“Lingering Echo“ by Suzi Galletti
PEN IN HAND

The Biannual Literary Journal of the Maryland Writers’ Association

January 2020

Editor: Dr. Tapendu K. Basu
(Gandharva raja)
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Guidelines

*Pen In Hand* is the official literary and art publication of the Maryland Writers’ Association. It is published biannually in January and July.

Submission deadline for the next issue of *Pen In Hand* is May 30, 2020. MWA members and young writers are encouraged to submit poetry, sci-fi, flash fiction, short stories, drama, mystery, memoirs, creative non-fiction, personal essays, photographs/Art.

Submit to peninhand@marylandwriters.org or tkbasu@verizon.net

Please follow the following submission guidelines:

• Use black type only
• Submit only in Times New Roman font
• Use font size 12 for the manuscript
• Leave 1-inch margin on top, bottom, left and right
• Place title of ‘story’ two double spaces below top of page.
• Center title
• One space below your title place your name
• Indent first line of each paragraph 1/2” inch
• Single space between period and new sentence
• In general, dialog should be double spaced and in quotation marks.
• Insert approximate word count at the end of your manuscript (except poetry).
• One double space below the end of your manuscript, include a brief Bio. The Bio should be limited to your literary works and interest, publications and awards.
• Art/photograph must be original. If not, permission to reprint must be obtained by submitter.
Message from the Editor

So What's New? As I greet our MWA members with a cheerful Happy New Year, I ask what's new besides another New Year celebrated with fireworks, balloons and a falling ball in Times Square as we did last year, the year before and a decade ago.

This year the political clouds are charged with theatrics, and authoritarian regimes are cropping up like dandelions on the lawn. Though the pages of history are dotted with similar weeds, one may say the situation is relatively 'new'.

Speaking of 'weeds', the serrated leaf has replaced the lofty laurel as the stuff with which to climb to high places. That's new.

At 250,000 crispy greens per passenger, Richard Branson, Jeff Bezos and the cracked-mirror-Tesla-truck Elon Musk will take us for a one-hour ride into space. Now that's flying high, and surely new.

On a distressing note, we see more homeless persons on the streets of Baltimore, a new and growing problem in the megacities of our country as the 'a picture is worth a thousand words' photograph shows.

On this New Year 2020, I wish all MWA members experience the thrill and ecstasy of a poem or a story in print. As my wife, Ruby reminds me, HOPE is always new as it renews itself each year and in the process renews us as surely as the crocus bursts through the dead earth in spring.

Dr. Tapendu K. Basu

(Photo by James Fielder)
Message from the President

Diogenes, an early Greek philosopher of the Cynic school, was known for holding up a lantern in people’s faces and claiming he was looking for an honest man. I may not carry a lantern, but I’m always looking for is a good conversation. Apparently, so are you.

That’s what many of the MWA conference evaluations indicated this year. They used the term “networking” but what they meant was more time built into the schedule to talk informally with their writing colleagues and maybe with an agent. The conference committee is hard at work planning next year’s conference, and they’ll be figuring out ways to increase opportunities to meet, greet, and talk with one another during the two days.

I’m looking forward to that because you can’t find a more interesting group of people for conversation. Writers in general are imaginative, intelligent, thoughtful, skilled, and have varied interests. Of course writers were welcomed at the intellectual salons in Paris and London. Haven’t you wished you could have joined the group at the Algonquin Hotel in 1920s New York City? They called themselves the “Vicious Circle,” but we know this witty little group as the Round Table. I’m told you needed to wear armor to protect yourself against the barbs. Here’s a list of “charter members”: Pierce Adams, columnist; Robert Benchley, humorist and actor; Heywood Broun, columnist and sportswriter; Marc Connelly, playwright; Ruth Hale, freelance writer who worked for women's rights; George S. Kaufman, playwright and director; Dorothy Parker, critic, poet, short-story writer, and screenwriter; Brock Pemberton, Broadway producer; Harold Ross, editor, *The New Yorker*; Robert E. Sherwood, author and playwright; John Peter Toohey, Broadway publicist; and Alexander Woollcott, critic and journalist.

Perhaps you wished you could join the ribaldry at the Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese, a pub in London, with Samuel Johnson, James Boswell, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Oliver Goldsmith and others of his crowd. The pub is known for its literary associations. Regular patrons also included Charles Dickens, G.K. Chesterton, Mark Twain, Alfred Tennyson, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and P.G. Wodehouse.

What’s going on here in Maryland? Is there a Round Table in Baltimore? A favorite pub writers favor in Cumberland? Or Salisbury? Annapolis?

MWA’s chapters offer members a program and time to network at least once a month. Can we make something informal happen, like a kinder Round Table in a local pub or restaurant in our town or neighborhood? What do you think?

Eileen McIntire, President
POETRY

Little Bear
by Andrew McDowell

Such it was on the morning of my birth,
That you were presented and brought me joy,
   For every single child on this earth,
   Must enjoy life with a favorite toy;
Eyes black, a nose brown, a striped bowtie,
Your body so plump, so fuzzy, and blue,
Although you have aged with time passing by,
   No matter what, I will always love you.
Years past my childhood too did depart.
   A playful toddler I can be nevermore.
But young I am still from within my heart.
   These memories I hold forevermore.
Wherever the journey takes me out there,
   I will always treasure you, Little Bear.

Bio: Andrew McDowell is the author of the high fantasy novel Mystical Greenwood, which was a finalist in the 2019 American Fiction Awards. He has also written poetry and creative nonfiction, and is an associate nonfiction editor with the magazine JMWW.
Felisha Flip
by bjai

My name is Felisha Flip,
And AMAZING is what I like to be.
So, come and go, come go with me
I’m pretty awesome as you will see.

Today I think I’ll take a trip,
Around the world I’ll fly
And if you look out your window
I’ll wave as I go by.

In my upside-down world
I’m right side up.
Not the table or the chair
or even the pup.

All my subjects
Aren’t head over heels
It makes me giggle
To think how they feel

So, when they’re sad
And I see a frown
In my head I’ll just
Flip them upside-down

It’s a fun place to visit
Especially when I’m mad
because in this world
I’m always glad

Come visit with me
But you can’t stay
Because my special world
Is just for play

BIO: Brenda Clayburn is a member of MWA.
The Parts of a Man

by Steve Lubs

I am the Beast, the babe newborn, whose body and thoughts are still unformed. Who, when thrust into the cold, cruel world, did shriek and try to hide in the fetal curl. Who knows not how to be thoughtful or kind, instead grabs for everything, crying, “Mine, Mine, Mine!” This is the first part of me I did find.

I am the Dreamer, the five-to-ten year old bundle who flies spaceships, fights dragons, yet still do I fumble, doing chores, eating spinach, doing those things I should do. It’s hard when there are so many things around you: Cars are monsters, trees are aliens in disguise—These things are obvious to a youngster’s eyes. This is the second part of me—a part that I prize.

I am the Idealist, a teenager at this stage. I can take care of myself, so do I rage at the adults around me who treat me as if I were a child. “I can make the world better;” I say, and they nod and smile, talking about politics and taxes, leaving me to my own devices, which I practice and improve upon, to surmount crises. I like this part of me—the part where my feistiness is!

I am a Mover and a Shaker, in the prime of my life, moving upward and outward in a world that is rife with challenges, and opportunities, goals firmly in mind, but not set in concrete, for I’m longing to find someone to share them with, someone who understands, yet may change my course, with gentle, caring hand. This is the fourth part of me…at present, where I stand.

I am the Provider, the head of a household. I don’t move smoothly or gracefully, but still, I’m not old. While the paunch has grown a bit, and the hair’s not as thick, I have the benefit of experience—I know when to turn the trick
that will give me the upper hand on the kids that surround me. Whether I’m raising them or working them, I know they will hound me. I like this part of me—it takes a lot to get ‘round me!

I am the Old Man, provider of wisdom… Educator, babysitter, wiseacre, and then some! Some come to me with questions, genuine and sincere. Others come with derision and ridicule, but it will cost them dear, for they will make the same mistakes I made in the past, and wonder how they got behind, when they were moving so fast. This is the final part of me—not the least, even if it is the last.

You’ve now heard my description of the various parts of me, but the whole is more than the sum of its parts, as you would not describe a tree as only branches and leaves, trunk and root, but talk of its height, and colors, and spread, to boot. To understand one’s own parts is a difficult task—understand another’s? Impossible! Yet I ask that you make the effort, whether during argument or laughter—promote fellowship, avoid strife…goals worth seeking after. To change the world for the better is a major undertaking; all I ask is this small effort you’ll be making. And who knows? Perhaps your neighbor deserves a higher rating!

**Bio:** Steve Lubs is an engineer whose published works are generally technical. He writes science fiction, fantasy, mystery and drama and occasionally poetry. He has been published in *Pen In Hand.*
A Salute to Federal Whistleblowers

by Tanya Ward Jordan

With lifted voices;
They made selfless choices;
To uphold the public good.

Facing harsh retaliation;
For the sake of the nation;
Against a soulless power, they stood.

Oh, how they suffered for their good deeds!
The righteous warriors risked it all.
They angered the MIGHTY in government.
They refused to let their honor fall.

Through jeers and sneers;
Through trials and tears;
They whistled a caged TRUTH into the light.

Candor they raised
With cheerless praise
as they boldly battled upright.

Bio: Tanya Ward Jordan, M.S. is President and Founder of The Coalition For Change, Inc., a civil rights whistleblowing organization challenging discrimination in the federal workplace. She was recognized by NAACP as a 2015 Black History Maker. She the author of 17 Steps: A Federal Employee’s Guide For Tackling Workplace Discrimination.
Robert's Heart
by Victoria Clarkson

I stand accused
of stealing your heart
Maybe I did
But not my fault

You took my breath away
the very first day.
The stars aligned
And you were mine

My head spinning
And voice quaking
Your heart in my hand
Was there for the taking

I could not breathe
Cuz you had my breath
So, I took your heart
I thought it best.

BIO: Victoria Clarkson is the President of MWA Baltimore North chapter. Her work has appeared in newspapers and magazines including Pen In Hand. She writes a blog entitled “Confessions of a Prepper Gal.”

Illusion
by Sara Younes

Meeting you is like seeing the light spectrum that the human eye cannot see
My feelings bounce for you like a rainbow on a prism
My heart is human, but filled with the light waves of the world
Please don’t be an optical illusion.

BIO: Sara Younes lives in Anne Arundel County. Her poems have appeared in And I Thought magazine. She took part in the Loudon County Public Library’s RhymeOn! Poetry Contest. She is a member of MWA since 2018 and participates in open mike nights.
Apolitical

by Arielle Lambert-Gannett

A jitterbug of a woman trembles down
the leaf-covered path while biting her
bottom lip.

She does not notice the nod
of the idle man, not reading his open paper
on the wooden park bench.

He mutters to himself and twists
the thumb of his right hand covered
with cracks tinged red.

She does not notice the glaring
red, white, and blue lights
of the cop cars in front of the school.

All in a line like the laboring ants
children stumble out hands held crossed
atop their head.

She notices the quick squish
of the soggy foliage beneath her boots,
and applauds herself on her choice of shoes,

and walks and turns and finally shivers
up wide marble steps,
checking her watch and smoothing her dress,

smiling at the plants in the lobby
and the rug on the floor
“Home in record time!”
she says, and hurriedly shuts her door.

BIO: Arielle Lambert-Gannett writes poetry and prose with the hope of finding answers to hard questions, or at least working up the courage to accept the things she cannot understand. Her poems were published in UMBC’s Bartleby.
Morning Mist
by J. D. Fielder

I see him in the morning mist
Just as the sun begins to rise,
Gentleness, calm and grace
is the cloak of his disguise.

I find him in the sun rays
Glancing off that drop of dew,
I thought I felt him speak to me
To be reassured and renewed.

I find him in the morning
Most often when I am calm,
If I remember to invite him
He is with me all day long.

**BIO:** J. D. Fielder is the Secretary of Education, Maryland. His poems have appeared in *Pen in Hand* and in a chapbook, *Unspoken Reflections.*
I am a construction worker—but not in the traditional sense, mind you. Mine is not a labor of bricks and mortar, but rather of dreams and memories. The great rebuilding that is now underway was not commissioned by some over-staffed government agency, but by the passing of my father two years ago—or was it three? And like many construction projects, an old structure has become obsolete in some manner or another and must be torn down, pushed aside before a new foundation can be poured and recently minted red beams lifted into place and welded together.

The old structure is my father’s world.

I am sitting on the floor of my father’s office—except it really hasn’t been his office for these last few years—not since cancer crept into his lymph system without a building permit, initiated its own clandestine demolition, and carted him away from our lives. The worst thing about cancer is that it never sticks around long enough to clean up after itself. No—it left me to deal with the punch list.

His Last Will and Testament is my blue print.

The legal documents have all been executed and my Dad’s name has been mined from assorted accounts, automobile titles, and rosters of professional organizations. This refuge is the final piece of his world I must dismantle, presumably to make way for something new—whatever that might be. The once ordinary items that fill his sanctuary have become sacred icons to me and sources of great comfort—his desk, his now quiet computer, and the shelves of neatly arranged books. I do this last chore not out of disrespect, disloyalty, or any lack of love, but because it must—sooner or lat-
er—be done. Part of this pre-packaged process we call life is the inevitable deconstruction of everything our parents were. And what we cannot or will not disassemble, time will do it for us—picking off our parents’ brothers and sisters, friends, neighbors, and business associates—as if they were all withered fruit hanging from trees in a dying orchard. Bit by bit, all our parents held dear vanishes from the face of this earth.

*Where do I begin?*

I am scrutinizing the walls full of the familiar plaques, awards, and photographs of buildings and ships covered with the signatures of those with whom he worked. But my attention falls to the series of photographs that are held captive on his desk in wooden frames of assorted sizes and shapes. Family and friends, favorite places and trips—as I savor each one, memories of the stories my father would tell, and tell again, come flying at me—stories of growing up on the prairies of Wyoming, of those he called friend, of time spent in the Navy, and of fish stories too fantastic to believe.

*Each picture frame is a window to memories past.*

There is a black and white picture of my father taken when he was a little boy. He was dressed in a smart woolen suit and matching cap. He was standing with his older sister and mother. “I will always remember that trip to Montana,” my Dad would recount. “I kept pestering your aunt with a rubber knife as we drove along. Every time I would jab at her, she would alert the front seat of my latest incursion. After several warnings, your grandmother turned around and said to me that if I poked my sister one more time, the knife was going out the window. One more poke I made and, sure enough, your grandmother turned around, grabbed my knife, and threw it out the window onto the scorching summer pavement, never to be seen by me again.”

*Oh, Dad—I so miss you.*

Since my father’s passing, I wake—I work—I eat—I sleep. I catch myself sometimes thinking like my father is still alive, a phone call away, or twenty minutes down the road. I dream of the Great God, the one capable of dissolving the tens of thousands of light years between my life and the firmament of heaven. I find myself bandaged in memories selected from contrary filing systems in my brain—one drawer for the fantasy he might come back, another drawer for the reality that he won’t.

*I tell myself that every old building turns to dust.*

The truth is, the more I think about my father, the more details of him and his life float up from my memory, seemingly without end. And just as digging at a construction site might uncover relics from some forgotten time, I am now finding questions cemented to those details—questions that can never be answered—questions I never thought to ask while my father
was still in this physical world. What do I do with all of his letters? His photographs? And what, pray tell, do I do with the memories I have collected?

What became of the love my parents had for one another?

My Dad and my grandfather loved to fish the streams just outside of Yellowstone National Park. One photograph showed them standing hip deep in the chilly summer waters, both casting out their lines. My grandmother, who snapped the picture, was never far from them—sitting up in the car on the road, ever watchful for a wayward bear or moose. Little good did her horn honking do on one fishing expedition—my grandfather had forgotten his hearing aid and was totally oblivious to a curious bear.

I am reminded of the saying printed on the reverse of my Dad’s funeral program—“When he goes home, dear Lord, may he be met by some tanned crony of his fishing days. His creel snug on his back, his line still wet, and thoughts of secret trout streams in his gaze. There must be a quiet woods for men like these.”

I wonder if the heavenly trout are biting today?

My favorite picture though, is of my Dad standing somewhere on the fringes of the flight deck of the USS Enterprise—the Navy’s first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. It must have been cool because he was wearing a pea coat with his hands buried deep in the pockets. His cap carried the ship’s name and designation—CVAN 65. Even though he was on his way to support the war in Vietnam, was thousands of miles from us, and was probably questioning the worth of his small contribution to the war—he was smiling. I think he was excited to be on an incredible adventure with a bunch of truly dedicated men.

Why do we only remember the good in those we loved?

We are like little tornados. We drop down from the clouds, find the earth with our toes. We wander about without knowing where our paths may take us. We dispense our destruction without meaning to hurt what we touch. And when we are done, we are sucked back up into the heavens.

What becomes of us?

I can hear my Dad’s voice reminding me that death is just another part of life. “Thanks for the cheery thought,” I would always reply. He would not be pleased with my efforts to keep him alive by my talk of him or my incessant reflections about his life. After all, I do have a life of my own, filled with friends who give me strength and enjoyment. Just before he passed, my Dad was lamenting about
his predicament. When he was done, he turned to me and said, “But maybe it’s harder for those left behind.”

*Maybe, indeed.*

What dreams did my parents dream all those many years ago—what plans did they conjure up as they drove across the other-worldly stretches of Wyoming, filled with lupine and sage, heading towards a wine-streaked sky. The dust stirred up by their lives has long since settled. Silence has moved across what was their world—and mine—like a tide of lightness ebbing into darkness. The dreams of my parents reside only in my memories now, nowhere else.

*I am a construction worker, now. Where do I begin, Dad?*

**BIO: Nancy Joie Wilkie** is a member of the Montgomery Chapter of MWA. After many years working in the biotechnology industry and federal government’s biodefense effort, she spends time composing music and writing. Her third CD “Venus In The Trees” was released in 2019. Her short stories collection, *Seven Sides of Self,* was published by She Writes Press, November 2019).

**Annapolis Saturday Sojourn**

*(Circa 1963)*

*by Susan Powell*

It was Saturday! I bounced out of bed, eager to hopscotch to my grandparents’ house, located next door to my home. A walkway of square concrete paving stones, which were painted green and red and laid in alternating colors, connected the two houses. There were a few inches between each paver, creating the perfect path to practice my playground skills at home.

Saturday meant my grandfather, PopPop, would to take my sister and me on our weekly trip to downtown Annapolis. We loaded into his black VW Beetle; as the little sister I was always in the back. It didn’t matter to me; we were going to town!

Each week, the same places.

Fawcett’s Boat Supplies, the premier yachting chandlery to find items needed to outfit or repair any boat. How it could take so long for PopPop to
get what he needed each week? After he examined all the shelves at least twice, he’d finish his conversation with the owner, John, and buy whatever he came for.

On to Woolworth’s! Located at the foot of Main Street, this was the magical Five and Dime that held everything I could ever want to pore over. The star attraction was the pet department. Birds, fish, turtles. How many times did my mother find me coming in the door from our Saturday sojourn with a turtle bowl and its occupant? A plastic home, manufactured with turtle comfort in mind: an area for water and an island, complete with plastic palm tree. Despite the bowl’s amenities, these little creatures seldom lasted for more than a week or two.

Johnny’s Sweet Shoppe, located halfway up Main Street, offered exquisite pastries for Sunday’s breakfast. The buttery aroma of freshly baked pastries spilled into the street when we opened the door. Fruit- and cheese-filled Danish, cinnamon twists, elephant ears, doughnuts of every variety, my mouth watered as we made our selections. Often, there was even a treat for the ride home.

The best for last, the Annapolis Public Library, housed in a historic building on Church Circle. Before reclaiming its name and status as Reynolds Tavern, it was a labyrinth holding precious words. I scuttled to the basement and lost myself in the children’s section. An hour or so later, cradling a week’s worth of reading, I clambered back into the “Beetle,” anxious to resume my magical journey begun in the library.

Fifty six years later, I marvel at the two-hour flight that gives me a different way to hop to my two young grandchildren in Milwaukee. And, eventually, for them to bounce to me, to pursue our own Saturday sojourns.

Bio: Susan Powell is a lifelong resident of Annapolis who has been published in Inner Resources. She is working on her first novel.

A Fox at the Cemetery
by Lois Perch Villemaire

We had driven almost three hours to the cemetery. I had hopes of finding and photographing her grave stone. My great-great-grandmother was born in 1837 in Russia and died in Philadelphia in 1909. I was searching for clues to her life’s journey, and the names of her parents, husband, and eight children.
I climbed out of the car, studying the diagram of the cemetery on my phone. Gazing ahead, I was surprised to behold waves of gravestones, monuments, and markers. They were all shapes and sizes, the colors blending into a sea of gray on a cloudy day.

When given the section, lot, and grave number, I expected it would be easy to find the burial location of my grandmother’s grandmother. The only problem was - it wasn’t. There were medallions on the corner of the numbered and lettered sections, but besides that it looked like a mass of randomly situated grave sites. I navigated the uneven terrain, stepping over chunks of markers. Many were in good condition, while others were overturned. Some were completely in Hebrew. The engraving was visible in certain cases, but for others, passage of time and effects of the elements had worn away the words. I was mesmerized by the sight before me, trying to focus on each individual stone, looking for her’s.

There was a sound. I saw movement in my peripheral vision. I turned in time to see a good-sized fox running close by. I gasped and stopped in my tracks, noticing his bushy tail. The fox continued on, glancing back at me.

The fox - I was afraid of the fox. He was letting me know it was his territory. He looked so red against the gray background of the cemetery. I made my way back to the car.

**BIO: Lois Perch Villemaire** lives in Annapolis, MD. She enjoys writing flash fiction, nonfiction, and memoir. Her stories have appeared in *Potato Soup Journal, 101 Words* and *The Drabble*. A 42-stories anthology is forthcoming. She blogs for annapolisdiscovered.com.
Cancer: A Love Story
by Janet M. Ruck

Over endless sultry and oppressive days and nights, the caliber of our summer aligned with the air quality for sensitive groups in the Baltimore area, consistently ranking in the category of “poor”.

90-degree days imprisoned my husband, Carl, and me as we tried to maintain homeostasis in our airconditioned house. I was a newly diagnosed breast cancer patient in the throes of chemotherapy which conspired to paralyze and confine me to the dog-run distance between my bedroom and the living room couch. Carl had just entered yet another clinical trial at Johns Hopkins to treat nine years of prostate cancer.

We were a ghoulish twosome, engulfed with gender specific cancers. Yet, our survival depended on one another.

As the once healthy member of our couple, my job for the past nine years had been that of Carl’s advocate, accompanying him to doctor appointments and tests, weighed down with 108 months’ worth of notes, charts and research protocols. Our roles reversed abruptly on May 4, the day my lump revealed its repugnant presence, when Carl became my notetaker and asker of questions as I sat numb and speechless while the surgeon said: “You have triple negative stage one breast cancer. While treatable, it is very aggressive.”

The C-word consumed my thoughts, rationale and reason. Any possibility of hope seemed to exist only in the days prior to the diagnosis, when I naively believed that a diet of fruits and vegetables, Pilates and swimming inured me in protective garb against health foes.

The lumpectomy on May 31, which removed all evidence of cancer, slowed down my breaststroke and decelerated my lifestyle, as my self-image as a baby boomer basking in the glow of physical fitness was altered. Insertion of a port into my vein to expedite the infusion of what would be life-affirming chemicals resulted in a collapsed lung, necessitating a three-day hospitalization and a ban on flying for four months. The one percent chance this might occur underscored my coming to terms with the reality that I now dwelled in the medical system as a surgical, oncology and radiation patient. No longer could I blithely check the “Never” box on forms that inquired about past surgeries and illnesses.

The four cycles of chemotherapy administered over 12 weeks accumulated in my cells, causing neuropathy, olfactory hallucinations, nightmares, muscle weakness, sleep disorders and fatigue. I entered the maw of the medical establishment, willingly, yet with no choice, because triple negative breast cancer requires forceful and hard-hitting treatment. In the space
of a few short weeks, I lost my hair and my identity. Each ache or twinge left me wondering if I was overreacting to chemotherapy. Should I call the doctor or tough it out? My body, once a bastion of dependability and stamina, was now a quivering mass of unfamiliarity which required navigation from a system of health care professionals whom I wasn’t even sure I trusted.

Meanwhile, Carl’s new regimen mandated four horse-pill sized capsules to be taken two hours before and after meals. Mealtimes became like the timing clock of a track meet – when do I start, what time do I stop, how much time do I have in between? The natural flow of eating, formerly a joyful part of the day and most assuredly a pastime enjoyed with friends, became another casualty of cancer. Together we suffered assault to our taste buds, making our conversations less about “this meal is fabulous” to more of “what does this taste like to you?”

Out of necessity, we spent the summer serenaded by the symphony of crickets and cicadas as we shrunk into our cocoon of comfort. Feeders outside the window attracted the red blur of cardinals, yellow streak of gold-finches and azure shriek of blue jays. Our untended and neglected garden gave rise to feeding grounds for a rotund groundhog. A shy doe and her twin fawns seemed to inch closer for us to get a peek. It’s as if Mother Nature was letting us know that life goes on, despite the trauma and uncertainty that enveloped us.

Following a blissful and brief four-week reprieve after chemotherapy, I start 20 days of radiation. Two weeks later, we find out if Carl’s latest clinical trial is successful. Alternatively, he will need to begin yet another medical experiment, replete with relentless lab work, awkward bone scans, ceaseless x rays. There is no guarantee that our cancers will not return. Do we dare dream of health or have we endured treatments and trials for nothing?

In sickness and in health which Carl and I naively vowed 38 years ago, looms large and loud in our most recent reality. We question if this roller coaster between our dual diagnoses and their respective protocols and treatment is our new normal, or merely a detour on our road to recovery. Traveling the country in a camper, a train trip across the Rockies and other retirement plans delayed--we are confident we still have time to pursue our dreams. Together, hope springs from a place of despair, elevating us higher than we dared reach alone.

We’re partners in our respective health crusades, not merely in marriage. Our life has slowed down for the time being and we have become accustomed to a simple routine. Sometimes, just being upright is all we can muster. Throughout the day, we nod and laugh to one another across the room, me sprawled on the couch bolstered by pillows that elevate whatever
body part happens to be retaining fluid that day. Carl’s favorite spot to take in our new life is a comfy chair strategically placed within my eyesight. Sometimes we marvel at how quickly our life seems to have unraveled, then we regroup and recount our awe at being together, truly united, at this most crucial time of our lives.

Seasons change and so do I.

We’re still here. The sultry summer gradually gave way to the crispness of autumn. Friends and neighbors rallied and brought us food and companionship. Folks we’d lost contact with stood ready to fortify and infuse us with more of what we needed than another medical intervention. The United States Postal Service delivered snacks, cards, flowers, cookies, plants. Every thought and gesture bolstered a wall of defense against the illnesses which hobbled us physically and mentally.

Cancer gave us a common purpose besides paying bills, mowing the lawn and planning trips. It’s not what we would have chosen for ourselves, but since it’s what life doled out to us, we try and look beyond the everyday angst and worry. We wage battle daily on behalf of ourselves and one another. Gradually we rise together in strength, determined not to let the moments we share be laden with doom and gloom (at least not all the time). It’s easy to give in. It’s so much harder to look beyond the scars, the nausea, and the bodies that just don’t seem to fit anymore and say yes to our condition while embracing the lessons and the beauty that are part of the C-word package.

Till death do us part.

BIO: Janet M. Ruck is a nonfiction writer of personal development and job search books. Her most recent publication You Anew: A Guide for the Woman Who Is Ready to Create Her Best Life is a self-directed journey which guides women age 50 and above in choosing their next steps for life satisfaction. Her website is www.youanewguide.com.
The wind was calm, the waves were flat, and the sailboat rode peacefully at its mooring. Robert felt, and then heard, his dinghy ground upon the boat slide. The slide’s slats slowed and then stopped the boat causing his body to rock towards the bow. He shipped his oars, placed a hand on each gunwale, and eased his way forward. He stepped over the bow onto the slide mindful it could be slippery from marine growth, then grabbed the gusset and heaved. The dinghy came up the slide. He heaved again and the dinghy slid up further. A third heave carried it up above the high-water mark, safe from being refloated in the night. He went through his ritual for putting the dinghy to bed. He took the pins out of the oarlocks letting them hang from their lanyards, took the oars out of the boat laying them on the shale beach, and took the sail bags off the stern thwart placing them next to the oars. He examined the now empty dinghy. Water lay in her bottom from the rain squall, the same squall that nearly capsized his sailboat an hour earlier. He smiled. That had been fun.

He’d been across the Sea of the Iroquois when he noticed the dark clouds over the Adirondacks. They moved closer and got larger by the minute. The rain falling from the clouds blanked out the mountains behind them. It always intrigued him that he could see the rain. Since he couldn’t avoid the squall, he sailed straight into it. It wasn’t a dangerous decision. It was a calculated risk. His boat was well built, her sails and lines in good shape, and he was wearing a life jacket. A crew would have been helpful, but he had sailed single-handed in foul weather before.

He cleared her decks for action, stowing loose gear under the seats or up under the foredeck. He freed the hand pump and made sure the bailer was handy. He confirmed the tiller was firmly in the rudder and checked that the jib and main sheets were un-fouled and running free. He looked ahead and saw it coming. First, the waves grew in size. Not large swells, but short choppy peaks that would hit the bow like slaps to a face, throwing up spray which the wind would fling over him, soaking him in seconds. Then the wind, all part of the excitement.

Every small boat sailor learns to recognize and watch for angry water as the tell-tale sign of a gust. The gust pushes the water, creating small ripples that turn the water darker than the surrounding area. It looks remarkably similar to the shadow of a cloud moving across the countryside. As the gust moves across the water, the sailor braces for the impact, ready to crab upwind to take advantage of the header or “start the main” which dumps wind out of the sails and keeps the boat on an even keel and on course.
Robert was close-hauled on a port tack, his favorite for tactical position and use of arms. Right hand on the tiller, left hand holding main and jib sheets, rear sitting on the windward cockpit coaming, and feet braced against the leeward seat. His body was angled port bow to starboard quarter, allowing him to quickly look windward and forward to watch for gusts, or glance to leeward and aft to check heel and water flow past the boat’s waist. Positioned like this always reminded of Ben Hur in the chariot race, controlling the power of his team of stallions with four sets of reins in his hands. Robert’s reins were the main and jib sheets and his chariot was an eighteen-foot long oak-built, fiberglass-cased, watertight Cape Cod Knockabout. It was the power of the wind and the waves that he would control.

While the boat had always been oak-built, Robert remembered when it was neither watertight nor fiberglass-cased. It lay, overturned on sawhorses, in a farmer’s field for five years, slowly rotting to death before his dad rescued it to give it new life. It became their project to awaken the lady in the hull, give her a new dress, and sail her again. Weekends, they drove from home to the storage shed to work on her. They dropped the centerboard, removed the bang rail, replaced rotted oak planks, and scraped off old paint. When she was naked and clean, they rolled her over, painted her with epoxy, and gave her a fiberglass coat. When they installed the new teak bang rail, it looked just like the pictures he’d seen in Wooden Boat magazine. The wooden plugs sealing the screw holes dripped dark resorcinol glue and stuck out, like Frankenstein’s neck knobs, waiting to be chiseled off and sanded smooth. Being covered in sawdust and standing ankle deep in teak, oak, and pine shavings made him feel like a boatwright. When he and his dad pulled off their face-masks and goggles and saw the red marks left by the gear and the dust coating their hair, they joked that they, not Helen of Troy, had the faces that launched a thousand ships.

The first gust rippled the water, turning it angry. Robert watched as it ran into his boat. The noise increased, the flapping got faster, the tiller pulled in his hand, and the boat heeled to starboard. Then the second gust hit and heeled her over, and stood Robert up in the cockpit. The leeward gunwale was buried, the boom was dragging in the water, and the rudder was having no effect. Robert arched his back as hard as he could in order to maintain his balance and remain in command of the boat. If he lost his balance, he would fall into the main sail, force it underwater, and bring the boat over on top of him. She would right herself due to the ballast in her bilges, but she’d be swamped and unsailable. If he “head up” or dumped the wind from the sails, the boat could snap upright so quickly he could be thrown overboard. Even worse, he could be knocked out and knocked overboard as the boom swung violently from starboard to port. The whipping action
could also snap her wooden mast like a matchstick. Either outcome would make for a long, wet, cold day.

“Going over” was not a new experience for Robert. He had sailed these waters since he was a child, first in a Sailfish, then a Sunfish, and finally a Hobie Cat. He knew how to avoid falling into the mainsail, by rolling backward over the gunwale and down the hull of the boat. He wore a life jacket to keep him above water and able to breath, in case he was knocked out. On reflection, the water temperature here was always invigorating, so he never imagined he’d be out for long. When Robert went overboard, each sailboat either continued tipping over into the water, which stopped their forward way, or snapped back upright, bow into the wind, drifting. Climbing onto the centerboard, pulling on the hull, and leaning back was all that was needed to get the boat upright and underway again. It was a repeatable process and one he repeated many times with great delight. However, Robert had never gone over in the Knockabout.

Robert loved how the forces at play and the consequences involved heighten his senses and forced him to focus completely on the task at hand. He arched backward more and eased off on the main sheet. The boat’s heel lessened. He let the tiller slide leeward in an attempt to head-up. Then, the third gust hit him, and he was on his ear and in danger of going over. He decided losing his mast was better than losing his boat. He let go all sails. Instantly, she snapped upright, her boom swinging from starboard to port, sweeping everything in its path overboard. But nothing had been in its path. Robert had ducked his head, hunkered down in the cockpit, and kept his hand firmly on the tiller. Her mast didn’t snap, but the controlled sound of wind rushing past the sails and water flowing past the hull was replaced by the jingling and rattling of rigging, thunderous slatting of the sails, and pounding of the hull as the wind and waves hammered the drifting vessel. Once, this chaos had unnerved Robert, but no longer. Robert put the tiller over, hauled on the main, set the jib, and took off on a beam reach. If close-hauled reminded him of Ben Hur, beam reach in a howl always remind him of the Nantucket sleigh ride that whalers experienced when they harpooned a whale. The whale would take off at breakneck speed towing the whaleboat behind it, and all they could do was hold on. Robert held on and grinned. He sang “What Do You Do With a Drunken Sailor” and thanked God for the wind, water, sky, sun, and a sturdy boat.

Like most squalls on the Sea of the Iroquois, this one was short lived as it swept across the lake at thirty-five miles per hour. Minutes after it started, the wind had dropped and shifted, the waves had moderated, and the sun was drying the boat. Robert altered course, adjusted the sails, and headed for home. He caught the buoy on his first approach. It was a source of pride
to him that he could judge the wind speed and the boat’s momentum so that when he turned upwind the boat lost all way at the buoy. He tied off to the buoy and shifted the dinghy to a stern cleat. He shipped the tiller, dropped and bagged the sails, and raised the centerboard. A quick pumpout of the bilges and a sponge cleaning of the deck completed the toilette. Last task was to ship the rudder and lay it on the floorboards.

Robert smiled again. That had been fun. He tipped the dinghy up onto its gunwale and heard the water running out, splashing onto the shale. When the sound stopped, he lowered the boat onto its keel. The sun would evaporate what was left inside. He looked out toward the mooring for one last looked at his girl. She was beautiful in the soft afternoon light with fine lines, symmetrical shape, high nose, and smooth hull; full of potential for the next sail. He picked up the sail bags and threw them over one shoulder, then balanced the oars on the other and started up the hill to the road. Twice, he looked back at his boat before he got there. Then, at the top, he looked back once more before setting his jaw and walking up to the house.

**BIO:** James Burd Brewster is author of the “Glad to do it!”, Pete & Petey, and Steve & Stevie picture book series which can be seen at: www.Gladtodoit.net. He is the Communications Chair for the Maryland Writers’ Association. His works have been published in *Pen In Hand*. He will present “Writing and Publishing Your First Book” at the MWA 2020 Brain to Book conference.

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**The Pond**

*by Jayce Johnson*

153 Million years ago, Portugal, a small flowing creek flows through the muddy, sandy soil. Three relatively small bipedal dinosaurs walked towards the stream to drink.

These dinosaurs are around five feet long and around half the height of the average human. They all had five fingers with only three of the five fingers having claws. These dinosaurs had a forward pointing oval shaped head with a small black beak. Only two of these dinosaurs have Peruvian brown skin with straight vertical peach colored stripes, these were females. The male was royal blue
with an electric indigo mask pattern around its dark brown eyes. The male also had jagged vertical light green colored stripes similar to the females’ stripes, as well as some proto-feathers that run from his head down to his neck. The feathers have the same striping has the skin below. These small herbivores are Eousdryosaurus nanohallucis. The Eoudryosaurus continue drinking from the small stream.

One of the female dinosaurs looks around at her surroundings after drinking. The dinosaurs are in a small oasis with a few primitive trees scattered around. There are patches of ferns around the creek which leads to a small pond. Eousdryosaurus are almost done drinking when the ground suddenly starts to shake. The small dinosaurs start looking around in a panic and see a bunch of larger dinosaurs headed toward the pond. Eousdryosaurus run over to the larger dinos almost instinctively. When they get there they come across a herd of animals that had a similar appearance to that of the famous stegosaurus, but with quite a few differences.

These larger dinosaurs ranged from 18 to 20 feet long as opposed to their 26 to 30 foot long cousins. But like their cousins they had two rows of plates, though much shorter, that run along their back and once their plates stopped at their hips switching to large sharp thagomizers that run to the end of its tail. These animals also had considerably long necks for a stegosaurus. Only the males possess long sharp thagomizers on their shoulders. The females are forest green with small black dots all along the animal’s body from the upper neck to the tip of the tail. The females also had chartreuse plates with a large oval-shaped auburn spot in the middle of each plate. The male stegosaurs have a scarlet head and neck with the rest of the body being golden brown. The plates of the male are black with a yellow ring around a dark blue circle. These stegosaurs are known as Miragaia longicollum.

The small herd of Miragaia ignored the smaller Eousdryosaurus running towards them. Miragaia seemed more focused on getting towards the small pond. The herd slowed down when they got to the small body of water. The herd was cautious when drinking from the watering hole. While the Miragaia kept drinking the three Eousdryosaurus fed on plants that were near to herd. As the herbivores ate and drank and time passed and it soon became dusk. The Miragaia started to lay down in a group and the Eousdryosaurus trio did the same as well. But while all the herbivores dozed off to sleep a large shadow was lurking behind a tree just crouched down seemingly waiting for nightfall. Once night came a large shadowy figure swam from one side of the pond to the other. The splashing woke up a young Miragaia. This Miragaia had shorter thagomizers than the adults, due to it not being full grown yet. Out of curiosity the Miragaia wandered toward the pond. Once it got there it stopped and looked around. The young one then turned its
back to the water. Suddenly a large three horned dinosaur with razor sharp teeth sprung from beneath the water. The sound of the splash woke up all the sleeping herbivores, causing the Eoudryosaurus trio to run out of sight. The Miragaia, instead of fleeing, decided to put up defensive positions by facing their bodies to the side with their head and tail pointed towards the sound. All of the Miragaia young hid behind the adults for protection… except for one. The young Miragaia that looked at water earlier was now being pursued by the three horned theropod. The young one was almost there but then there was a sudden pain in the young Miragaia’s tail. The Miragaia started going backwards despite not moving its legs. In a panic the young one turned around to see its attacker fully lit by the light of the moon. The creature was black with a white underbelly. The creature had a row of small rounded spiked shape osteoderms running from its head all the way to its tail. There are two small red crests on its head, one above each eye. On the tip of its snout was a large blade shaped horn that was prussian blue at the base with red above that and an amber tip. The creature’s eyes seemed to glow yellow in the moonlit darkness. In panic the young Miragaia cried for help. The creature looked up and let go of the young Miragaia. The creature was then suddenly hit in the face with the tail of a fully grown Miragaia, causing blood to fly from its lower jaw. The creature looked back at the younger Miragaia has hidden behind the larger adult female Miragaia. The female Miragaia growled aggressively at the attacker. The two dinosaurs size each other up but the stegosaur was bigger. Upon releasing this the horned carnivore fled into a scattering of trees.

Finally dawn breaks and the herd of Miragaia move away from the oasis into the open expanse. Once they all leave the trio of Eoudryosaurus from night before come from out of the bushes. They head towards the water and the small dinosaurs begin to drink. One of the small dinosaurs notices something moving through the water. Suddenly a large crocodile leaps from the water about to attack the Eoudryosaurus, until it the crocodile got dragged back underneath. The Eoudryosaurus leave the area and then silence. Slowly the water starts to turn red with blood. Bubbles form on the surface of the pond. The crocodile slowly floats to surface. A pair of large scarred black jaws bites into the neck of the once deadly croc. The large black dinosaur from the night before has the crocodile in its jaws. This animal is known as Ceratosaurus dentisulcatus. The Ceratosaurus drops the crocodile, also known as Goniopholis baryglyphaeus, and the ceratosaurus then proceeds to feeds upon it.

**BIO: Jayce Johnson** is fascinated by paleontology and prehistoric animals. A member of MWA, she enjoys fishing, drawing, and painting.
Laboriously climbing the narrow, unlit stairs, the old woman leans on the mahogany railing, worn by generations of family curious about attic treasures and sneaking up to hide their own secrets. At every step she drags her lame right leg up to meet her strong left one. It takes twice as long as it used to. Limping through the narrow door, she squints at the sudden sunlight that glares even through the dust-covered panes. She lifts her long white cotton skirt above her knees, mindful of the lace trim that matches the bodice. Heaving herself over the side of the splendid dinghy, she climbs onto the seat, panting a little with the unaccustomed effort. She caresses the elegant curve of the bow and her vision blurs as she remembers sanding the wood to silky smoothness, then lacquering the surface with coat after coat of patient love.

They’d said she couldn’t build a craft like this -- she a woman without the practical skills to bend and shape, measure and join.

She gently rocks the boat from side to side, imagining the sparkling streams and vast rivers they will never travel together. She wants to sing out, to give voice to the melody of the birds and the rustle of the leaves, but she finds she lost her voice in the fever of daily life. She and her craft are mute and land-bound, caught in this attic tower of aspirations unachieved and openings too narrow to pass through.

They were wrong! She was able to do the work. If only she’d planned how to bring it to the light of day.

She fingers the coarse, unbleached wool of the cardigan sweater folded neatly in the bow of the little boat, then she pensively picks it up and worms her arms through the sleeves, fastening only the top button.

The smooth river rocks are there, too, four for each ample pocket. One by one she places them on the seat beside her, then pivots and swings her
legs over the side of the dingy, easing herself back to the floor. She stands proudly erect as she drops the stones into her pockets, ignoring how the knit fabric sags with their weight. Looking resolutely ahead, she slowly takes a step, then another toward the tall, wavy-paned window at the street side of the attic. Now the golden rays of sunset reflect on its dusty surface in sand-like grains. Perfect! She smiles.

“Mother, where are you?” Cynthia’s voice rises and breaks as she crashes up the stairs two at a time and pushes open the door. “What on earth are you doing up here in your nightgown?”

“I am ending my literary career as it deserves,” the old woman pronounces. “Virginia was the only one to go out in style, walking into the river. Those other women gassed or hanged themselves or took pills. I have no stomach for that sort of thing.”

She pauses.

“However, I suppose now that you are here, I shall have to come down for dinner.”

She smiles, the light dancing in her eyes.

“Help me with these rocks, will you dear?”

**BIO: Jane Newhagen** grew up in Denver; graduated from Brown University; lived up and down the east coast of the U.S., in Paris, France, and for nearly two decades in Key West, Florida. Her historical novels, *Sand Dollar, Pieces of Eight*, and *Chambered Nautilus* are tales of old Key West. She now lives in Silver Spring, MD. and is a member of the Montgomery County MWA chapter.

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**Such a Dog**

*by Lona Queen*

The urn, unexpectedly heavy, slipped from my fingers and shattered on the brick hearth. Out of the corner of my eye, something gold rolled away. A dog tag maybe. I searched under the old velvet settee, but didn't find anything. There was nothing to do but pick up the larger pieces of broken blue paw-printed crockery, and drag the vacuum out of the closet.

I paused over the chunk that read Benny, the dates strangely left blank. I had planned to put the urn in Tia Rita's casket. Otherwise, how else to dispose of it? I didn't want to keep ashes from some dog I'd never known, no matter how beloved by her.
I sighed.
The urn had always occupied the center of Tia Rita's mantle. Every Dia de los Muertos she placed a dish of dog biscuits beside it. Perhaps, though, she would forgive my clumsiness. Concerned for her loneliness, I once suggested going to the animal shelter, hoping she would choose another dog. She showed no interest.

“No,” she had replied, “one was enough.” She went on to say that Benny growled and farted a lot, got out and ran around, made a mess of everything, and never listened to her or did anything she asked. Not a good boy at all. I asked her why then, when she passed the mantle, she would reach out, pat the lid, and murmur, “good boy”? She replied, “well, he's good now, isn't he?”

It was two weeks later, as we were readying for the estate sale, that I found the gold wedding band. It tipped over into the back furniture pad when we lifted the settee. Inside the band was inscribed, “To My Beloved Husband Ben.”

Tia Rita had been married? I crossed to the table where I was stacking important-looking papers to take with me. I flipped through them and found a marriage license. His name was Alfred Benjamin Grant.

It wasn't until a few days later, as I was getting ready for bed, that I remembered that I'd once asked Tia Rita if she had ever been in love or thought to marry. I was a teen then, seventeen if I recall correctly, and felt I had found the guy for me. I hadn't, but that's another story.

Tia Rita told me yes, when she was about my age, and he not much older. But the love of her life turned out to be a ladies' man, and one day ran off with some—she actually used the b-word, which shocked me. Tia Rita was such a polite and proper old lady. It was the only time I ever heard her use such language. She told me it was better this way, anyway. He turned out to be such a dog.

“If anyone knew what happened to him,” she added, “they weren't talking.”

I'll never know the truth about Benny, but I suspect he got the urn he earned.

**BIO:** Lona Queen won the Carroll County Chapter’s 2019 Flash Fiction contest with her story, “Such A Dog.” Lona is a visual artist and writer. For 23 years, she and her husband co-produced the *Winding Road Motorcycle Times*, a regional motorcycle magazine.
ART

Art by Suzi Galletti

Through her acrylic on canvas paintings, self-taught artist, Registered Architect, and Baltimore MWA Chapter member Suzi Galletti aims to evoke spiritually uplifting common threads that transcend personal perspectives. Exploring the interplay between color, balance, and proportion, her large format, award-winning, non-representational paintings fuse vibrant emotional depth with the structured lyricism of music, the flow and spontaneity of nature, and the spatial relationships of architecture.

Ms. Galletti's work is in private and institutional collections and she has exhibited her work for over 20 years in Maryland and Texas. Suzi has a Bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Duke University, a Masters in Architecture from the University of Texas at Austin, and a Certificate in Medical Qigong from AOMA College of Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine at Bastyr University. She was formerly Senior Architect for the Johns Hopkins Health System and Capital Planner for Johns Hopkins University, and presented the workshop, “Humor in Writing” at the 2019 MWA Annual Conference. Her work can be found at www.suzigalletti.com, where you can email her directly to inquire about original paintings, commissions, and prints.

Front Cover: Lingering Echo: accepted at Maryland Federation of Art exhibit
Back Cover, Top: Inspiration:
Back Cover, Bottom: Done with February
DRAMA

A Cure for Duane’s Syndrome

by Gandharva raja

(The mahogany desk sits in the middle of the den. An elegant middle-aged man with an impish twinkle in his eyes, Dr. Downie is seated in a vinyl executive chair behind the desk, a stethoscope around his neck. Duane, an inner city teenager wearing a NBA team basketball jersey, is seated in a chair to the left of the desk. He is seen twiddling a pencil with his fingers. On the opposite side of the desk, Betty Horton, a young nurse in uniform is seated. Her nametag reads:

Betty Horton RN
New Dawn Rehab Center

Nurse Betty does not join the conversation except with gestures of approval and frank admiration for what Dr. Downie says or how Duane reacts.)

Dr. Downie: Nurse Betty tells me you have given up on life. You make excuses to go the health clinic so you can skip class. One day it is sore throat, next day a bad headache. True? You did not protest so I guess it is so. (Dr. Downie studies the medical chart before him and from time to time looks at the young boy searching for a clue. He gets none. After a long pause, he continues.)

Well, let’s see what I can do for you. I can give you pills or…

(Dr. Downie waits for Duane to say something. Duane remains with his head bent and continues to roll the pen in his hand)

Dr. Downie: Have you ever written a poem, Duane? With that pen in your hand… (Duane shakes his head to signal no.) Have you tried to? Perhaps a line or two?
Duane: No. Never even thought of writing one.

Dr. Downie: No matter. I don’t think the Wright brothers knew how to fly when they were sixteen, much less fifteen. Ever heard of the Wright brothers? *(Betty nods for Duane)*

Duane: *(Annoyed)* I go to school, man! *(Pause) Well not ... every day.*

Dr. Downie: I won’t say I never cut school. Do you know how to dance, Duane?

Duane: Duh…

Dr. Downie: Of course you know how to dance. Well, tap those words up down and swirl them around. Left forward, right back, bend and back, turn her around! There you have a poem.

*(Nurse Betty places her right hand on her cheek and squints her eyes.)*

Duane: I dance, but it ain’t poetry.

Dr. Downie: I wish I had spring in my steps myself.

*(Nurse Betty does a quick three steps and sits down without speaking. Dr. Downie is amused.)*

Dr. Downie: Well you do play basketball. I have heard that. Are you good at dribbling the ball and throwing it in the hoop three out of four? Slam dunk?

Duane: *(Nods his head to signify yes, but is puzzled)* So what? Dr. Downie: You do! That’s a start. Well then you can write ...poetry.

Duane: *(In mock disbelief)* I do?

Dr. Downie: Yes. Dribble those words up and down the page – then when you are ready – throw the three-pointer. Robert Frost threw great three-pointers. He made the commissioner of NPA proud!

Duane: What’s NPA?

Dr. Downie: National Poetry Association. It is like the NBA but pays less,
like the NRA but with less firepower. (*Pause*) But it lights up the heart like a slam dunk.

**Duane:** You are cool, man. I think I know what you are shooting at.

**Dr. Downie:** Word volleys! Boy when those dribble in one after the other, watch the fireworks – like the 4th of July. They light up the whole sky – lights up your whole life! Am I boring you Duane?

(*Duane rises and moves about the room pretending he is dribbling a basketball.*)

**Dr. Downie:** (*Jumps up from his chair*) That’s it. You got it. It is like Nat King Cole, Michael Jordan and PT Barnum, all in one act.

(*Duane freezes in the act of shooting a three pointer.*)

**Duane:** (*Recites as he pretends to dribble a basketball*)
Betcha I can do it -
Ne’er ever doubt it.
Lotsa fun it will bring
A circus with two rings.

**Dr. Downie:** I ne'er ever had a doubt. Did you Nurse Betty?

(*Duane pretends to throw a basketball to Nurse Betty, who pretends to catch it. Duane resumes his imaginary dribble then freezes in the act of scoring a three-pointer.*)

**Duane:**
Down at the finish line,
Babe, throw me a rhyme.
Babe, we got ‘em beat
– Ay I can count my feet.

(*In unison all three throw their imaginary basketballs at the imagined hoop and act as though each have found their mark. Nurse Betty walks up to Duane and they exchange a high five. Dr. Downie bends down to tie his shoelaces tighter. He places his feet on the table. He points to his basketball sneakers with a wink towards Nurse Betty.*)
**BIO: Gandharva raja** is the pen name of Dr. Tapendu K. Basu. He is a member of the Academy of American Poets, Maryland Historical Society, Maryland Writers' Association and Mystery Writers of America. He is the editor of *Pen In Hand*, MWA's biannual literary magazine. His publications include *Hoofbeats, A Song of You: A Poetic History of the United States; August 29: How Kabir H. Jain Became a Deity; Epic Mahabharata: A Twenty-first Century Retelling;* and *The Last Day of Ramadan*. His historical/romance parallel novel *I, Kanishka* awaits publication. In 2017, *The Nisha Trilogy* was produced as a Bengali movie, *Tadanto* in Tollywood, Kolkata. *Satiric Verses: The American Century* was published in 2019.
“Inspiration” by Suzi Galletti

“Done With Winter” by Suzi Galletti