think you're fine and dandy!*

The all-knowing Internet can't say for sure where this ditty comes from—perhaps an olde-time Valentine!



ELEPHANTS IN EDINBURG by **Kathy Hoff**

Edinburg, New York, is a small town in the Sacandaga River valley on the southern border of the Adirondack Park—an hour north of Schenectady,

forty-five minutes west of Saratoga Springs, forty minutes south of Lake George Village, we tell people. (Up in the North Country, we use time rather than miles to signify distance on winding, hilly roads.) Like much of the upstate region outside of famous resorts and the Capitol District, Edinburg is scenically beautiful, but economically poor.

A hundred and fifty years ago, Edinburg bustled with industry. Along Beecher Creek in the hamlet of Beecher Hollow, where our summer home was located, were a tannery, smithy, grist-mill, carriage factory, sawmill, coffin factory, chair-round factory, and wooden hay rake factory. Across the river in another hamlet, Batchellerville, were four woodenware factories; another in Tenantville. In the rich flatlands along the river, farms thrived. All of these enterprises worked with local resources: land, timber, and also, especially along Beecher Creek, water power. The creek flow was captured in mill ponds, released into sluices, then onto overshot water wheels for grinding grains from the farms and running machinery to mill wooden carriage parts or saw lumber.

By the twentieth century, the world had changed and left Edinburg behind. Its industry did not survive into modern times. The Sacandaga River was dammed to flood the valley

for Hudson River flood control, drowning the flatland farms and making the grist mill obsolete. Cars replaced carriages and wagons, making the carriage factory obsolete. Even the patent medicines that replaced carriage manufacture were rendered unsalable by modern medical practice and government regulation. The woodenware factories and lumber mill had burned in great fires by the turn of the twentieth century. Water power lost out to modern engines, tiny factories to mass production. Hemlock ran out, and anti-pollution laws shut down creek-dumping of tannery waste. Adirondack Park rules slashed the value of long-time private landholdings by forbidding subdivision and most development.

Today, Edinburg has just one upland farm operating, its cash crop, maple syrup produced in its own sugar house with sap from its own sugar bush—a stand of maple trees. A small lumbering business still exists, but mostly the economy functions on low taxes, a benefit from richer parts of Saratoga County, and on tourism—summer folks seeking recreational opportunities on the lake without the expense or busyness of Lake George and retirees loving country peace and serenity.

Edinburg's year-round population is around 1,300, mostly clustered in its several hamlets or strung along the

lake. Of its 67 square miles, seven are lake, much of the rest is woods. The median age is 57; young people move away. Those of working age who stay commute down to Walmart in Gloversville or over to Stewart's ice cream factory in Saratoga. How, otherwise, is one to make a living in poor Edinburg?

Visionary twentieth-century entrepreneurs have tried to answer that. Most successful have been realtors capitalizing on the summer trade, but more inventive businessmen have tried as well. Would you believe that Edinburg has an airport? It does—the Plateau Sky Ranch Airport. Its runway is a grassy field. A small hanger houses a couple of private planes, and a windsock guides landing aircraft. Before my time in Edinburg, the now private house across Airport Road was the Airport Inn. I'm told that on a weekend, it used to hum with small plane enthusiasts flying in from the Capitol Region for brunch. One local hustler induced a World War II B-24 to land there in the '50s, but once successfully landed, it did not have sufficient runway to take off again, so it was stripped of contents, then broken apart for scrap. That's how it came about that we discovered two wired WWII high-altitude flying suits on a shelf in our basement back room among other junk scavenged by the previous owner.

Another entrepreneur who saw the airport as opportunity, even after the Airport Inn had failed, constructed a twisting macadam course in one corner of the airport property on which to operate go-karts. The business promptly failed, as local businesses were wont to do, but the hardtop pretzel of a course remained. Some bright local saw it as a great site for Corvette racing. Once or twice a summer, Corvette owners assemble from far and wide (one I know personally comes from Rochester) to compete in time trials on the go-kart course. The engine roar echoes for miles across the hills into the valley.

Someone in Lake Lucerne, just south of Lake George Village, has run a successful Wild West show for some years, so an Edinburg mimic tried that once—unsuccessfully. But he was not easily disillusioned. Not long after his round-up failed, I drove up the steep hill out of Beecher Hollow, turned right at Edinburg Four Corners by the Café, and headed past Lee Robinson's place on the road to Northville. As always, I looked left across the broad pastures where Lee grazed his horses to see if I could spot turkeys or, over toward the woods, deer, the usual local wildlife. But what to my amazement did I see in the green Edinburg pasture—two large grey elephants. I was cold sober—no DTs or hallucinations. Double take, almost running off the road—definitely ele



ALBANY TIMES-UNION

phants. The explanation? Our failed round-up entrepreneur had tried—and promptly failed again—this time with a circus. Lee Robinson had been kind enough to let the circus elephants graze in his horse pasture pre-mati-nee. Later, in the *Edinburg Newsletter*, the entrepreneur vented his frustration with locals' lack of appreciation for his efforts to liven up the scene. He wasn't heard from thereafter.

One inventive local guy did succeed, however, at least in terms of publicity. He took up a special hobby which brought him and Edinburg regional fame and good press, though he certainly spent considerably more in time, money, and aggravation of his long-suffering wife than he got out of the whole business. Todd Brownell grew giant pumpkins. One of his prize pumpkins, at 1,540.7 pounds, won him a \$2,000 prize and a lengthy article with multiple photos in the *Albany Times-Union* (September 25, 2010). Locals flocked to the Brownell home to visit Todd's pumpkin patch. In

summer 2012, Todd gave a fascinating talk to the Edinburg Historical Society about the art of growing giant pumpkins, followed by a field trip to his home where we viewed his elaborate system. He gave us each two carefully cross-bred giant pumpkin seeds with slips of paper giving their genetic heritage, quite as a skilled horse or dog breeder might record lineage.

In my summer purse, I carried the plastic packet of two thoroughbred giant pumpkin seeds until 2021, when I gave them to Kay Marik. She miraculously germinated one of the two this past spring and nurtured it into a rapidly sprouting, foot-long vine in the sunshine by her patio door. We thought it would continue to grow like Jack's magic beanstalk, but—alas—after Kay planted the vine outdoors in the Community Garden, a May storm snapped the infant vine off, killing it. So we did not manage to replicate the giant Edinburg pumpkin at Pennswood.



AUTUMN
by **Glenna Follmer**

The winds of autumn come
and rustle at my door.
At dusk the great horned owl hoots.

Corn stalks guard their fields.

Mice nest-build in my shed
although I lock the door.

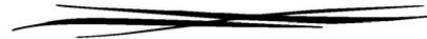
I scrape dirt from my tools and
batten down the porch chair
while acorns rain upon my hat.

I hear kids squealing as they scamper
through their piles of leaves. Later,
Dad home,
the smell of smoke fills the air.

I taste my baked apples, raisins,
maple syrup
and burn my can't-wait tongue.
I roast my pumpkin seeds.

Today, wind scoured the trees.

Too soon, the winds of winter will be
whining at my door.
I will not let them in.



F I C T I O N
PROPERTY
DEVELOPMENT
by **Howards Arons**

The old building was offered for sale by the city's Abandoned Property Authority. The story was a familiar one. The property had been in active use for almost one hundred years, but gradually the customers aged, or moved away, or died. Newer and younger people just weren't buying

what was being offered. The merchandise was not trendy and was even considered by some sophisticates to be socially suspect. Enter the Authority, with a court-ordered seizure under the new Urban Tranquility Act. The tired and dispirited owners just walked away and let the city take over.

As I scanned the legalese describing the property, I began to think that the old place might be a perfect fit for my company's needs. Dilapidated neighborhood now undergoing gentrification. Check. Close to upscale area. Check. Just close enough to a high school. Check. An eager seller. Check. It doesn't get any better than that. I told Margie, my assistant, to call and arrange for a walk-through.

For a solid stone building, the place was a wreck. OK, it had stood abandoned for a while, but still Worse yet, it was an architectural oddity, at least to my practiced eyes. See, I'm the VP of Property Development for YOUR HAPPY PLACE. That's right, I'm talking about those big, inviting, pale green studios all over the country where you can buy and use every form of pleasure and recreation that used to be called "drugs" back in the bad old days. You're too young to remember, but back then, chemically enhanced enjoyment was actually against the law. After a few forward-looking states legalized "medical"

cannabis and the money flowed, the cultural barriers began to erode. Cocaine and heroin were next, "for use in a clean, protected space." Now there are all the new synthetics like *Orange Pop* and *Happy Hour* that you know so well. We sell them all at YOUR HAPPY PLACE and provide everything you need to fully enjoy them, from music of your choice and a comfy recliner to a personalized pill vial.

Of course there's one little problem; isn't there always? That "architectural oddity" I mentioned could cost us a bundle to fix. There's that absurdly high ceiling with exposed beams in what I call "the great hall." All those strange windows are too narrow and need a complete re-glazing. Rows of hard, non-reclining seats must go, and they're all bolted to the floor. The basement is chopped up into a bunch of smallish rooms, and what might have been a first-class kitchen is beyond salvage. Then there's the exterior. All the stone work is dark and weathered, and the place generally looks like a vampire's castle. To top it off (pun intended), we have that tall, tall structure atop the great hall. Maybe it was a communication tower that got out of hand, I don't know. We'll have to keep it, because it's too expensive to remove. Our PR people will need to sell it as a feature, not the eyesore that it is. Bottom line: the city's just giving the place away, we

can cut the usual corners on the remodel, so I say, “Let’s go for it.”

Eight months later . . .

I’m sure you know that old saying, “If anything *can* go wrong, it will.” Believe me, it’s not funny any more. We barely put up the construction barriers before the damn Neighborhood Association—who knew there was one?—complained to the city that our brand new, graffiti-resistant barriers violated people’s rights by preventing them from spray painting their opinions. A week later, when the remodel finally got underway, there were the noise complaints. I ask you, when your neighbors are empty buildings, who’s going to be bothered? Oh yes, the squatters, I forgot. Then we needed a special permit (which cost us two cases of Scotch) for our jack hammers because they weren’t electric. Our construction debris didn’t get picked up for a few days since it turned out we had chosen the wrong hauler. Our exterior lights weren’t energy efficient enough, and they were too dim. The new ones (of course) were too bright. The demolition guys had a jurisdictional beef with the carpenters. And all this was in the first month, can you believe it? I could go on with our sad stories forever, but good old American persistence and packs of cash in plain envelopes, finally won out, and now here we are at last.

It’s a beautiful evening for a Grand Opening, isn’t it? Well, there it is, our most elaborate and, if I do say so, most inviting YOUR HAPPY PLACE in the country. The customers certainly seem to like it, judging by the mob at the doors. This is our first opening event that needed cops for crowd control, by the way. Naturally, the police presence is for the arriving crowd, the people leaving being generally too, umm, too mellow to cause trouble. And see, it was pure genius to have those spotlights pointing at that tower thing; it makes the whole place look really special. I knew we could make a feature out of it if we tried.

Oh, one other little story you’ll enjoy. We needed to brighten up all that outside stonework, remember? Well, we hired a guy to sandblast the whole exterior. When he was working on the wall next to the big doors, he called me over to see what he’d found. There on one of the stone blocks next to the door was ghostly writing that the sandblasting had brought out. It said “Church of the Redeemer.” Luckily it disappeared when the sand hit it again. But seriously, this new place has turned into such a big deal for the company that I think I can see “Senior VP” in my future.



PENNSWOOD NOW

by **Ann Maley**

I used to think 80 was horribly hot;
now that I'm older I know that it's
not.

The oceans are higher, the glaciers
have calved.

The time we can stand to be outdoors
has halved.

I don't want to ail here alone in my
box
with kitty cat fever or lightening bug
pox.

So please could we turn back the
timepiece a bit

to a time when we thought that at
least we were fit

to be mothers and fathers and valu-
able friends.

When we made a mistake we could
still make amends.

I think here at Pennswood we have
the best chance
to make a new friend or dance a new
dance.

So even with knees that are creaking
or popping,

we know on our way we'll be
frequently stopping

to talk about ailments and doctors and
such

and remember the past but not overly
much.

We still have a future, if not quite so
long,

and our feelings, beliefs and commit-
ments are strong.

So I'll now raise my prune juice to
Pennswood at last
for all of my future and some of my
past.

(PS: To anyone's ear Dr. Seuss I am
not,
but his cadence and wisdom I like a
whole lot.)



WHEN FROST IS ON THE PUMPKIN

by **John Wood**

The shrinking hours of light,
The growth of North Wind's bite
Foretell approaching winter of a life.

A season that births memories
Of those yesteryears

When we gathered at the hearth,
Or round the harvest table

To give thanks and have our fill.

And when the snow obliged,

Slid downhill in a racer

Layered two to five;

Or joined friends on pond ice

To crack the whip and glide.

Now, when the mirror reflects

The many seasons passed on by

And childhood pictures dim,

Horizon now in sight,

We are apt to find the lengthened
night

Brings shadowed memories of those
loved
Now lost or out of sight.
We take no pleasure in this altered
view,
But can and do accept
Since life confirms it as a universal
fate
From which not one escapes.



HAPPY HOLIDAYS

The editors are
taking a well-de-
served vacation,
so no *Village*
Voices will be published in December.

We hope you are busily at work writ-
ing the lyrics for an up-to-date
Pennswood alma mater or an ode—
tribute to this place we call home.
We'll hear a collection of songs and
poems, old and new, in a program ear-
ly next year. These encomiums will be
part of Pennswood's 45th Birthday
collection which is currently being
amassed. Please get your offering to
Anne Baber by December 31 (we've
extended the deadline).

Coming up in February's *Village*
Voices will be a reprise of something
that was a big hit in 2021—Little
Love Stories. You can see examples
of these memories in miniature in *The*

New York Times. We'll also be posting
some examples on the main Bulletin
Board outside Penn Hall. Your story
can be about someone (human or an-
imal) or something and must be only
100 words long.

See you in 2023!

The Editors

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