

Village Voices

In Our Own Words

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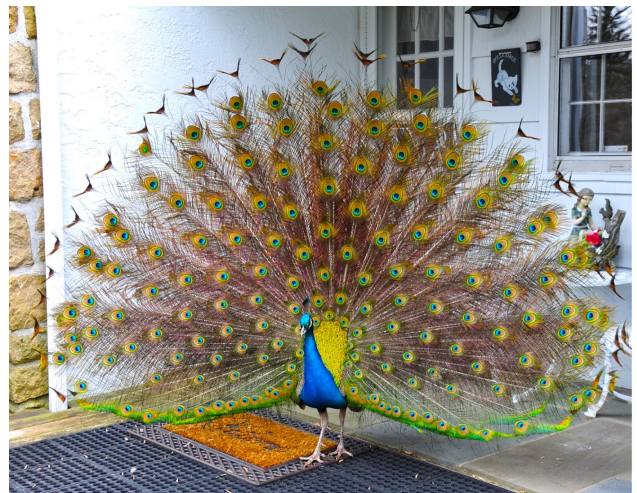
THE YEAR PEACOCKS VISITED ME by Tom Mayhew

In late August 2011, I happened to glance out my window, and to my surprise, there was a peacock looking in! I grabbed one of my cameras and photographed him. This picture was the first in a full year of many peacock photographs taken through late July 2012. The peacocks that visited me had escaped from a man who lived a half mile from my house. He did not seem to be very interested in getting them back, so they roamed the area.

The visitors were a group of four peacocks and one peahen. It is the male peacock that has the beautiful iridescent feathers and the large spreading tail feathers which he often displays to attract the peahen and to make himself look larger when confronting his competitors. The peacock also has colorful orange wingtip feathers, which are normally tucked away under his body, but they are very obvious when he is flying.

Peacocks can handle outdoor weather conditions year round in the Philadelphia area. The peacocks and peahens can fly and typically spend the night roosting high in beech, oak or tulip trees.

The visiting peacocks went through their yearly cycle of growing new tail feathers, competing amongst themselves for the affection of the lone peahen, flying onto rooftops or into trees when disturbed, sometimes calling to each other when separated or when gathering for the night, and oftentimes just resting on railings or chairs. In the evenings as it started to get dark, the peacocks often



could be seen coming down the street, returning from their day's activities. It would take them a while to get settled in the trees for the night. You could hear them squawking and talking until they settled down.

During their visits, I was able to walk among them and photograph them at will in their various activities. I think they considered me one of them, and they would often spread their tail feathers (in defiance?) as I approached them. The peacocks seemed to be in competition for the acceptance of the peahen, and sometimes the males would peck at each other for domination. Because I was with them a lot and had close-up photos of each, I was able to identify each one. One peacock had what looked like a white star on the front of his neck, and so I called him "White Star." I think he was my favorite (but he didn't get the girl). Eventually, the female accepted one of the peacocks (he was the largest, not "White Star") and they paired up, often perching on the railing together.

Although the peacocks provided a lot of entertainment, they could be very annoying. In addition to the noise that they occasionally made, they seemed to have a natural predisposition to get up onto things: rooftops, trees, and even automobiles. They operated as a group and kept track of each other. Because the peacocks are competitive, they are some-

times irritated by their own reflections in the sides of a shiny car, thinking those are other peacocks. They would stalk around a car and study their reflections, sometimes pecking at them. Eventually the peacocks' noise and disorder led the neighbors to complain to the authorities, and a Pennsylvania State Constable was tasked with capturing the birds one-by-one and removing them to a farm in northern Bucks County, where they could live a normal peacock life.

At the end of the mating season in 2012, as the peacocks were being relocated, the remaining peacocks became more irritable. When it got down to the last peacock in July, he became aggressive. One day, as I was filling a bird feeder with seed, he jumped up at me in one of his fighting stances—two feet out and claws forward, but I fended him off with the bird feeder. I think he considered me to be the equivalent of one of his former peacock competitors, and therefore he needed to dominate me. We two had a few more aggressive encounters after that, me with a broom or a water hose, and he with his stalking me, trying to get too close for comfort. But the State Constable eventually caught him with a net and that ended our Alpha male peacock duel.



TURNING 87

by Brad Sheeks

I've given up driving. Yes. After more than 70 years of driving a car, I'm done. I could no longer be sure to take that last glance both ways before driving into an intersection. Turning in my keys has been painful, reminding me of the stages of grieving such as the Kubler-Ross model which includes denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. It's like visiting those stations of the cross that you'll sometimes see painted on church walls. The road to Easter Sunday runs through Good Friday. I've staggered through each stage and stumbled into each stop along the way.

Denial is quick and easy. Come on! All I need to do is remember to check both ways at the intersection. No problem. But then one evening at dusk, I was distracted by a car coming from my left and making a turn into my street. I pulled out as soon as it cleared the intersection. OOPS! A car was speeding from my right with its headlights turned off. The driver had to swerve to miss me. It wasn't the first time. Denial didn't work anymore. I couldn't keep that promise to myself and others.

Why not put a Post-It on the dash? The note could read, "Remember!" But what if I forget to glance at the note? No way could I always remember to look both ways at an intersection.

I was angry at myself. How irresponsible! Yes, how irresponsible it was not to glance both ways in that intersection. I should be able to do such a simple thing. It felt like a kind of moral failing. What's wrong with me? But then I realized I was experiencing a gradual loss of mental capacity associated with the onset of dementia. Last year, I wrote in my Turning 86 birthday essay, "Dementia feels like a dark cloud lurking just over the horizon." Something beyond my control has been going on. No one to blame.

How depressing! Indeed, this was depressing: tossing the car keys into the drawer. This loss of independence. But more than feeling depressed, my depression turned into sadness. There was so much pleasure all these years of being able to drive my car. I can still remember the sense of competence and independence when I got my driver's license all those years ago. All that is gone now. I'm dependent on others to get me from here to there.

Then an interesting thing happened. I gradually felt a weight lift off my shoulders. Little did I realize that I had been carrying the weight, the worry, that I might cause an accident. Yes, there is a kind of sweetness to having a burden lifted. It's the pleasure of being free of an obligation. So, yes, I've given up driving. But I'm happier for it. Go figure! Who

knew? I'm living in the land of acceptance. I like the view.

There's more here to this story than just leaving the car keys in the drawer. I mentioned that it was an aspect of dementia, in this case the loss of the capacity to always remember to take a last look both ways while driving. There's a lot here to accept, not only my cognitive diminishment, but also my dependence on others, primarily Pat. I'm more dependent on her when it comes to making decisions about health care and finances.

Khalil Gibran wrote of the river as a metaphor of life, of the journey of the soul. A river has a long and winding path, flowing past mountains and crossing forests and villages. Then the river finally flows into and reunites with the ocean. It's an interesting metaphor, similar to the idea that the journey of the soul is like a drop of water that is formed from the morning's mist, rising to a distant cloud for a period of time, then falling as a rain drop to merge again with the ocean.

I take comfort from these images: a flowing river, a drop of water. They illustrate the idea that we are all participating in a continuum of life, with each phase to be experienced fully.

But at this late stage in life, as my capacity to do things has decreased, it seems

that I feel more grounded and centered. By letting go, I seem to have an increased capacity to offer emotional support to the people in my life. Perhaps that is my new challenge as I turn 87.



HANNAH

by Charlotte Spencer

"My name is Hannah." I heard the firm small voice clearly, as I pulled her free from the Amazon delivery bag, "the same backward and forward." She is a pet, soft, small, washable, just as ordered. Welcome home, I thought, but what in the world was I doing or going to do with this charming little creature? I had never been particularly a doll person even as a six-year-old, so what was I doing at 94 ordering Hannah from an online shopping giant? No family members younger than their thirties, no sign of a new generation, it was just me in my second childhood, but I loved her, and I remembered. Old as I am, I have found that some memories cannot fade.

I remembered Tootsie, the doll my grandmother made for me when I was about six years old. Where in the world that name came from I can't imagine but there it was, always Tootsie, always the only doll I really loved. Granny made her for me. My father, sister, and I at that time were living with Granny, Father's

mother, in her house. Mother and my older brother were in Warm Springs, Georgia, trying to reclaim as much of his polio-ravaged body as possible. We three mostly stayed on in New Hampshire, cared for in Granny's big house by her maids and, lovingly, by herself, our widowed grandmother.

Granny liked to sew and embroider. One of the big, sunny rooms upstairs was her sewing room, fitted out with storage closets and cupboards filled with needed materials, a table in the middle for cutting out and planning, a sewing machine set up in front of the window. Down stairs directly below was the room for her other life with her desk, books, and more cupboards full of real estate records and family history. Today's women who work at home would surely envy the space, the cupboards, and certainly, sometimes, the lack of devices, only a telephone at her elbow.

These two spaces were where she worked. If we ever wanted to see her in the morning, we were apt to find her in her office downstairs or maybe in the sewing room upstairs. It wouldn't have occurred to us to look in the kitchen. That was Lena's space or Aurora's. During the bad days of the Thirties sometimes when we went through the kitchen on our way to the garage, we might come across an unfamiliar man sitting on the back porch with a meal on a tray

in his lap. We were being taught, quietly, to feed the hungry.

Tootsie taught me about love. Granny had made her for me not because it was my birthday or Christmas, but just because she liked making things and she loved me. She knew I needed a lot of loving just then. From that moment on, Tootsie, with her adorable embroidered face (Granny's work), came into my bed every night for warmth, hers and mine. My mother's mother's name was Grace, and I could have given my new companion that name but at that age, I hardly knew the meaning of the word. I was beginning to learn.

Eventually, Mother and brother returned from Warm Springs. We all moved back into our own house together again and picked up our interrupted life as well as we could. It had been almost three years. Later when I went away to school, I left Tootsie at home. I didn't think she needed to go to boarding school. She could stay safe at home, well wrapped on the shelf of my closet waiting for my return.

Once, however, when I came home for vacation, to my horror, Tootsie was gone, my private shelf neatly empty. No need to ask. I recognized my mother in one of her decluttering modes. Tootsie was gone. I had no idea where she had gone, only that she was gone. To comfort myself, I began to tell myself the story.

Mother might have been asked to contribute goods to sell at a rummage sale held by any one of a number of agencies she knew. I could see her opening the door of my closet to look for stuff to give away. It wouldn't have occurred to her to ask me; she knew I didn't play with dolls any more. Tootsie was sent off into her own future without me. I have always hoped that her future included a little girl somewhere who needed a loving gift maybe even given by her own grandmother. I never asked about it. One didn't question my mother. Tootsie has always lived in my heart since then, wherever she might have found herself all those years ago.

A few months ago in our bedroom here at Pennswood Village, I was idly looking at the little arrangement I have made over the years of a sort of illustration or translation of the painter Edward Hicks's vision of Isaiah's Peaceable Kingdom. There they are, bunched together on a small bench in our bedroom, the lion and the lamb, stuffed toys I found years ago in the Gift Shop of The Brooklyn Museum beside a Bargello pillow I made to show off our wonderful colorful world. One thing only was missing from my version of Isaiah's Peaceable Kingdom, a little child to lead them. Where was she? Who could she be? Tootsie, of course! She leapt back into my head, so many years after she had left to lead her own life. I wanted Tootsie here, now, with me.

I knew she would not turn up on Amazon, but these days where else do you look when you need something? There, in that extraordinary catalogue, the hand of Providence held Hannah out to me. She is smaller than Tootsie but she is soft and simple and sweet and lives with us now in our peaceable kingdom.



SEA SALT CARMELS

by Alice Warshaw

What's this nonsense about sea salt on desserts? Sure, it's wonderful on meat and vegetables, but on chocolate? Yuck!

Even our gift shop has succumbed to the fad. I bought a box as a gag (!) gift for the family.

Putting it away that evening, I saw that sparkly chunks of salt were scattered on the *outside* of the milk chocolate. "I could rub them off, if I hate it," I thought . . . and took a bite.

You know how it is when the planets align perfectly and rainbows and unicorns appear? It was like that only better.

I did not pass those chocolates on to my family. These were to be hidden and savored by ones and twos over several weeks.

Would you be shocked to know that once in a great while three Sea Salt Caramels became lunch? A well balanced lunch of milk, chocolate, caramel, and salt!

MY DAD, JIM, AT CAMP

by Jay Chandler

Camp was Chandler Camp on Thirty-One Mile Lake in Quebec, Canada. Founded by my grandparents, Nina and Bill Chandler in 1938-39 on a piece of an island, about nine miles up lake. Their son James K. Chandler—Jim—was my brother Billy's and my dad. Jim was a fisherman, first class. He told me once, "To catch fish, you have to think like a fish! Believe it, too." With all its fish and the great fishing and fishing people and fishing stuff to buy and get ready, Jim was in Heaven on that wonderful Canadian lake. Every summer we went to camp.

My first visit there was in 1940, when I was seven. Thirteen were staying in the crowded and happy cottage that year, Billy and I each sleeping on a window seat. In 1942, because of the War and gas rationing, our family of four took the train—out of Cleveland to Buffalo, then through Toronto to Ottawa. We boys loved the train. Although it seemed to take forever, who cares! Then we were in Ottawa and awaiting the slow train to

Gracefield, Quebec—hard cane seats and a thousand stops and starts. Looking out the window as the train started up yet again, I noticed the "GRACEFIELD" sign starting to slide by. Hollering at my sleeping parents, Billy and I leaped to the challenge, dragging the huge Army surplus duffle up to the still-open door and rolling it out. As we jumped out, Jim's face was white behind us as he pulled the emergency cord. I can still see the startled faces in the windows, the cloud of dust as the train stopped, the screaming French from the fat conductor, then the running engineer. All yelling at Jim, who understood not a word and cared not a bit. He was almost at Camp and that fish-filled lake, after all.

To get from Gracefield to the lake required a ride in Jim Duffy's taxi, four-door, four on the floor, black, seedy old Chevy. Mr. Duffy also had the only gas station in Gracefield—Shell. Because I was the youngest, I got to sit between Mr. Duffy and Jim in the front seat. I couldn't see much except the sky and Mr. Duffy's right elbow, which he kept pointed out, requiring my being alert and my head jerking to avoid left ear jabs. At the top of hills in the wash-boarded dirt road, Mr. Duffy turned off the motor and coasted down. Car sickness ensued.

Because Mr. Duffy loved pike, my father always took a fresh pike to him on the

way out. Pike chowder was a favorite at Chandler Camp, and Jim could be counted on to promote a Pike Derby every summer. It took lots of thinking about where to find them, what lure to use, what time of day, weather—all that. There was some out-loud friendly debate, mostly by Jim, prior to any fishing expedition.

The next year Jim decided that we would drive. Drive? How? Gas rationing was still in force; gasoline in short supply. Being a reporter (having been declared not healthy enough to be the Marine he wanted to be), Jim had more ration stamps than most. He said he had enough to get to the border, over the Peace Bridge at Buffalo. “Then what?” we asked. His reply? “I just hope they will have some stamps in Canada at the border. For tourists (he meant “fishermen”). Miracle! They did. The immigration official pondered a bit, then threw a handful of ration stamps in Jim’s lap. Seems that folks leaving Canada would leave their unused stamps at the border. We got to the lake.

Grandmother Nina always had fish on the menu for daily lunch. That can be a lot of fish. We got enough fish for all, because Jim was up to the task. He was out every morning on the lake. He went around the assembled multitude at the Camp and coerced everyone into going with him at least one day, for hours, until there were enough fish to feed everyone.

(To increase yield in later years, Jim began trolling with our small motor for bass. I believe he was the first on Thirty-One to do this.) The only bait we used for bass fishing those early days was minnows, caught in a trap by our head Guide. The lake’s fish then were small-mouth bass, lake trout, great northern pike and a very rare ling (similar to cod, in deep water). Minnows were later outlawed as other fish showed up—perch, herring and sunnies, largemouth bass. Our lake water was cold, mostly weedless and clear.

Camp was where Jim’s shoulder bursitis disappeared on arrival, where Billy and I would harmonize on the dock at sunset, where loon calls closed our eyes at night and we listened to wolves howl, and where Peg and Billy and I tried to learn to think like a fish.



**OUT AND ABOUT
BACCHUS COMES
TO PENNSWOOD**
by Mea Kaemmerlen

There’s plenty of nostalgia at Pennswood.

“Remember the old post office before the renovation, before it was moved to the basement?”

“Remember the old Dance Committee—they tried to teach us Tango and Square Dancing and who knows what?”

“Remember the old 4:45? Boy, things have changed.”

The old 4:45? What’s that? Some kind of numbers game, health procedure, area code?

Nope. The 4:45 was a Pennswood phenomenon of not too long ago. It was the routine before the concept of wine-in-public-places reached Pennswood. At 4:45 in the afternoon, neighbors would gather in each other’s apartments to have a drink before dinner.

Back then—pre-wine—dinner started at 5:00, so the 4:45s were popular with many folks. Barbara Richardson, who moved to Pennswood in 2009, just after wine was permitted, says, “I know a lot about this because before we arrived, my husband’s godparents were here for years. They called it ‘the 4:40’—maybe they liked an extra five minutes.” Barbara reports that this was a time-honored custom at Pennswood. When her husband’s godparents moved to side-by-side rooms in Barclay, they had a hole cut in the wall and set up a bar to continue the tradition.

A loosening of the rule against wine in the dining room didn’t seem likely, as many residents, the CEO, and the

Pennswood Village Board were all opposed to any change. Having alcohol in public places wasn’t in accordance with Quaker guidance. There were fears of inebriated elders dancing on the tables.

Says resident Marj Burton, “There was some discomfort with it and certainly some controversy.” Marj, herself a Quaker, was neutral. She grew up at George School where her father was head of school for 18 years, and she married a teacher, Ken Burton. “Wine was not part of my family or my growing up.”

Enter Jack Bertolino, who with his wife, Ruth, had moved to Pennswood in 2003. Jack was a mover and shaker. His first goal was to introduce bocce to Pennswood. In this, he quickly succeeded. With the help of Drew Mason, landscape manager, the fine bocce court was built. Today, the game continues to be wildly popular.

“With that success under his belt, Jack took on a personal crusade for wine at dinner,” says Barbara. “It wasn’t easy, but he proceeded in a Quaker way.”

Ruth Bertolino was interviewed in 2022. “There was opposition,” she said. “I remember one man saying, ‘if anybody comes to my table with wine, I’ll get up and leave.’”

Jack doggedly promoted the idea. One of his arguments, said Ruth, was the 4:45s. “Do you know that drinking on an empty stomach affects you more than going to dinner and having a sip of wine with your food?” But when Jack became PVRA Board President in 2005—on his first day—the corporate Board sent him a resounding NO.

Not to be quelled, he created the resident Ad-Hoc Wine with Dinner Discussion Committee, with 12 members, six of whom were Quakers. They did a survey of residents: “Are you for?” “Are you against?” and “Don’t you care?” The “Fors” won because there were many “Don’t Cares.” Jack won a six-month trial.

On the first night, all went well. No dancing on the tables. No staggering elders. After a while, the Board and the CEO were persuaded. The residents who had voted “Against” seemed resigned.

Mea Kaemmerlen, former columnist for The Trenton Times, brings fresh eyes to Pennswood in a “whenever” column.

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