



**Westland
Writes**

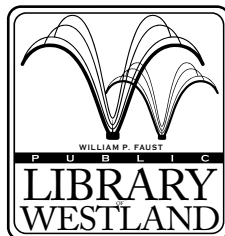
2019

Westland Writes 2019

A Collection of Local Writing

Alexis Tharp

Editor



William P. Faust Public Library of Westland
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Poems

Annette Rochelle Aben

Close Your Eyes

If
You can
Believe in
The power of
Stars to grant wishes
Then you'll set your heart free
As you trust them with your dreams
Knowing that fortune favors you
Calling for you to go deep within
And give wings to your imagination

Carefree

Skip along
Merry tunes to hum
Life is yours
To embrace
In each and every moment
Happiness results

Helaine Binstock

October

Anticipate October – await its golden glow;
It puts an end to summer – a pause before the snow;
Its many shades of copper – a peace your mind achieves
while strolling down a forest path – atop those crunchy leaves;
My favorite time – it’s unsurpassed – beloved month to me;
This autumn month beyond compare – it’s pure tranquility.

CHEERY PEOPLE HERE AND THERE
DAPPLED SUNLIGHT EVERYWHERE
OF WINTER, SUMMER, SPRING AND FALL
OCTOBER’S ALWAYS BEST OF ALL!

Would You?

Would you do it all again – knowing everything you know;
Would you choose the same old guy – that enthusiastic beau;
If you knew what lay ahead – is that still the way you’d go;
Would you marry him again – must your answer now be no?

Would you do it all again – with the hopes and plans you made;
Would you choose a different path – than the one on which you stayed;
Did the sparkle stay alive – did you watch it slowly fade;
Do you think it all was grand – or a costly price you paid?

Would you do it all again – would you marry the same guy;
Would you do it one more time – if you had another try;
Did you feel some discontent – or most moments on a high;
Did you pass the time amused – was there ever need to cry?

When you think of all the years – and you honestly confess;
Would you do it all again – CAN YOUR ANSWER NOW BE YES?

Tisha Cole

Morning and Water

Heavenly clouds, muted pinks reflect on water's face
 As morning dawns quiet and still to a new day
 And in a room, and through an opening
 A child awakens, all rosy-cheeked
 Awakened as from a deep sleep

So innocent, so full of hope to what should lie ahead
 As the pale light fills the shadowed room
 The child jumps out of bed
 And in wonder he blinks, and in hope he beholds
 Through the window his sailboat at water's edge

On a Quest

An oar in the water, a rhythm begun,
 And the beautiful lady with golden-hued hair shined like the sun
 A halo is cast over the water, as with steady moves
 The waves swirl behind

And the day waned to dusk

Then her ears picked out the mournful yammer
 Of the ancient loon, a distant shadow in leaving light
 Swimming and dipping
 Dipping and swimming
 Calling out as to invite into a water dance

"A medieval sound, indeed," she whispered.
 "A bellus cantio. His song of songs."

Bettie Cunningham

Body Image

I really don't know how I'm supposed to feel about the way that I look
Because I don't look like the models in the magazines or books.

I am average size and yet they are tall and thin,
Long blond hair, straight noses and pointed chins.
I walk kind of clumsy but they walk with a strut.
I can see their rib cage in the place that I call gut.

My thighs are a little thick and theirs are very thin.
Am I supposed to feel comfortable in the body that I'm in?

My mother says I'm beautiful just the way I am.
My dad thinks I'm the cutest and calls me Lil Miss Ma'am.
My friends all love my hair because it's curly and real thick.

My Granny says it's good to have meat on my bones,
So I don't look like a stick.

But I can't help but wonder how I'm supposed to feel
When I see the images in magazines.

Are they fake or are they real?

My pastor says God made each of us just the way we are
And though we're all different, everyone is still a star.

My teacher says there is beauty throughout the magazines
But that we have to be willing to look at the pages in between.

She said everything is beautiful in the eye of the beholder
And that I would understand this as I get a little older.

So as I look in the mirror, I've learned to love the way I look
Because I am just as beautiful.

No magazine!

No book!

Yes, I have learned to love, love the way I look;

Because I am just as beautiful.

No magazine!

No book!

I Am

I am me!

I am my father's child and my mother's too.

I am an individual.

I am a flower; colorful, beautiful.

I am not to be stepped on.

I am a bird, an eagle; I can soar to great heights.

I am not a prey to be hunted nor killed.

I am a train made of steel, I have places to go.

I am not to be derailed.

I am strong and sturdy and sometimes my head is as hard as concrete

But

I am not the ground you walk on. I am not the bag you punch.

I am not the tires you burn. I am not the trash you dump.

I am not a puppet on a string. Yet, I am many things.

I am cotton candy sweet; won't you savor my flavor.

I am raindrops falling from the sky; feel me kiss your face.

I am a snowflake; now you see me, now you don't.

I am growing and learning and trying and doing

And

Working and playing and singing and praying.

I am the peace in your storm, the pot of gold at the end of your rainbow.

I am your rainbow.

I am an heirloom quilt put together with care and love.

I am love.

I am me.

I am beautiful.

I am beautiful.

I am intelligent

And although God isn't finished with me yet,

I am all that.....

I am!

Melissa Hinken

My Mother's Singing

My mother singing
I still can hear
In echoes ringing
In my ear.
I still can hear
Her broken voice
In my ear
"It's my choice."

Her broken voice
Gained strength to say
"It's my choice,
Come what may..."

Gained strength to say
Her last goodbyes
Come what may
Then closed her eyes.

Her last goodbyes
I remember more
Than her closed eyes
No longer sore.

I remember more
The times we had
No longer sore
No longer sad.

No longer sad
In echoes ringing
In hearing, glad
My mother's singing.

The Measure of Success

The ticking time clock measures out success.
(Which sounds very daunting I must confess)
Of societal expectations to achieve
All that it deems required to deceive
Those that surround us that all is fine.
Making us all liars toeing the line
That is drawn between the haves and have nots
That makes superior those with better lots.
A segregating sham, success and time,
That make us imposters as we climb.

Heidi Irvine

Growing Up

I felt like a tree
Stagnant in my place
Embracing the rain
Filled with faith
I would grow
To be 50 feet tall
Provide fire by a lake
Build someone a home
Be the paper for an equality law
A coffin for a final resting place

It was almost like I needed the rain
Just as much as any green thing
I soaked in the nutrients
And replenished my vitamins
As the breeze blew through
My spring jacket
It was then that I knew
I have been holding myself back
It wasn't the storm
It wasn't the snow
It wasn't the cold
Even at 24 below

I looked at the rain in the wrong way
I forgot I needed it to grow

Please Remember Me

There may come a day
When you don't remember which shoe is left and which is right.
You may think it's time for bed even though the sun is shining bright.
There will be times when you forget how to pray because your mind
cannot think of what words to say.
You may forget to eat or you may eat dinner twice.
You may forget the stove is on and burn the rice.
When you think it's Sunday, but it's really Tuesday, and you missed
church.
Times like these will really hurt.
There will be moments where you forget the way to your son's house.
And days when you forget the name of your spouse.
Occasionally you may feel terrified because you're losing your mind.
These minutes turn into days and you constantly need to be reminded.
One minute you know you have to use the restroom, and the next
minute turns into a mess.
You will get frustrated because you no longer know how to dress.

Tears will come flowing when you look in the mirror and do not
 recognize your face.
 You may curse your mind because your memory has gone missing
 without a trace.

But when the day comes that you cannot remember me,
 When you haven't got a clue,
 Should all your strength be lost within your memory,

Know that I will never forget you.

Cheryl Martin, M.A.

Cardinal of Life

Cardinal of life, the crimson, full feathered creature,
 With his magnificent stance,
 Unless the blush color of his bride is a giveaway, not so much in flight,
 But on the spring branches still bare from winter's grey
 As I sat there last week, mind astray, as fresh loss palatable,
 Signs of a connection,
 One that has had meaning over the years; whether a violet and cream iris,
 A planting from heaven's gates via an important soul who passed a
 few years back,
 Yet, the one mainstay, I maintain,
 Are the feathers in flight, no matter the season, nor the temperature
 in the air,
 The verse is there,
 Singing to me, notice me, I am here,
 The stance, one that cannot be ignored, as the presence of a soul or plenty,
 Is a Buddha moment

Where a symbol of past lives echoes with that songstress,
As a pair shares a piece of seed, grass, nutrient, filled with action, yet, are
A comfort in a time of need,
Appearing at the right moment to share the quiet,
Sometimes gently flying to a different branch,
Another, the echo of the wings slightly above,
Portraying a message from the heavens,
I am still here, not really far, but a part of your heart,
The crushed soul isn't what anyone needs,
As that broken sob cannot continue as it robs the beauty within,
Including shared memories,
As the bird balances again, almost like a transition,
Moving from branch to branch, clutching to it,
With a cold spring wind sprinkling more seeds for it to nibble,
Right there for you to see,
And reflect,
The connections between universes are real,
A signature of life
With the heartfelt memories are carried by the red cardinals
For you to see,
As heaven's gate is keeping tabs,
Making sure you are all right.

A Haiku

Rhubarb near tulip
Maroon flair with evergreen
Sweet and sour taste

Catherine M. McKenzie

Waiting

In my dreams a desert blooms
full of color and beauty and awe
and...
In my dreams I see myself
waiting..
like a blade of straw

How Can We Be

How can we be except what we are.
How can we be? Accept what we are.

Sally M. Pinchock

One

We are together,
One in All we share our breath.
I cannot hurt you.

Gratitude

All is given free,
From Creator grace divine.
Total Gratitude.

Gail Shulman

Machine heart

Once again my heart feels heavy, to this there is a painful levy.

The tax that is has always been, my heart's becoming a machine.

I sometimes feel but it does not stay, so numb I become once more,
their dark emotion feeds me, of that I am now sure.

I sense that their hearts darken but my own heart hard to feel, it is
often cold as ice as though my heart's becoming steel,

and so I ask can the metal stop from taking over and a meek heart
can be taught? or do I fail at trying and find it all for naught.

Now I feel the gears, as they twist and wind, in my mind they leave
dark thoughts as they shift and they grind.

The oil drips slowly oozing like a thick form of blood into a puddle
on the cold steel floor that will quickly flood.

My own heart's light now fades with each and every coming decade
and every day more steel takes hold, so very slowly until the machine
finally becomes me.

Who am I

My touch is hazardous to your health, I care nothing for power or wealth, do you know who I am?

There are many names I go by and countless forms that I can take, I care not if you are sleeping or if you're awake, so I suggest that you be wary for your very sake, do you know who I am?

I'm old as time itself and I have yet to age, I have been through every single battle that earth's creatures have all waged, do you know who I am?

They say that I am evil, they claim evil is my friend, but I have never chosen sides even in the very end, do you know who I am?

I thrive in all religions in every corner of the world, my name strikes fear in the bravest of hearts when my intentions are unfurled, do you know who I am?

Many creatures fear me though they should not be afraid, for I am renewal and the end, during your journey I shall aid, do you know who I am?

I go where my work takes me, I come from near and far, though it depends on how you are. I'm not in the least picky, when it is your time, I'll take you in sickness and even in good health, I am the great equalizer, I am death itself.

Nancy Louise Spinnelle

Where Your Soul Comes to Rest

Forgive my mistakes.
Forgive at least some of them.

Set them free. Never more captive.
One by one, free them.

Slowly release your grip.
Let them. Let them escape.

Let them disappear;
disappear into space.

Let me fill that place.
Let me be that place.

A place for your soul;
where your soul comes to rest.

The Argument

Enough! Enough of the sensible tresses of wild sprigs of gray. Revolt!

Cover it...Color it

Cover it. Cover it like the
paintings of Monet.

Cover it...Color it

Color it. Color it in light
that speaks in colors; pulsing, surging in pigment divine.

Cover it...Color it

Let the color run through my tamed tresses like a rapid river.

Cover it...Color it

Let my hair live again. Let the gray run down the drain into

o
b
l
i
v
i
o
n

Cover it...Color it

The mirror mocks me;
mocks me with a hair of gray.

Cover it...Color it

Standing brave.
Standing stubborn.
A single strand.

Cover it...Color it

The smug reflection of gruesome gray retaliates, snickering...

I win...I win

Brian J. Tripp

Fragile Dreams

Dreams of yesterday,
become today's reality
and the regrets of tomorrow.
They fade into memory
tho' sometimes they return
bringing a smile to our face
or perhaps a pang
of sorrow.

Dreams can be like
Shooting stars burning bright
Across the starry sky at night
Slowly fading as
gravity brings them
down to earth.

Dreams haunt us
like shadow puppets
projected on the walls of time.
They come back to remind us
to confront our past.
And like the proverbial mirror
they're so easily shattered
into a million pieces
just like glass.

Where the River Widens

As the river narrows
water quickens its pace
Rapids turn white with foam
Currents seem to race one another
flowing hurly-burly downstream
The sound of rushing water
is almost deafening

Where the river widens
water thins out to fill the shallows
and seems to meander along
Movement is nearly imperceptible
Water leisurely flowing
at a slow and steady pace
The roar becomes a murmur

When I was younger
I raced through life
Burning the candle at both ends
Rushing headlong into the future
Just like the river racing through
that narrow passage

Now, I look downstream
and in the distance,
I can almost see
where the river widens

Teresa Q. Tucker

Gray

My baby girl.
Our love child.
Created from a fleeting moment
As temporary as his presence.
You are my permanence.

He could not stay because they didn't understand.
Our love was not permissible by those
That claimed to be filled with the Holy Ghost.
Our expression, our union, was forbidden.

He and I were relegated to cloud and soot.
Light and dark.
Good and bad.

I felt you, solid and strong, embedded in my womb.
No water could immerse the particular fire he and I created.
You grabbed hold of the elements of us – black and white,
Spun around into yourself.

You are a reckoning wrapped in a flagrant shade of gray.

Shari Welch

An Islander at Heart

Audacious waves roaring toward shore, pounding onto the rocks
Creating a rhythmic form along the docks
Ocean ionic music ignites a mesmerizing flow
Gliding—sliding weaving waves swooshing to and fro

A surfer's paradise emerges in this ocean playground
Riding the wave into shore coming in fast onto the sandy brown
Beach land full of swimmers and viewers of the scenery
Sailboats in the distance admiring the palm tree greenery

After a day of aquatic tropical fun
That big orange glowing ball is as usual on the run
Settling for the evening against the sky and the ocean's door
The sun and ocean coming together as always once more

The moon grins and glitters on the sleek, shiny waters
Flowing fluidly gliding to shore—continuous aquatic motions maintained
Carrying wet walls layered into wavy steps
A language all its own takes place as the ocean and winds embrace
A soothing relaxing rhythmic message is calling to say
Come back tomorrow for a new day of fun and play

Art Will

How I Discovered the Hair Weave

Years ago I went to get done my hair
I sat down to get a haircut and went to sleep in the chair.
I woke up and saw that everyone was bald
And when I looked in the mirror that wasn't all;

For on my head was nothing, it looked like a basketball.
I was so devastated, I jumped to the floor and I started to crawl.
I scooped up all my hair and I placed it in my lap
I wanted it back on my head, I didn't care that it had naps.

The barber told me that his shop only did bald heads
That was on the sign that I saw but had not read.
I told him I would pay a hundred dollars for my hair back on my head
So the barber took out a needle and also a lot of thread.

Although it was painful and I thought I would break and crack
I ignored those things because I wanted my hair back.
When he was finished, my head was sore, but I was happy
And not only did he put it back, but my hair wasn't nappy.

I looked in the mirror and a light bulb appeared over me;
I came up with an idea, a great plan to make lots of money.
Then I opened up a shop and women would come and never leave
Until they paid a hundred dollars and got themselves a hair weave.

Shark Attack

Shark attack, shark attack, I don't ever want to go back
To the place on the ocean where a shark made my arm its snack.
As I was fishing for food in the form of some fresh caught fish
Roles became reversed as a shark tried to make me its dish.

It knocked over my boat and I fell into the water,
As the shark came after me all I thought about was my daughter.
I couldn't give in, I had to survive the shark's attack,
No one had ever survived one, but I didn't care about that fact.

The shark swam fast, and yet, somehow I swam faster
I wanted to survive so bad, over my life I was the master.
If I chose to live, then live I shall, because I had a strong will
I didn't want to die the gruesome death of being a shark's
 afternoon meal.

But as happens to us all, I began to get tired
I began to slow down, my heart was no longer inspired.
The shark got closer, I got frightened as my arm it started biting,
I started to give in, but then I became strong, I then started fighting.

I then remembered my fishing knife that I always kept in my pocket
I took it out and stabbed the shark in both of its eye sockets.
Blinded by me, it couldn't see, I then escaped from further harm
Happy to be alive, life intact, but minus my left arm.

Anette Wolski

Haiku on a Plane

Baby cries loudly
I prefer to chew my gum
Ears popping on plane

Baby stops crying
Waiting on choices of snacks
Starts cooing instead

People talk in flight
Loud humming; my ears popping
Eh? Speak louder, please

Haiku on a plane
Four hours of entertainment
Creative passion

Lost my gum wrapper
While staring out the window
Is that Chicago?

Maybe Milwaukee
River of cumulus clouds
Greetings from above

Now what time is it?
Thus far, sleep alluding me
Is that Donald Duck?

The cloud resembles
Donald Duck with a big hat
Puffy clouds rejoice

Got up at four-thirty
You'd think that I'd be sleepy
Adrenaline rush

Greens, browns, yellows, grays
Majestic white-capped mountains
Colorado, yes?

I feel empowered
Observing this from above
I am a mere speck

Haiku on a plane
Four hours of entertainment
Creative passion

Imelda Zamora

Do You Know?

I have no length nor height,
No depth nor weight,
It is even possible,
That I am invisible.

I can be fierce and strong,
Like a thunderstorm.
But gentle and sweet,
Like a baby asleep.

I am fearless and true,
I'll take a bullet for you.
Or run a marathon
With my spiked heels on.

I can take a paper cut,
Ouch! That must hurt.
And follow you anywhere,
To the ends of everywhere.

I am a conundrum,
Some say an enigma,
But always copacetic,
Which rhymes with antiseptic.

Who am I?
What am I?

Do You Know?

Goodbye Grief

I have to go now,
He said to me one day.
His voice soft and low.
So low, it was a mere whisper.
As if he did not want me to hear it.
As if he did not want to say it.
The words heavy in his mouth.
I saw his lips move,
His head cocked to one side.
He looked into my eyes,
Deep into my eyes.
And gave me a half smile.
What did you say? I asked.
He did not answer.
What did you say?
I asked again.
And again.

Stories

Larry Binstock

The Would-Be Crooner

I have been endowed by nature with a great memory, and it has served me well throughout the years. One of the best manifestations of this asset came when I was in my early teens. I could easily memorize the lyrics of every popular song of the day. After one or two hearings, I not only knew all the words, but all the intonations used by each vocalist to “sell” the song. I knew which words were emphasized or whispered or dragged out to elicit the most emotional response from the listener. I knew when fingers had to be snapped to make a jump tune really jump. I actually thought I might try my hand at becoming a big time crooner when I got older. Sinatra, you’re on your way out. Crosby, start making arrangements at a retirement home. Here comes Larry.

But where and when could I show off my talent? I was chomping at the bit. My chance finally came. In seventh grade our class began what was called “departmental learning,” meaning that we now had different teachers to instruct us in the various subjects. On the first day we entered the class room of Mrs. Bauman, the music teacher, she lined us up at the piano and told us we would take turns singing so she could identify to which musical category our voices belonged. We would then be assigned to the row in which that category resided. She then asked if, for our audition song, we could sing “Symphony,” a popular tune of the day, and one she very much enjoyed.

The first candidate took her turn at the piano and shamefully admitted she didn’t know the words to “Symphony.” Kindly Mrs. Bauman soothed this girl’s ego by saying she could sing the familiar “Star Spangled Banner.” The girl sang a few lines from our national anthem and was told to sit in the third row, home of the altos.

Candidate after candidate took his or her turn at the piano. And each confessed to ignorance of the words to “Symphony.” After a time, Mrs. Bauman stopped asking if the candidate knew the song of her choice and began automatically launching into the “Star Spangled Banner.”

But guess who knew every syllable to "Symphony." I knew every lyric and, even more important, how to deliver those romantic words so they would have the greatest impact. Mr. Bauman would have a passionate partner that night, and never know he had me to thank.

I was near the end of the line. But that was okay. The longer Mrs. Bauman had to wait, the happier her surprise. Finally, my turn came. Mrs. Bauman looked at me and instinctively began playing the Star Spangled Banner. I held up my hand like a traffic officer stopping a line of cars and announced grandly, "I'll sing "Symphony." Taken aback, she said, "You know it?" With a triumphant smile, I simply nodded my head. Mrs. Bauman gave me an arpeggio and I began the song. Only a few words escaped my lips when Mrs. Bauman ceased her playing and said calmly, "You go with the monotones." I couldn't believe my ears. "I beg your pardon." "The monotones," she repeated. "It's the last row." The walk to that last row was the longest journey of my young life. And the biggest trauma, which I still feel.

I couldn't make myself believe Mrs. Bauman. Perhaps she just had a bad day, which clouded her decision-making powers. I had to be swatted down a few more times in my life before I came to grips with reality. I tried out for the boy's chorus in high school. I pictured Mr. Stoddard telling me that I would now be the soloist, and the Farragut Boys' Chorus would now be my back-up singers. But, like Mrs. Bauman, Mr. Stoddard rejected me after I sang one line. Then there was the time I got a little tipsy at my cousin's wedding and asked the band if I could sing with them. Instead of the anticipated admiration, my rendition of "I'm in the Mood for Love," was met with laughter from the attendees. Later my cousin asked, "You did mean to be funny, didn't you?" "Of course," I lied.

Then there was the ignominious time I tried singing a Christmas carol along with my future wife's incredibly musically inclined family. One of her brothers had always starred in his high school's annual musical shows. The other brother recently returned from studying at the famous LaScala Opera in Milan, Italy. Suddenly I found myself singing Silent Night alone with everyone staring daggers at me. I was told I wasn't on pitch. Pitch? Wasn't that something you used for fuel or that a baseball player threw from the mound? What did that have

to do with music?

To this day, when I sing around the house, my loving wife makes me go into some room where there is a door between us. But I haven't given up hope. I still remember the lyrics to those now classic songs. And I still remember how to sing the words to get the most out of them. Someday someone will recognize my talent. And if you're interested, I am available to perform at weddings and other happy occasions.

Philip Howell

Learning

A clanging ring came from the antique brass gong on the Moderator's Table. It was amazing how this simple device could snap one out of a reverie, just like a splash of cold water in the face after a soothing night's sleep.

Let's see, how did this all begin? My father ran an import-export business out of Baltimore. Life was good for an affluent immigrant family like ours. We had a country cottage and a substantial brick home in the city. I was in secondary school preparing to enter college in the fall, then it happened: a ship came in from Cuba with a hull full of sugar. Too late we learned it also carried death, in the form of typhoid fever. First my little sister Susie died from the fever, beautiful mother was covered by a rash before she too died, my brother Sammy also succumbed, and finally father died of the disease and a broken heart. It was decided I should return to Uncle Oliver and Aunt Emma in Liverpool. The trip was uneventful except for constant "nor'easter" storms with accompanying seasickness that seemed to strike me specifically, adding to the torture of being the only survivor in my family and now an exile with no real home and no real family.

Finally, on a new continent, I was made welcome by my father's brother Oliver and his sweet wife Emma. My education was not up to British standards, so I had to take, how shall I say it, remedial tutoring prior to entering Cambridge, two years late. With being a foreigner twice over, once in America, and now in England, I became an introvert, keeping to myself except for guest lectures in such diverse subjects as Greco-Roman History, the Science of Agronomy, and Medieval Art in addition to vigorous studying in my major of Finance and Commerce. My only real fun at university was proving that an outsider could beat the educated elite at their own game of academia. I graduated with honors at the top of my class.

I immediately went to work for Uncle Oliver's Import-Export International Commodities, Ltd. Then one Friday evening, I walked a

tall, ramrod-straight British military type. He was sent by his father to negotiate the price for and delivery of 75 bales of cotton to his father's Lancashire textile mill. After the deal was consummated to both of our satisfactions, we started some light get-to-know-you conversation that ranged from the Kaiser's plans for the German power house, to the defeat of Athens by Sparta, to Rembrandt's landscapes versus Chinese landscapes. No matter how obscure the topic, we almost always each had something to add to the conversation. Yet throughout all of this I could not shake the feeling that somewhere our paths had crossed before. Finally, I said, "You seem familiar, have we met somewhere before? Did you ever visit America?"

"No," he replied. "I was bred and raised in Lancashire with summer holidays in the Lake District, followed by an Oxford education. Though to be honest, I have seen you at a number of Cambridge public lectures."

"I am sorry; you have the advantage of me. I don't remember you participating in those discussions."

"No, I was strictly there as an observer of both the lectures and," a pause, followed by a clearing of the throat, and a tinge of embarrassment, "yourself."

"Me?"

"You see, I belong to a rather private intellectual discussion group, and you were anonymously recommended for consideration as a new member."

"I say, was this an interview?"

"No, it was more in the way of a mutual evaluation." Another pause, followed by a searching look. "You see, we wanted to determine both if you would fit in and have something to contribute to our discussions."

"What discussions?"

"Well, we are a group of British gentlemen in search of mental stimulation. We have an annual discussion on a topic just like one that we just finished discussing."

"Why me, and why would I be interested?"

"We like to keep it small, say five to fifteen members, chosen from England, Scotland, and Wales. This year we decided to open it up to one of our cousins by blood and culture, from Canada, America, Australia, or New Zealand. This individual, for only one will be

initially chosen, must be a private-type person, with wide-ranging intellectual interests, and open to discussions without rancor."

"Without rancor?"

"Yes, we have Three Rules of Good Social Conduct:

- "1. Make your jokes so outlandish that no one will mistakenly take them seriously.
- "2. Most of the time make yourself the butt of your own jokes.
- "3. And most importantly, stop and think before speaking.

"Easy rules, easy to follow, and quite effective."

"Any other rules?"

"Just two:

- "1. Everything must be kept in the strictest confidence and every individual's integrity must be vouched for by two other members openly at our annual meeting.
- "2. A member may be expelled for bad form, or bad conduct as you Yanks would intone, as if you are conducting an orchestra. Although the joke is on me as I am totally tone deaf with no sense of rhythm, I can barely march halfway around a parade ground without forgetting how to sing the regimental marching song."

"Anything else?"

"Well yes, we all go by descriptive nicknames. I am Soldier and, if you agree, I would like to christen you, Yank."

"Agreed, Soldier."

"Now if you are agreeable, we could meet at B.J.'s Pub at 9:30 this Saturday morning for breakfast and a stroll through the local park. I would like to introduce you to a few of the members."

"Agreed, I will meet you with bells on."

"Oh, very good, some Yank humor; I can just see you wearing bells."

At 9:30 sharp I was standing outside of B.J.'s Pub. As I turned around, I almost bumped into Soldier.

"Punctuality, I like it. Our friends are waiting inside for us." He said.

Inside I was introduced to a Mister Reverend and Sir, just Sir. Like Soldier, they lived up to their noms de plume with one wearing an Anglican collar and the other in a squire's tweeds.

After a delightful breakfast of veal and pork sausages with eggs and a side of that most curious of English dishes, Shepherd's Pie, which is both simple and richly satisfying, then getting into the spirit of things I declined coffee and took a cup of hot tea.

The conversation ranged over a number of topics such as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, weeding a garden, and the Japanese folk tale of the *Forty-Seven Ronin*. A very eclectic conversation, but I felt an undertone of testing one's intellect and integrity.

At a rather deliberate pause in the conversation, Soldier said, "Well?"

In response both Reverend and Sir gave the slightest of nods.

Soldier said, "I would like to extend an invitation to join our society. Any questions?"

"Yes, please give me an example of one of your recent meetings?"

Soldier, as if expecting this question, leaped into his response, "Last year we were told to meet at the British Royal Museum. From there we were taken to the rail station and silently rode by private coach, passing by Hadrian's Wall and into the Scottish Lowlands. Then we were given a repast of camp bread prior to a three-hour country hike, in silence, ending at a local hotel where we were given a meal of Scottish Porridge with polite table conversation allowed. We then adjourned to a meeting room where we were given the topic:

Why Did Rome Stop Expanding?

"We discussed this question for the next few hours when by general consent we retired for a good night's sleep before returning to London. That is our pattern: we are given a task to accomplish, such as a hike; then a relevant meal or meals, in this case Roman Bread followed by Scottish Porridge; and then and only then the 'surprise' topic, such as Rome's cessation of geographical-political expansion."

Then with military-like precision, "Here is my address. If you care to join us, please drop by my rooms, say between 1 and 3 P.M. tomorrow afternoon, to receive our meeting place, time, and most importantly, our common preparatory task."

I arrived at 1:05. The assigned task was to read H.G. Wells' recent surprise hit *The Time Machine* twice and then review it once. We were to meet in a private room at the British Library a week from this Sunday,

at 5:00 P.M. sharp. I was then given a first edition, first printing of the book. Any other reading or research I wanted to do, at my discretion, could be written down on a single page memorandum along with any personal thoughts. Almost as if going through a checklist, Sargent continued, "By the by, our club name is Lyceum-Juntos. Lyceum is Aristotle's academy and Juntos is Benjamin Franklin's self-improvement society. Lyceum is the password to gain admittance and Juntos is the confirmation password."

I showed up exactly at 5:00 P.M. sharp, gave the password, and was promptly ushered into the dining room where I had a choice between an angelic Eloi feast of fresh fruit served on palm leaves with absolutely no utensils, not even a knife to cut the melon with, or beastly Morlock scorched, semi-raw meat eaten with your own personal slag iron knife. No vegetables, no bread, just fruit or meat. Naturally, I dined on apples, pears, grapes, melons, and even bananas; rather than half scorched and half raw chunks of mutton, lamb, goat, beef, and pig.

One hour later, the gong was struck, I was formally recognized as the newest member, and we were given our final instructions by Tradesman, the moderator for this night of congenial conversation. "It seems that at a private dinner party, Mr. Wells said he had considered writing a sequel to *The Time Machine* by having the Time Traveler take three books back with him to rebuild the world, but, based on the underwhelming accolades for Milton's sequel to *Paradise Lost*, Mr. Wells decided not to go down that path, so we will go down that path tonight. I will give you half an hour to silently and individually roam this great library to collect your thoughts and seek inspiration for notes on the back of your memorandum paper." A number of members, myself included, having discreetly placed their memorandum papers in a jacket pocket, now removed them. I was prepared for discussing socialism, as Wells was a socialist, or comparing the Morlocks to Spartans and the Eloi to Athenians. I will spare you the details of my library wanderings except to say I briefly looked at Milton's *Paradise Regained*, Plato's *Republic*, Plato's *Laws*, and even Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*; inspiration did not strike.

The gong sounded and we reassembled in the meeting room.

First up was Reverend, and he proposed The Holy Bible.

Next up was a Mr. Newton who proposed Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and since the Bible is at least two books, he proposed as his second book Galileo's *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*. Remarkably enough, both gentlemen held themselves in check: there were no fist fights, name calling, or even raised voices. They just stated their cases, marshalled some arguments, and went silent. Finally, Mr. Philosopher, peering over his glasses, calmly said, "Why not table this as an issue deserving of its own separate discussion by Lyceum-Juntos?"

Then silence, followed by a general muttering of assent.

Scholar, seeing his chance, spoke up, "What you are really talking about is a better man. I propose the best of men, Marcus Aurelius and his *Meditations*."

This was followed by a "Hear, hear" and a thumping of hands upon tables.

Then Explorer proposed, "Besides a better man, we need growth and advancement; therefore, I propose Sir Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* as a neutral book on the scientific method to restore past glories of mankind and a road map to a bright new future." Note, he wisely did not say scientific advancement. We were not talking philosophy here; we were talking mortar and steel.

After a pause, Journalist added, "What about the collected works of William Shakespeare, which contains the pinnacle of British thinking?"

Almost immediately, Barrister (a fancy British term for lawyer) objected, "This is more than one book and it contains a number of actions that I would not like to carry forward to future generations, just think of *Lear* and *Othello*. I also submit that the terminology and history would be far removed from their level of comprehension."

Inspiration struck me, eureka! "What we need is a dictionary, else all of this will be lost on future generations. Naturally, it should be the Oxford English Dictionary. Is this acceptable?"

My proposition carried; I was amazed.

As we were happily tottering off to bed at a nearby hotel, Soldier said, "Well done," followed by a small bow.

For the first time, I noticed that under Soldier's frock coat he carried something cross between a dagger and a short sword.

Seeing my surprise, Soldier said, "That is a story for another time."

Michele Matuszewski

Eventually

The boat was stalled. Dead still in the water. The evening was clear. The water was calm. We were about 100 yards south of Belle Isle, an island jewel of Detroit!

We were sitting there on the water in the dark on Barbara's boat, affectionately named *Eventually*, as in eventually she would get a larger boat or eventually we'll get to where we're going. Barbara was a long-time boater. We felt safe with her.

Just west of us was a lot of open lake; however, now we were sitting ducks, floating perilously close to the shipping channel. There were four women on board: Barbara; her wonderful daughter Sandra; Jo, our good mutual friend; and me.

We were idled because for some reason unknown to us, the engine just simply quit! Period. No go.

As we bobbed dangerously close to the shipping channel, a full-blown freighter, traveling north and seemingly right toward us, appeared. In the surrounding darkness, there was little comfort in knowing that this behemoth had to stay in the carefully carved out shipping lane.

Barbara immediately radioed the Coast Guard station situated on Belle Isle, probably not more than a half a mile from our location. They advised her to call Sea Tow, a commercial outfit that handled all manner of issues on most major recreational waterways. Sea Tow would be on their way according to Barbara's ship-to-shore communication; however, they were miles north of us in Lake St. Clair, and it would take much more time for them to get to us.

The lone northbound freighter began blowing its horn at us. They were agonizing blares demanding action. The more they blew their horns, the more nervous we all became. Were we in that much trouble? Again, an ear splitting blast and then the bullhorns: men on the bridge shouting at us to get out of the way. We would like nothing better! The blare of the freighter's horn was deafening as we sat there floating

in our 23' boat, probably looking more like a raft to the men high up on the freighter. The freighter was fast approaching our location. The horn bellowed again and again as the men shouted for us to get out of the way! They knew more about undertow than we did, and although the dark ship, unloaded and riding high in the water, was daunting, it "seemed" to be a relatively safe distance.

The shipping channel in the Detroit River is large enough for two freighters to pass each other, one northbound and one southbound. There would be more than enough room for this singular northbound ship to pass us. We would be okay in spite of their continued bullhorn yelling and horn blasting!

What we didn't see, and soon became apparent, was the other ship: a southbound freighter slowly starting to reveal itself beyond the shadows of Belle Isle and into the plain view of us four stranded women. Two ships passing in the night. This was not a romantic notion. These two ships would now take up most of our alleged safety barrier, and any sense of security quickly dissolved!

And now we have TWO freighters blowing their horns at us. Not only was the noise deafening, but it was now also foreboding! The blasts coupled with the shouting voices echoing across the water seemingly falling on our deaf ears. Since we had no way to communicate with these ships, they couldn't know that our options were quickly slipping away.

With two ships vying for our space, we started becoming more proactive. We looked around the boat feverishly for life jackets. Our voices rose as we asked Captain Barbara where she stowed these important safety items. Barbara, never one to look fear in the face without a solution, was busy stripping off her outerwear and jumping into the river, ignoring our quest for the life jackets.

One by one, the life jackets were located. They were stuffed here and there under seats, in the cabin, but no two in the same easy-to-access place. Would the life jacket even matter if we were thrown into the river and dragged down by the undertow? We buckled up and tried to think of any other safety measures.

In the meantime, Barbara, having abandoned us, was in the water at the stern with her hands tightly gripping the swim platform. She

was kicking her feet fiercely, and then for added “power” started paddling with one arm as our boat started moving. Slowly, very slowly, she managed to push the boat toward the lights of Detroit and away from the shipping channels. It was slow, but it was real, but not a distance the ships even recognized as they continued with their bullhorn.

Sandra, her daughter, was aghast as we all were; however, what choice did we have? Moving slowly was better than not moving at all. And the boat WAS moving away from the freighters—which hadn’t yet gotten to the point of actually passing each other in their channel. Sandra let out a few fearsome comments, which Barbara ignored, using her energy to keep on her task.

Initially, I thought this maneuver was foolhardy, but then I even entertained the idea of jumping in myself to help. But I sat stunned in my life vest. She was a stronger swimmer than I, and she was so self-assured. She was right to think that this would work, and the boat was actually picking up speed (if you could call it that), so I sat at the back and encouraged her to continue as I tried to calm Sandra. This was futile. What could I possibly know about this mother/daughter combination and where Sandra’s ranting was heading? All I could contribute to this dilemma was a modicum of moral support.

There was another story playing out on this venture, as her daughter took this highly emotionally-charged situation to further address the poor judgment of her mother in another area of Barbara’s life! There was a man Barbara was supposedly engaged to who, at the tender age of 55, was still living with his mother and was nothing more than a mooch—and he looked the part! Barbara was a corporate buyer and had worked too hard all of her life to give in to such a person who, for entertainment, made Jell-O jigglers. The absurdity of it all just magnified everything that was going on around us.

The freighters were now playing dueling banjos with their horns and shouting for all they were worth for us to get out of the way. Momentum was on our side as the *Eventually* did pick up some speed, or at least a faster crawl, and progress was being made. By now Barbara, the mother, was yelling at Sandra from the water.

“Calm down!” said Barbara as she feverishly kicked and managed to move our vessel toward some semblance of safety. “Calm down”

were Barbara's most favorite words. I've heard her use that term in business, or when talking about the most recent novel we read, or when talking politics or religion, which we did often. "Calm down" was her way of saying she had a solution to discuss.

I was calming down because I saw some progress. Frustrated by hearing Sandra introduce the "boyfriend" situation, I became speechless—a characteristic I didn't often exhibit.

The freighter captains were still blowing their horns, only now it was the formality of addressing each other as oncoming ships do when passing in the close quarters of the channel. The captains were in control of their ships, and we were now bobbin' along at a little safer distance than before. They began to ignore us.

Then ... from around the southeast end of Belle Isle, the Ski Tow boat appeared, lit up like Christmas and coming to our rescue. There was a collective sigh of relief. Being in very dark waters, the lights were welcomed. Now, reasonably out of the way of the freighters, Captain Barbara, realizing her state of undress, was now climbing back on board to regain some modicum of modesty. The huge spotlight of Ski Tow was illuminating the entire scene on our lovely boat and her drenched body.

Ski Tow threw a line, which I grabbed and held onto firmly, and now we were being towed more quickly to a safer spot in the river.

Barbara threw her outerwear over herself as the Ski Tow rescuers asked permission to board our vessel so they could better assess our needs. We were safe, but now we needed to get to our marina. Towing us was a possibility, so there was no fear; however, as we explained that our engine just cut off for no apparent reason, the rescuer asked if we had recently purchased gas. At the same time, he leaned over the side to access the gas cap. His maneuver was so simple, it defied everything that had happened so far this evening. He unscrewed the cap, waited a minute or two, and then re-screwed the gas cap. He went to the control panel, turned the ignition, and the engine started immediately. That was all there was to it: vapor lock.

THREE HOURS EARLIER:

The evening began three hours earlier when Barbara picked us all

up at St. Aubin Marina for an evening ride to Canada and dinner at one of our favorite haunts. As we travelled northbound on this very same waterway, it became evident that Captain Barbara had misjudged her gas supply, and we all collectively hoped we would make it to the gas pumps not far ahead of us. Going against the current, we were actually able to coast the last several feet to meet the dock.

I jumped off the boat with a tow line in hand and pulled it the remainder of the way to an available gas pump.

As I was filling the tank, a very elderly gentleman approached me. I quickly volunteered how we had just coasted in on fumes to this pump, laughing at our good fortune! He replied in a very soft-spoken voice, something about vapor lock and the quick fix of simply taking off the gas cap and then putting it back on—should the engine cut off. Funny thing about this man ... his voice was very low, and he repeated his instructions twice more. He was dead serious, and I was not paying attention. This was my contribution to the evening's happening!

DAYS/WEEKS LATER:

Over the years, Barbara taught me the full meaning of the word "chutzpah." She was the definition of that word: "boldness coupled with self-confidence" gravitating to "excessive boldness." On many different occasions she did things that wouldn't be blessed by many, but with her sense of bravado, she met her goals.

As we reviewed the panic of that fateful evening, and we did that often, as we could now laugh about it, the concluding thoughts were:

- Barbara jumped in and pushed us ... she was right to have done that.
- The ships were reduced to annoying, but we knew better.
- The Coast Guard, which was so close, should have come to our rescue.
- Barbara let the loser boyfriend go.
- And I try to listen and heed, especially in unfamiliar situations.

The boat *Eventually* was in several more "situations" less stressful and more laughable over the years; however, "eventually" it was sold. Leaving the water was hard for Barbara, but she knew it was time.

Sherry Nichols

Biscuits

I can hear her in the kitchen. It is early. 6:00 AM. The house is chilly. They have no furnace. Grandpa feeds the wood burning stove just before going to bed in the evening. By morning the fire has almost burned out. Just embers now. The cold from the night has penetrated the walls of the old house and the chill has seeped in.

The bedroom where we sleep is cold. We sleep beneath 3 or more quilts. It's so heavy you can barely move. Three of us sleep in the bed together. I know she has the oven on. Its warmer in the kitchen. I can watch her as she rolls out her biscuit dough and cuts perfect circles that will explode into puffy, delicious biscuits for breakfast. So I slide out from beneath the quilts and scurry into the warmth of the kitchen.

Her hands are covered with flour. She sprinkles flour onto the table and lays her dough down on it and begins rolling it flat with her old wooden rolling pin. My grandmother. Her biscuits are famous in the family. A memory I relive often in my head. She is gone now, but I feel her love.

I have her recipe but the biscuits just don't taste like hers. Must have been all that love.

Katelin P. S. Smith

An Excerpt from “The Memoirs of Margaret S. Mercy”

21ST DAY, MONTH OF MIST, 18—

When I was young, I thought myself braver than most.

One of the children at the clinic, a boy that was maybe a half a year older than I was, dared me to go out after dark on one of the nights marked by the blue moon. I can't recall why I took the dare in the first place. I was to run to the nearest market square—a few streets over—and to run three laps around the fountain. Then I would come back. The trip would take a quarter of an hour, at most. Now, near the end of my life, I suppose it seemed easy enough and I did not want to show weakness to my new roommates. Children could be as cruel as they were kind. If I refused, I would be laughed at and ridiculed. When I was teetering between the spheres of childhood and adulthood, ridicule was so much worse than the boogeyman that lurked in the dark. I didn't think about how they would know if I actually did as they asked, but I was an honest child. I would complete the task, properly, and come back victorious.

I slipped on my coat and shoes after everyone went to bed and stole the key that hung by the front door. I knew that my challenger and his posse of younger boys and girls waited by the window of the second story, watching me, and I did my best not to look their way when I took a deep breath and stepped outside.

There was something peaceful to the abandoned streets. I liked the quiet after everyone had gone home, when they locked up their shutters and doors, lit candles or, if they could afford it, turned on the electric lights to make the place appear cheerier than it was. The air was brisk, but nothing unbearable. I pulled my coat tighter and started my trek down the street. Looking back, I should have noticed how only my footsteps echoed on the cobblestone but I only focused on my ragged breathing, and felt the cool air contrasted by my flushing cheeks as I tried to complete my task.

The market square was small, circular, and claustrophobic. The

stalls were boarded up and shut tight, nestled together awkwardly to make the most out of space. Some of the smaller ones sported colorful rooftops, but they were dull and pale in comparison as the night stretched on. The fountain in the center didn't work; it was merely ornamental, with a collection of rainwater, spit, and flecks of scum or algae clinging to the sides of its four, soot-stained tiers. I was careful not to get too close, and started my laps, the moon my sole witness.

The first two laps were uneventful. As I reached my last lap, however, a thick fog rolled in. It wasn't like a fog I had ever seen before. Normal fog wafted and drifted, as if it were the scenery that was just passing through, but this fog crept up from the sea and sewer grates, a gelatinous thing that oozed and shuddered, maybe even breathed. I didn't notice it until I turned to run back the way I came, back to the safety of the clinic, and found the street blocked. I faltered, and finally stopped running. Pain surged through my lungs and legs as I stood only a few feet away from this fog, which crept closer with every heartbeat.

Instinct told me not to step into the fog, and I listened. I scanned the marketplace and found another street not touched by the fog just yet, to take me back to my front door. I made it four or five buildings down when another alleyway started to leak the slow, stumbling fog onto my new route. I stumbled to a halt, watched it creep halfway into the street, before I slowly tiptoed around it. I lingered just a moment too long.

Inside the alley, I heard scuttling. Thin, punctuated steps mingled with the sound of wet flesh dragging against stone. I saw something in the fog, darker and larger than what was usually found there. At first it looked like the silhouette of a man, staggering from too much drink, and I went to call out, wondering why they were out this late on the night of a blue moon as well, but I stopped. The hair on my neck rose. I had the thought to run, or to hide, or to stay so still that the figure wouldn't see me.

I chose the last. I was frozen, mouth slightly agape, as something monstrous dragged itself out of the alleyway and partially out of the fog. It lumbered unsteadily on too many legs, reeking of rotten fish meat and mildew. It was a form I did not recognize now that it wasn't just a shadow creeping in the dark. The skin I could see sagged, scaly and wet. There was nothing that resembled a face that I could see,

except a thin slit that might have been a mouth, with teeth that looked like fingernails gnashing together. Its form twisted to face me. My purpose to be out that night completely forgotten, I ran back the direction I came and back to the market. Its appendages slapped against cobblestone like fins. I ran blindly through the market, trying to dodge the fog that crept in further, doing my best to avoid being cornered by the fog, or by the monster.

I finally ducked into a small alley that the fog had not touched, only to find that the other end was blocked and too high for me to climb over. I turned back to find somewhere else to hide, only to see the creature's shadow appearing at the entrance, followed by wet sucking noises. I scampered back and forth before running as far back as I could.

I tried to hide. I threw myself in a rubbish heap pushed into a corner and hoped it couldn't find me, but it skittered and groaned as it dragged itself into the narrow space. Its joints popped and crunched as it molded to fit, blocking any hope of escape. An overpowering stench washed over me, made me gag and thrash, and try to move further into the garbage and away from this creature, but it followed until it was only inches away from me, staring me down with its eyeless face and horrible teeth. The mouth contorted upwards, unnatural in its movements, and with a pleased gurgle it leered at me like it was smiling.

I wanted to scream but I couldn't. I could only stare, aware that it was possible that there, in that alley, I would die. The creature's saliva dripped down onto my legs and the rubbish I had tried to hide myself in. An appendage, long and snakelike, reached out for my neck.

A whirring noise pierced the air. An explosion of gore burst out of the side of its head as a harpoon, almost as long as me, pierced its flesh. Bits of blood, fat, and brain matter spilled into the alley, onto the rubbish heap, and onto me, slimy and smelly. The creature thrashed, hitting discarded crates, piles of waterlogged goods that had gone moldy, and rotted wood. It sputtered and gasped, still alive, as the rope holding the harpoon went taut, and pulled it away. Something dragged the creature out of the alley. The monster cut through the fog and was swallowed up by it. A sound I didn't recognize clicked through the air, and only later did I realize it was the sound of appendages trying to grasp at the street, at the brick walls, or anything else to give it

leverage. A scream so loud and fearful that even today, many years later, I still shudder to remember, pierced the night sky and then cut off dreadfully short.

I held my breath. Waiting, counting the seconds, until I couldn't hold it anymore, and with a gasp exhaled. Then I covered my mouth, fearful I had given myself away.

A voice, rough and uneasy, called, "You there? It's okay, little one—you can come out now."

I still didn't move. Perhaps it was a trick, I thought, and the beast could mimic voices. Or worse—something bigger out there had hunted the beast. That was something to be feared, and the imagination of a child often ran wild. I stayed put and shut my eyes, covering my face, as if it would help.

Footsteps grew closer and closer until I felt something staring at me. I peeked past my fingers. A lantern dispelled the darkness and fog, affixed to a stick and bobbing over the figure's shoulder. A dark green fluid dripped off of them and into a puddle around their feet, mingling with the grimy substance that started to dry on my skin and clothes. They were human. I slowly unfolded from my hiding spot, still too terrified to move much, and the stranger adjusted the hood on the lamp so it didn't blind us both. Once the spots disappeared from my sight, I got a good look at them. The stranger, their oily coat soaked with the creature's blood, wiped one of their bandage-wrapped hands on the flap of their coat and held it out to me. Now, I could finally see my savior's face—a woman, weatherworn but still young. Her mousy brown hair was tucked up in a cap, braided so it wouldn't get caught in a scuffle, and bangs framed her round, cheerful face. Opposite the lantern on a stick, I saw the harpoon, glistening, with bits of scale still clinging to its point.

I took her hand, still damp and slimy, and let her pull me to my feet. Her grip was dreadfully cold, like ice or seawater. She was at least three heads taller than me, and she lifted me so easily that I knew underneath the thick whaler's coat and the layers of woolen sweaters, she was as strong as any man on the docks.

"You know," the stranger said, "most people aren't out here on a night like this. Thought you'd get a look at them, did you? Then you

got more than you bargained for.”

I nodded, unwilling to get into the specifics. Now that the fear and danger had passed, I was mortified that someone had to come to my rescue. The stranger laughed at my expression of distaste, not unkindly, and let go of my hand. “Now, come on. Let’s get you home.”

We didn’t run into any creatures like the one that attacked me. The fog, and the monsters it seemed, parted for her lantern. I kept close, almost clinging to her coattails. The creatures were there, just beyond our reach, and were reduced to wet noises and quiet screeches echoing through alleys. The stranger was undeterred. She paused at every street corner, guiding us this way and that through the winding maze of streets, until we stopped at the clinic’s stoop. I hurried up the steps.

“Now, then,” said the stranger, “make sure not to do something like this again, got it? You won’t always be so lucky.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” I replied, finally recovering my manners. “I appreciate your help, ma’am.”

She stared at me, before she shook her head and laughed. Then she waved me off. “In you go. Be safe and stay out of trouble from now on, y’hear?”

I opened the door with my key and hurried inside. Everything was quiet. The others must have gone to bed, and the headmistress was probably reading in her room or had also turned in for the night. I shut the door and locked it behind me, slipped off my coat and my shoes, letting my stockings muffle my movements. I crept up the stairs to the second floor. Then, without a moment to waste, I darted to the window in the hall and looked out onto the street.

The stranger lingered in front of the clinic for a few more moments, before she adjusted the lantern to make it brighter again. Her mouth was moving but I couldn’t hear her. I opened the window just a crack.

The stranger sang a rollicking tune, jaunty and uneven like the waves of the sea, and I couldn’t understand a word if anyone asked, but as the stranger sang, the night wasn’t as cold and dark as it was before. The lantern bobbed while her shadow danced on the surrounding houses. The stranger swayed in the street, harpoon on her back, before she began to disappear into the fog.

A foolish thought struck me and I acted on it. I pushed the window

open and leaned out. "Wait!"

My voice echoed through the quiet, jarring the stranger from their song. A light appeared under the gap of the headmistress's door.

I leaned out the window as far as I could, teetering on the edge to the point of falling out entirely, and I called, "Who are you? What is your name?"

The stranger smiled at me, before she shrugged, tipped her hat, and disappeared into the fog as hands grabbed me from behind. On instinct I fought back—only to see the headmistress's worried face appear out of the dark, light flooding into the hall from her room.

"Margaret Mercy!" she scolded, slamming the window shut and locking it tight. "What in heavens are you doing?! Shouting into the night like that, on the night of a blue moon, no less! What do you have to say for yourself?"

Frozen, I didn't have a reply. I searched for an explanation. "I just—!" I looked back out the window. The stranger was gone, and the fog swallowed the street. The sounds of the creatures leaked through the window panes. "There was something out there, ma'am." I hoped I wouldn't have to explain my clothes or state of dress.

The headmistress shut the curtains and led me along by my hand, not noticing. "There's nothing out there but trouble," she snapped. "Trouble and death. Off with you!"

I looked back at the window, now plunging the hallway into artificial light, and let myself be led away.



Westland Writes began in April 2009 as a small poetry book by local authors in celebration of National Poetry Month. Since then, it has grown into an eclectic annual collection of poems and stories from in and around the community of Westland, Michigan. The William P. Faust Public Library of Westland is proud to present this tenth installment of Westland Writes. Happy reading and writing!

