

# Creative Voices

Creative works by members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute  
at the University of Cincinnati **2015-2016**



## Cover Art

# City Reflections at the Banks

*Photograph by John Spain*

OLLI has opened John Spain's eyes in many ways, not only in photography: classes in literature, history, and psychology have broadened his horizons in wonderful ways.

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Each year, OLLI at UC invites members and volunteers to contribute their creative work in the form of short fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and visual art to be featured in *Creative Voices*.

### Editor

Cate O'Hara

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Judy Stewart

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The selection committee for *Creative Voices* wishes to thank everyone who submitted their creative endeavors and made the process of selection so delightful and so difficult.

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*This publication is dedicated to the memory of Sally Peterson (1938–2015), Creative Voices Selection Committee Chair, 2012–15.*

## The Table

By Judith Lococo

Another long Memorial Day weekend was fast approaching, and the feeling of dread was already beginning to settle on my shoulders. Oh, how I hated weekends—the two-day weekends were bad; a three-day holiday weekend was sheer torture. I used to look forward to them, but since my marriage fell apart, weekend minutes seemed to tick by at an excruciatingly slow pace. Weekdays flew by quickly with a job I enjoyed and a regular school routine for the girls.

We lived in a one-bedroom apartment on the second floor of a two-family house on a very busy intersection. Every other weekend, the girls' dad would pick them up after school on Friday, and I would be left alone—again. With a smile on my face, I wished them a fun weekend, waved goodbye, and plopped down in a chair on the large front porch. I watched the traffic whiz by, sure that every car held passengers who were on their way to picnics and parties, while my weekend companion would be the all-too-familiar depression. After thirteen years of marriage, I really didn't know how to be alone, what to do alone, how to enjoy being alone.

That particular weekend, the weather forecast seemed to tease me too—sunny with a high of 75 all weekend long—that somehow made it worse. When I couldn't bear staring at the cars any longer, with a deep sigh, I got up, went inside, and changed into the nightgown I was prepared to stay in all weekend. As I looked around my tiny living space, my eyes settled on the old library table I had found in my grandparents' garage when their house was about to be sold.

"What an ugly table!" I thought. It was black and crazed with age, giving it what is called an "alligator finish." It had loose, wobbly legs and a water-stained top where plants had lived and died for many years. "I wonder why I'm even keeping that damn table," I thought. A second thought immediately popped into my head. "Somehow it seems to fit quite comfortably in my life right now." Then a strange thing happened. I began to wonder if anything could be done with the table to at least make it look less ugly.

I cleared the table of knickknacks, books, and plants and dragged it out onto the front porch before I could change my mind. "Now what?" I wondered. Almost as if in a daze, I went inside, changed out of my nightgown, and headed to the local hardware store. I explained the table to the man behind the counter and told him I just wanted to make it look a little better. He took pity on me (that happened a lot back then) and gathered all the supplies I would need to refinish it. He explained each step I needed to take to bring the table back to life. I brushed off the guilt I felt at spending money we really didn't have, bought the supplies, and headed home.

"Well, I guess I'm refinishing the library table this weekend," excitement and fear bubbling up in me. I'd never done anything like this in my life.

Pouring paint stripper on the crazed table top sealed its fate. "Now I have to do something with it," I thought as I stood there watching the gel-like stripper begin its magic. The surface bubbled while the color of the stripping gel went from clear to black. The instructions said to wait twenty minutes before scrapping the surface. Those twenty minutes couldn't come soon enough for me. With one of my brand-new scrapers, I anxiously began sliding it across the tabletop. I watched with amazement as the goo accumulated on the scraper and exposed warm brown walnut wood underneath. The more I poured, waited, and scraped, the more excited I became.

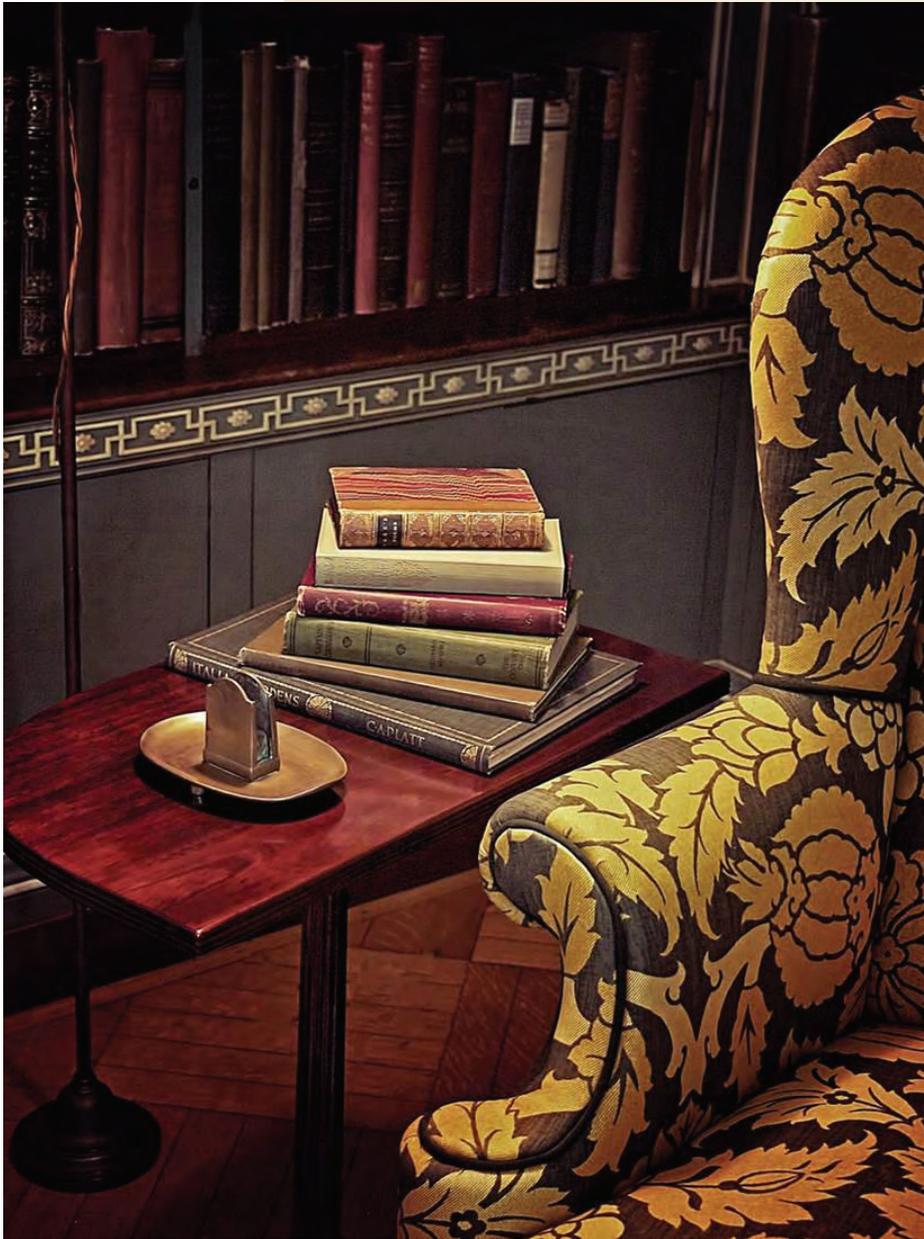
The trumpet-shaped legs with fluted columns were especially difficult to strip. All day Saturday, I went through boxes of Q-tips and toothpicks digging out grime and dirt that had been there since the early nineteenth century. Meal-times came and went, and I forgot to eat. I just drank water and scraped away under the porch light long into the night. I finally fell into bed at about 3 a.m., exhausted but happy from the day's work.

When I awoke Sunday morning, I decided to skip going to church. By this time, it felt like I was on some kind of mission that couldn't be postponed. I could hardly wait to go outside to see what the fruits of my labor from the day before looked like in the daylight. "Oh, my God. What a mess!" I said out loud when I saw the table. Yes, it was stripped of the old finish, but it looked ragged and spotty at best, old finish still clinging as if it didn't want to let go. The wood had a lovely brown color to it, but could I ever make it look beautiful?

So I scraped some more and then began sanding and sanding. Much like the day before, the day slipped past me without regard to food, traffic noise, or imposing thoughts. I just kept working and sanding, sanding and working. After draping an old sheet over the table to protect it from the evening's dew, I fell exhausted into bed very late that night but with a budding sense of accomplishment—a feeling I hadn't had in a very long time.

Memorial Day dawned—a day bright with sunshine and cool breezes—a perfect kind of day. I removed the damp sheet and underneath saw a wonderfully warm brown surface just waiting for a light stain and finishing touches. "Could I get this all done today?" I asked myself. I got to work, and by noon I was staring at the most beautiful library table I had ever seen!

After tightening the legs, I moved the table back into the



## A Quiet Corner

*Photograph by David Kushner*

David Kushner, a retired UC faculty member, believes that photography makes the world spin just a little bit slower.

apartment just before the girls arrived home from their visit with their dad. Usually they came home with stories of movies they had seen, nice restaurants where they had eaten, and places they had visited. But today they noticed the table right away and asked me, “Who did that, Mom? It’s beautiful!”

At that instant, it dawned on me that if I could take a dusty, dirty, ugly table and turn it into a beautiful piece of furniture that I could proudly display in my home, why couldn’t I do that with myself? Could I turn a sad, scared, defeated, and depressed woman into someone who could face

life with a renewed spirit, a sense of ownership, and pride? It would be difficult; it would be challenging; but if I began to work hard and stuck to it through each step, through the process, maybe I, too, could be restored. I had done that with the table; why not me?

And so it began.

The OLLI class Guided Autobiography tapped into an area of Judy Lococo’s brain she didn’t know she even had!

## Armageddon

By Ella Cather-Davis

It's pretty to think of it that way  
Blazing scarlet, fiery orange  
Drifting alighting featherly  
The demise of the Sun

The air has wept onto all of us  
The second before the climax  
Before our foretold extinction  
The light too painful to bear

There it was in the inky Ether  
One penny polished brighter  
than the rest of them  
insatiable in its incineration

Icarus, now darkness, nada

A member of Greater Cincinnati Writer's League and Ohio Poetry Association, Ella Cather-Davis writes poetry, essays, and sometimes children's stories to amuse her grandchildren.



## Ravens Discussing Geometry

Watercolor by Sam Hollingsworth

If we acknowledge that ravens can communicate with each other in a language we don't understand, how can we be sure they are not "Ravens Discussing Geometry"?



## Biddeford Fog

Photograph by Mary McDonough Mahler

Molly McDonough Mahler has been interested in photography for several years and appreciates the inspiration and fresh ideas she's been exposed to through fellow OLLI students.

# Sisters

By Eleanor Bowman

When we were young and fresh,  
our Mother favored one,  
which sister Jane knew nothing of  
because her fate was sealed and  
done.

It mattered not on Christmas Eve  
or birthday party times,  
her gifts were always bigger then,  
no reason nor no rhyme.

I could not understand my lot.  
What crimes did I commit?  
My only certainty was that  
Somehow I did not fit.

Oh, the way we fought as children  
Pulling hair, grabbing toys.  
Favored status did not matter,  
only served to kill our joy.

The situation never changed  
from childhood to adult.  
A second generation got  
the cursing of this fault.

I pushed my anger toward  
success—  
leaving home, no look back.  
My sister lingered in her spot,  
got frozen in her tracks.

Oh, the ways our fighting  
simmered,  
Our fates still simmered on.  
Till the day she finally told us  
her days might not be long.

My heart filled sharp with pangs  
of guilt.  
Who cared about our fights?  
It mattered not her favored state.  
What mattered was insight.

Oh, the fun we nearly buried.  
The simple good times now.  
We're not cozy but we're closer—  
True sisters take their bow!

Eleanor Bowman is writing a series of poems telling about growing up in Africa.



## Watch Out

Photograph by Richard Lingo

Rick Lingo's "photographic eye" has been sharpened through a series of OLLI seminars.

## It Seemed Like a Good Idea

By Bob Herring

**H**e looked at us.  
He looked at our boat.  
He turned to us and said, “Turn back. You’ll never make it. You’ll die.”

It was the most sobering moment of this great adventure. It had seemed like a good idea at the time. That seemed to be our mantra lately. All these things seemed like they were good ideas at the time.

We were now in over our heads—or, to listen to Captain Jack, would very soon literally be in over our heads. We had stopped in Evansville, a small Indiana town on the Ohio River, looking for gas, supplies, and advice. We had started in Cincinnati and were headed to New Orleans, four guys on an adventure in a pontoon boat not much bigger than a hot tub, the boat Brad had built in his backyard over the last six months.

Clearly we were punching above our weight. With no experience navigating the river, living 24/7 in a boat that bobbed like a cork in a bathtub propelled by the underpowered motor Brad had installed, we were a disaster waiting to happen—so Captain Jack believed. And he was quite clear about that: “Turn back. You’ll never make it. You’ll die. When you hit the Mississippi, you’ll be in a current that your piss-ass motor can’t handle. You’ll face 42 barges lashed together coming at you—six across, seven deep. They will create such a wake that you’ll be sucked into the undertow. You’ll have no chance. You’ll drown before you get to Memphis.”

From Evansville to Paducah no one spoke. The four of us were lost in thought considering what Captain Jack (ass) had said. Yes, we were inexperienced, but we weren’t stupid. Or at least we didn’t think we were. Well, according to Captain Jack, the experienced river man, a lot could go wrong, and we had set ourselves up for it all to happen once we hit the Mississippi River.

The deal was: any of the four of us could leave the boat at any time, any place. Once off the boat, you had to find your own way back to Cincinnati. The others would continue on, with New Orleans as the goal. So from Evansville to Paducah we were lost in thought, considering the challenges, the dangers, the chances for success that laid ahead of us around each bend in the river.

At Paducah we stopped for gas, supplies, and advice—a second opinion from someone, anyone

familiar with the Mississippi, on what our chances would be of reaching the Big Easy. The guy coming off the cruiser at the dock seemed like he might know something.

Yes, he had a moment before heading into town. Yes, he was familiar with the Mississippi. We told him we were heading for New Orleans in the boat just behind us. He looked at us; he looked at our boat and started asking questions.

“Do you have the Army Corps of Engineers maps of the river?”—essential to know where the shipping channel is to avoid debris below the water line. Yes, we have the maps.

“Are you drinking or doing drugs?” No.

“Are you running at night? The locals in the rural areas will use your running lights as targets when they practice shooting their rifles.” No, we are not running at night.

“Do you have a gun or a hatchet?” No gun; we do have a hatchet.

He stood there and looked at our boat, looked at us, considered what we said, and looked at the boat and looked at us again.

“If you stay in the shipping channel and hug the shoreline well out of the way of the barges, if you stay clean and sober, and if you don’t run at night, you might make it to New Orleans. If you stop in Helena or Cairo, put your hatchet on the railing where anyone approaching the boat can see it. If they get close, pick up the hatchet and tell them, in no uncertain terms, that anyone who gets on your boat will lose their hand. If you avoid Cairo or Helena, your chances of finishing the trip improve.”

Well, that was food for thought. So over a late lunch in a greasy spoon on Paducah’s waterfront, we considered the advice of the experienced river men, considered the option of turning back, thought long and hard about the prospect of drowning, and decided to press on. We’d reach the Mississippi River and see what awaited us. This was an adventure that still sort of sounded like a good idea.

After going from Cincinnati to New Orleans in a pontoon boat, walking through all of Cincinnati’s 52 neighborhoods in nine long walks, and hiking to the top of Kilimanjaro, Bob Herring is planning his next adventure.



## Loire Flowers

*Photograph by Mary McDonough Mahler*

Molly McDonough Mahler has been interested in photography for several years and appreciates the inspiration and fresh ideas she's been exposed to through fellow OLLI students.

## First Communion Dress

*Photograph by Virginia Cox*

It is a pleasure for Virginia Cox to share her work in *Creative Voices* with painters, writers, and other photographers who are members of the OLLI family.



## A Single Tear

*By Jayne Kuhlman*

A single tear escaped,  
Sliding down my left cheek,  
Finding its way down my throat  
To disappear into clothing.

I sit in colored sunlight  
Front pew.  
Ancient Anglican architects  
Arranged for sunlit spaces  
Centuries before.

I rest.  
Rest some more.  
Admire subtle Yuletide trim.  
Eucharistic hosts adorn the tree.  
Who knew?

I see myself as from above  
Like god might,  
Here in god's house.  
No longer the young student,  
The young activist,  
The young mother.

Gray and achy,  
I sit in the sun  
In the church  
Taking my place in time.

No longer anything  
But the one I am  
Right now  
In the sun  
In the pew.

Stained glass filters sun.  
Organ music, as if on cue.

Jayne Kuhlman lived this nice  
moment in Nice, France, late 2015.

## The Red Umbrella

By Rick Stein

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her a block ahead and across the busy street. Shocked and frozen in a swirl of confusing thoughts and emotions since his wife had left two weeks ago. There had been no goodbye, only a handwritten note that said, "I am leaving. I won't be back. Don't try to find me."

She walked with curt, brisk steps up Park Avenue. The sidewalks were crowded with a commuter rush of people exiting Manhattan for home. He followed her. At first he only matched her pace while he watched and studied her. Looking for some reason she felt she had to go that way. Not knowing why gnawed at him and left him this wounded, empty creature. Unaccompanied, her stride steady and purposeful, said this was no leisurely stroll. He increased his stride without breaking into a trot, careful not to draw attention to himself. He didn't want her to turn around and catch a glimpse of a man desperate to close the distance between them.

The streets and sidewalks were soaked. Clouds that had descended upon the city obscured the tops of tall buildings. The Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building, half eaten by gray sky so dense and low the sun disappeared. With the bleakness that enveloped him, the darkness that surrounded him, he was terrified that he had lost her again. It began to rain hard. Then she raised a red umbrella. It was a beacon to follow up the crowded sidewalk as she glided through the gloomy soup that surrounded him. A wave of dark coats closed around and swallowed her. The red shape ahead guided him as he fought against the current of the host of dull, faceless people trying to get home.

He wiped the rain off his face, out of his eyes, and saw the red umbrella turn left at 32nd Street. With no reason to fear she would see him now, he ran to catch up. Almost completely dark, the city lights came awake as she turned right onto Madison Avenue. Drenched, he sucked heavy, moist breaths but managed to sprint to the corner, only to glimpse the red umbrella the moment before it turned into a building halfway up the street. A silent scream of failure filled his head with the dread that he would lose her. He forced himself to follow, his feet now leaden as he looked in doorways till he found the one she had entered, a stationery store. Sitting open on the floor inside was a dripping red umbrella. A saleswoman handed him a gray card that said, "Don't follow me."

She was gone.

Rick Stein is a poet, writer, artist, and general Renaissance monkey who is always trying his best to do good work and have a few laughs.

## City Streets

By Pamela D. Hirte

At intermission, people buy drinks  
they barely finish.  
Bells melodiously ring; patrons  
reclaim seats.  
After the last act, hearty applause  
cues a standing ovation.  
As they depart, taxis screech,  
revelers shout, cars honk.  
Cultures clash as citizens of the  
city mingle.

Outside the theater, panhandlers  
confront people.  
Some dig a dollar out; others look  
down and keep walking.  
A limousine pulls up and the  
privileged pile inside;  
the haunting eyes of the homeless  
are as noisy as coins in a cup.  
The dark city streets are a dimmed  
stage.

Theatergoers hurriedly walk to  
cars along downtown streets;  
homemade cardboard signs  
scribble messages for help.  
Along the way, people exchange  
glances with the homeless.  
Shopping carts jammed with  
clothes and plastic bags.  
Once inside their cars, the  
theatergoers feel comfortable.

The homeless walk the theater  
district like a final curtain call.  
The human drama unfolding on  
the streets is unending:  
emotions stir as night closes in.  
Are the theater people so unlike  
the street people?  
Do they share the same demons?

Pamela Hirte appreciates the  
opportunity to share her work with  
fellow OLLI students.

## The Ring

By Sue Wilke

I have been having difficulty putting on my rings, especially the gold signet ring I wear on the middle finger of my left hand. The arthritic swelling of the joints means I have to maneuver it over my finger's increasingly crooked shape. I worry about the day when I can no longer wear the ring, which I have slipped on every morning since Sandee died in September 1993 after a two-year struggle with cancer.

The ring and I share a story.

Shortly before Sandee died, she invited a few friends over one by one and asked if there was anything of hers we wanted. "Something to remember me by," she said quietly. She was making a list of items for her brother to parcel out after she was gone. I picked a metal sculpture she had welded of a winged woman on a pedestal and a muted, modernistic watercolor. In their own ways, each represented the best of her.

"Is that all you want?" she asked.

"It's enough. I'm good," I said as if such tokens could ever be enough. It was hard just being there, knowing that she didn't have much longer. She insisted I take her gold ring. She took it off, placing it in the palm of my hand and wrapping my fingers around it. The ring has her initials engraved on the top in the inverted fashion of signet rings. I opened my fingers and stared at the ring, thinking back to the way I had learned its story.

In 1992, Sandee was in the midst of another round of chemo, totally bald and generally feeling yucky. A visiting professor at Miami University who was also a Native American Shaman had offered to conduct a ceremonial spiritual rite for women based on the calling of the Four Directions. The event would be held on a farm in St. Leon, Indiana, and involve an overnight stay. When I told Sandee about my plan to attend, she exclaimed, "How can I sign up? We can go together."

Sandee had always been interested in native spiritual traditions and the wisdom of the crone. I doubted spending a night outdoors was a great idea given her health. But it was May, and she thought it would be warm enough. She was excited about the prospect, but promised she wouldn't go if she didn't feel up to it. I didn't believe her for a minute. She was physically worn out by chemo, but her spirit was strong. Two other friends came along to support Sandee and learn from the Shaman practitioner.

On the appointed Saturday, we packed our sleeping bags, blankets, flashlights, bug spray, and lawn chairs and headed for St. Leon. Women began to arrive and claim their spots on a freshly mowed field. The field was open and flat,

and the four of us found good spaces to set up chairs and lay out our sleeping bags. Dinner would be a cookout.

The Shaman arrived while we were in the midst of our meal. She was a petite white woman with long, dark hair pulled back with a simple hair comb. Although graying at the temples, she was younger than I expected. She wore a black dress with a rose-colored shawl over her shoulders. A large turquoise cross on a chain hung across her chest like a pectoral cross, and she had on scuffed brown leather boots. She did not look like the image of any Shaman my brain would have conjured up.

She got down to business, saying she needed to walk the land and bless the space. She soon returned and told the gathering that the field was not right for her ceremony. She went instead into nearby woods, returning with Lucy, the farm's owner, in tow saying she had found the perfect spot. The group of about twenty women gathered up our belongings and trudged into the woods. The sun was beginning to set, and the night was getting blacker and cooler.

The Shaman's perfect spot was in a cluster of sycamore and locust trees where the land sloped downward. The forest floor was covered with pine needles, rocks, and twigs. Here and there, spots of green peeked through the winter's decay. Branches crackled underfoot as we made our way through the underbrush. We came to a space where a natural circular path already existed, worn by other explorers' feet. Lucy instructed us to set up our bags and chairs to form the circle of women the Shaman wanted.

A few women gathered branches and old logs while others dug a fire pit they circled with rocks to build a huge fire to keep us warm. With the yellow-orange fire blazing in the dark night, the Shaman began to tell the story of the Four Directions, her remarkably loud voice for such a small woman penetrating the evening quiet. We learned that while Native American traditions may vary somewhat in the terms they use to describe the meaning of the Four Directions, the sources of the meaning are the same.

"A big part of what is happening when we call the directions is bringing parts of ourselves together into a spiritual focus," the Shaman reminded us. "We are a part of nature, a part of the earth to which we eventually return. We are a part of the heavens through our angelic and spiritual selves. Calling the directions focuses our intent and sacredness and creates a sacred space. We must take time to make our world a sacred place."

She asked us to stand around the circle of life we had created to give thanks to each direction. She told us first to face east where the sun rises and whose light brings us wis-

dom. With a bowing motion, “Speak,” she said, “your thanks for the warmth of the sun and the coming new day, and pray for the power of knowledge.” Then we turned to face south, the spirit of earth and the power of life, to give thanks for the gift of life on this moist earth. She asked us to pray for the power to grow and peace in the world. “Next, face west, the spirit of water, and give thanks for the water of life, praying for purity, strength, and self-understanding.” Finally, we all faced north, the spirit of wind, to give thanks for the great white cleansing wind and pray for the wisdom of experience.

After these prayers, the Shaman lit a bundle of sage, smudged herself, and passed it around the circle, asking each woman to follow her example before smudging the woman next to her. It was powerful standing among the tall trees, the circle of women visible in the glow of the crackling fire, the night punctuated by the thump, thump of several women drumming.

Before the Shaman spoke, I had found what I thought was a good spot where my lawn chair would sit properly on the uneven ground. I placed two big rocks behind my chair’s front legs to keep it in place. I looked around and discovered that Sandee had set herself up across the way on a part of the path that had a steep incline just below. Our other friends had scattered around the circle, so none of us were together.

“Don’t you want to be on a flatter surface, closer to the fire where it will be warm?” I asked Sandee, worried about her stamina and wanting her closer to me.

“This spot is just right for me,” she replied, her voice strong. “I feel this is where I should be. Don’t worry, I’ll be fine here.”

She was facing north. Because I considered her a wise woman, I decided she was right about this being a good place for her. I also knew, once she made up her mind, there was no changing it. I was facing south, which I took as a sign that I should consider this a time of peace and renewal. I walked back to my spot, making sure I was positioned directly across from Sandee to keep watch. She had already wrapped her pencil-thin body in her sleeping bag and wore a Cincinnati Reds ball cap to keep her bald head warm.

The Shaman explained that someone should always be awake with her to keep the fire going. There were women more anxious than I to keep the watch, so I tried to relax and settle in for the night. Lying on the ground proved too uncomfortable. Although I had tried to clear the space of rocks and branches, I felt like something was sticking me in the back. The night was now bordering on cold, and the soil was moist from nighttime dew. The wetness was seeping into my sleeping bag, so I decided to sleep in my lawn chair. A soft breeze tickled my face, and fireflies flashed across the night

sky. I could hear the humming insects and other unknown forest noises. Growing up and living in cities, I had never spent a night outside. This was a new experience I hoped I wouldn’t regret.

Sitting in a tilting lawn chair, sleep didn’t come easily, but eventually I dozed off. I remember waking suddenly with the sun rising and shafts of light peeking through the trees. I worked my way out of my sleeping bag. Everything on me was damp and soggy. The fresh earthy smells of the evening had been replaced with odors of mildew and rotting wood.

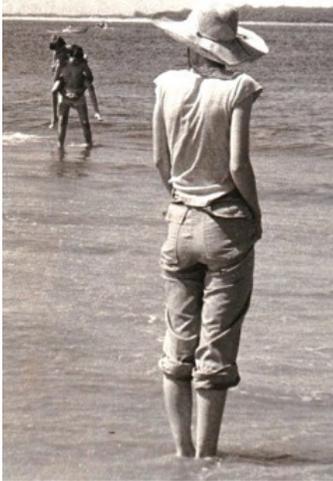
I looked across the way for Sandee. She was missing. So was her chair. I rushed over and found her empty chair resting slightly down the slope against a large oak tree. Where was she? Had she fallen and hurt herself? Was she unable to stay in the woods all night? Suddenly, Sandee appeared, walking steadily toward me. She had been up to the bathroom and assured me she was fine. As the rest of the women began to wake up, Lucy announced that breakfast was ready at the farmhouse. “Pack up all your belongings,” she said. “Please leave the forest as you found it.”

Sandee was tired but seemed exhilarated by the whole experience. I was weary and washed out. My damp clothes sticking to my skin felt rough and raw, and I desperately wanted something warm to drink. We had just started up the hill when Sandee said, “Wait. I forgot something.” She dropped her chair and walked back to her spot. I saw her reach up and take something off a tree branch. She had taken off her gold signet ring the night before and placed it on the branch where, facing north, she could see it.

“This ring has a history,” she said. “I bought it as a gift for myself after my divorce. It cost more than I should have spent at the time. It was a sign of the end of my past life and the beginning of a new direction and independence for me.” In the way she spoke and carefully handled the ring as she put it back on, I could tell it was special.

I have worn the ring every day since she gave it to me. Often, I find myself unconsciously turning it on my finger. I remember Sandee’s wisdom and strength, hoping some of it rubbed off on me. She was my teacher, my shaman, and I loved her. Someday, I know I will no longer be able to wear the ring. I have been thinking I should find her son, Marty. The ring was so important to Sandee that he might want to know its story and have it as a keepsake, possibly for a wife or daughter. But then I tell myself I am not ready yet to give it up.

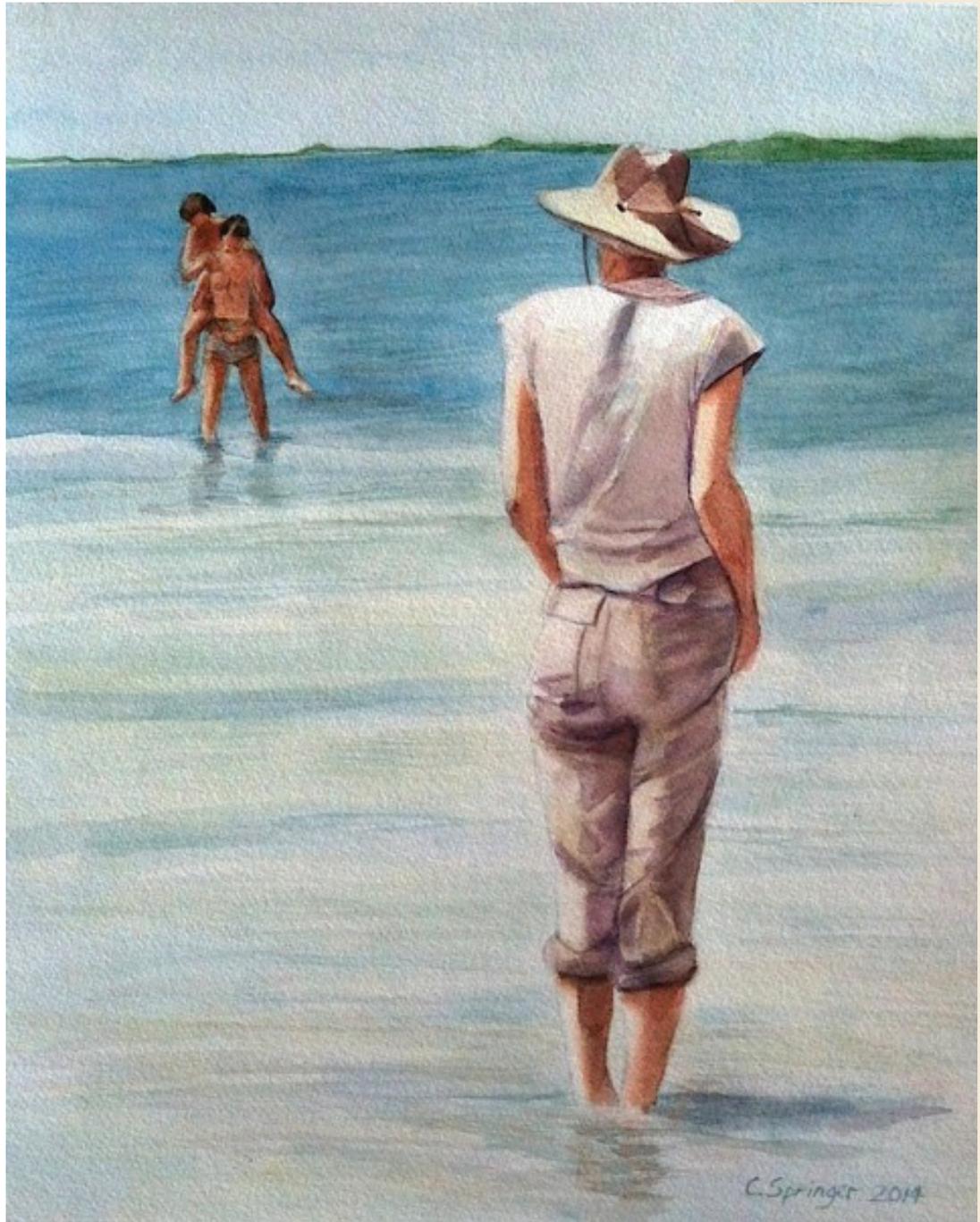
Sue Wilke has been working on her memoir in recent years, writing down the stories she hopes will create memories her children will enjoy reading someday.



## On the Beach

*Photograph and watercolor  
by Connie Springer*

As a painter and photographer, Connie Springer assumes the role of storyteller, portraying people in intriguing situations and interrelationships.



## Merlin's Villanelle

By Doug MacCurdy

Learn something to smooth the voyage of aging.  
Cultivate your dreams as the body gets weak.  
Shun self-pity: it is powerfully damaging.

You will find your supple mind most obliging,  
though your once-strong frame begins to creak.  
Learn something to smooth the voyage of aging.

Joy opens your mind, and it becomes engaging,  
reminding the spirit that it is wisdom you seek.  
Shun self-pity: it is powerfully damaging.

The last act is nigh and in need of some staging,  
but your role in this act need not be bleak.  
Learn something to smooth the voyage of aging.

Learn tranquility: it disperses the disparaging.  
This serves well both the bold and the meek.  
Shun self-pity: it is powerfully damaging.

Learning power is always at hand; don't go foraging.  
Accept whatever truth you discover, without critique.  
Learn something to smooth the voyage of aging,  
Shun self-pity: it is powerfully damaging.

Doug MacCurdy created this poetic version of Merlin's advice to the young King Arthur from the novel *The Once and Future King* by T. H. White.

## A Poem for Sylvia

By Rick Stein

They found you on your knees,  
Head in the oven, gas on, pilot off.  
Doors and windows sealed with wet  
towels,  
To protect the children asleep in  
their beds.  
The scene as meticulously crafted,  
As dark and brutal as any poem you  
wrote.  
Cold and lifeless, dressed only in a  
tattered robe  
Toothbrush and keys in your pocket.  
Why didn't you just drive away?  
Why didn't you brush your teeth and  
go to bed?  
The pain and anger you bled onto  
the page,  
In sharp words, like razors, like  
broken glass,  
Like a finely forged knife blade,  
Pierced our skin, our hearts, our  
brains.  
Was it finally all too much for you?  
Leaving in silence after the loud roar  
of your life.

"I have never put a toothbrush in a  
poem"—Sylvia Plath

Rick Stein is a poet, writer, artist, and  
general Renaissance monkey who is always  
trying his best to do good work and have a  
few laughs.



## Burano Canal

*Photograph by Richard Lingo*

Rick Lingo's love of travel and photography makes the world his workshop.

## Wistful

*Photograph by Larry J. Pytlinski*

Larry J. Pytlinski is an award-winning amateur photographer and OLLI moderator.





## Ready to Dock

*Photograph by Larry J. Pytlinski*

Larry J. Pytlinski is an award-winning amateur photographer and OLLI moderator.

## A Sonnet to a Hybrid

*By Jack B. Meibers*

Noah's three sons each had their own horse. Shem, the eldest, had a stallion, of course. The middle son, Ham, had a well-bred mare. In Noah's ark they were the perfect pair. Japheth, the youngest, had a nervous filly, Who, when the rains came, acted quite silly. To calm her down until the rains would pass, They stabled her with a biblical ass. But Noah balked at letting them on board. They were not what the ark was to have stored. After much pleading, Noah changed his cant, And to this day you can hear the mules chant: Hooray for Noah, he saved the equine lass! Hooray for Noah, he saved the horse's ass!

Jack B. Meibers is a retired postal employee who is still trying to deliver deletter, deshorter debetter.

## Is It Any Wonder?

*By Hazel Pegues*

Many of us have more respect for our Black ancestors than we have for our current Black selves.

They made it! They chose life in the face of malice, murder, rape, maiming, kidnapping, torture, confinement, abandonment. If they hadn't chosen life, we wouldn't be here. They deserve our love and respect.

Some of us get sad and angry, and some of us grieve for the atrocities that our fore-fathers and fore-mothers had to endure for 250 years during slavery.

However, we rarely visit the psychological terror and trauma that these survivors had to live with. The tricks of the mind and body they had to develop to survive the lives they were allowed to live.

Pretending they were not human, pretending they were lowly, pretending they were second class, pretending they didn't count, pretending they weren't beautiful, pretending they weren't intelligent, pretending they had no dignity, pretending not to care, pretending, pretending, pretending.

Is it any wonder that after all that time the pretending became more real than the truth?

Is it any wonder that they passed the need to pretend along to future generations?

Is it any wonder that those future generations now believe what our ancestors had to pretend . . . self-hatred?

Is it any wonder?

Self-hatred is what our ancestors had to practice in order to survive.

Is it any wonder that self-hatred was passed along?

We are the survivors of a people who had to learn how to hate or pretend to hate themselves in order to survive.

Is it any wonder?

Hazel Pegues rarely finds a form of artistic expression she's able to ignore.

## A Letter to Godot

By Jack B. Meibers

January 29, 1920

Samuel B. Godot  
Justice of the Peace  
Cana, Virginia

Dear Mr. Godot:

This is in answer to your query of January 19, 1920, in which you indicate that one of the citizens of your fair city had a question regarding the amount of homemade wine permitted under the recently enacted Volstead Act. You said this citizen was a mother who was worried that she may have caused her son to break the law by urging him to replenish a shortage of wine.

Mr. Godot, please reassure the conscientious mother that, under the current regulations, no law was broken. The farmer-friendly, fermented-fruit-juice exemption covers the question involved here. While the exact amount per year is not spelled out in the Volstead Act, follow-up regulations have identified the amount as two hundred gallons per year per household. And, according to your account of the incident, this amount exceeds the maximum number of gallons involved—six containers holding twenty to thirty gallons each comes to no more than 180 gallons at the most—well within the two-hundred gallon limit and, therefore, perfectly legal.

What troubles me, though, Mr. Godot, are the puzzling and extremely mysterious circumstances of the actual manufacturing of the wine. You say, one minute there were six containers of water and, the next minute, six containers of the best wine?! How can this be? This is most perplexing! I hope you will have the courtesy of writing me again to explain the details of this mysterious phenomenon.

I am yours truly, Mr. Godot, and anxiously await your response.

Andrew J. Volstead  
U.S. Representative  
Washington, D.C.

Jack B. Meibers is a retired postal employee who is still trying to deliver deletter, deshorter debetter.



## Serendipity

*Photograph by Judy Stewart*

Surprise makes Judy Stewart continue her passion for photography.

## Marguerite

*By Barbara Roth*

I have memory photos of her  
tiny vignettes of my childhood  
Standing on a stool in the narrow upstairs bathroom  
brushing her long auburn hair  
that fell in waves down her back  
She, sitting at the kitchen desk  
smoking a long thin cigarette, lip stained coffee cup in reach  
while she played solitaire  
carefully turning each card with pink nails, always filed to perfection  
Standing in the kitchen  
an apron tied around her waist  
placing freshly kneaded bread dough into the yellow mixing bowl  
Wearing a hat while gathering blueberries along the white dunes of  
the Cape  
Her mink stole  
resting graciously on her shoulders  
as she pulled on her pearl button white gloves  
Then placed her hat atop her head as we would leave for church  
Her smile  
at once both serene yet mischievous  
When she walked holding hands with my father  
Her voice  
low, husky  
the sound of a woman just out of bed  
The way she wove stories into her conversations  
I can still see her sitting in the yard on the garden bench  
Bent over in laughter, leaning toward Sharon  
The way she hugged  
as if pouring all her love and energy into my body  
The gentle touch of her hand as she brushed my bangs out of my  
eyes  
Her tables for the holidays, especially Easter . . . marbled eggs, blown  
eggs, china eggs  
bunnies peeking out from everywhere with a sprinkling of foil-  
covered chocolates  
Her, perched on a chair  
one shapely leg tucked under the other as she cuddled my new  
puppy  
Sitting at the sewing machine  
her high arched foot in constant motion, pins in her mouth  
as she made my dresses  
She was often quiet, at times shy  
But she shone with a deep beauty  
Her compassion, humor, her ability to create whether sewing,  
knitting, writing,  
baking, gardening, crocheting, braiding rugs was legendary  
But her greatest talent was how she welcomed everyone who  
entered her door  
as if they had finally come home

Barbara Roth's passion to capture images of nature and life reflections has inspired her to write poetry since childhood.



## Gardenia

*By Judi Morress*

Do not tempt me again, O foul Gardenia.  
You've pulled this stunt before, not twice but thrice.  
I knew I should have bought myself a zinnia.  
They're cheerful and they're sturdy and they're nice.

But you, Gardenia, with your sweet seduction,  
Your pure white blossoms, and your heady scent,  
Cause me to lose all powers of deduction.  
It almost seems that you are heaven sent.

But do you then return my deep affection?  
Do you produce a bumper blossom crop?  
Oh no, although I give you my attention,  
You turn away and let your tight buds drop.

I simply cannot do this anymore.  
O Gardenia, you are nothing but a whore!

P.S. Well, maybe just once more . . .

Judi Morress has been attending OLLI classes for the past twelve years and co-moderates the Poetry Writing Workshop.

## Lotus Pond

*Photograph by Karen Rowe*

Karen Rowe thanks her OLLI instructors for opening up the world of photography as an art form.

## Artist at Work

*Photograph by Karen Rowe*

Karen Rowe thanks her OLLI instructors for opening up the world of photography as an art form.





## Great Sand Dunes, Colorado

Photograph by Sue Wilke

Sue Wilke's OLLI photography classes over the years have helped enhance her skills with the camera and helped her to view the world through a different lens.

## Picking Things Up and Putting Them Down

By Judi Morress

**H**ave you heard the joke? Why shouldn't women over fifty have babies? Because they'll put them down and forget where they left them.

When I'm not busy getting into things and out of them (see *Creative Voices*, 2014), I spend the rest of my time picking up things and putting them down. Ever since the first pre-human made a tool, we have acquired things. What is a tool anyhow? It's a thing used to make other things. I can picture a Neanderthal wrinkling his receding brow and wondering, "Now where did I put that ????" Since then, we've just made more and more things. We developed language in order to name all these things, so that we could ask each other, "Have you seen my hand-axe?" We use these things to trade for other things, and the more things we get, the more we misplace them.

The adage "a place for everything and everything in its place" should be learned at a very early age so that it becomes automatic, almost a muscle memory, because after a certain age, muscle memory is all you've got. That rule is fine for the things that have a place and stay there. For instance, if you hang a picture over the fireplace, it's likely to stay there. It's the things that you use and move around every day that get you in trouble.

I learned long ago that my glasses should always be in one of three places: my nightstand, my bathroom vanity, or my face. My children remember vividly the days when I would shout, "Everybody stop what you're doing and help me find my glasses!" My car key should always be in my purse or in the ignition. My house key should always be in my purse or in the lock. You may have noticed the liberal use of the word *should*—I don't always do what I should.

I have good intentions about putting things away in their own little places, but if I'm interrupted, who knows

where I'll put down the scissors that I just went into the kitchen to get when the doorbell rang. My exercise program consists of retracing my steps, and as I have a two-story house with a basement, I get a lot of exercise. I suspect that there is only one category of people who does not have this issue: cloistered nuns. The vow of poverty ensures that they don't have very many things, and the vow of silence keeps them from interrupting each other.

Then of course, there's the "special place." This is reserved for a newly acquired something that doesn't yet have its very own place, so you put it in a special place until you know where to put it. Sadly, that day never comes. That quickly, the new thing has claimed the special place as its own, has settled in, and hidden itself there, only to reveal itself after you're gone, when your children are getting rid of all the things that you acquired. Flea markets, garage sales, antique shops, and thrift stores—these are the ultimate recyclers of our things.

Since we spend a good part of our lives picking things up and putting them down, it should come as no surprise that we use the terms for a lot more than just shuffling the objects of our lives. You can pick up a cold, you can pick up lint, you can pick up a stranger in a bar. (Be careful you don't pick up something else with that last one!) You can put down a good book and want to pick it up again. An army can put down an insurrection; a snob can put down a social climber; and if that stranger in the bar turns out to be a jerk, you can put that down to experience. But just like death and taxes, it's a sure thing you'll be picking things up and putting them down again to the very end.

Judi Morress has been attending OLLI classes for the past twelve years and co-moderates the Poetry Writing Workshop.



## Bonobo Mother and Baby

*Photograph by David  
Kuschner*

David Kuschner, a retired UC faculty member, believes that photography makes the world spin just a little bit slower.

## Walking with My Grandfather

*By Ellen Frankenberg*

The crunching snow under my boots  
confirms my bond with the earth  
and those who walked here before me.  
Is there some primordial link,  
some Nordic genetic code I share  
with the grandfather who died  
even before my father came of age?

Snow is my friend today, falling silently, transforming,  
always transforming mud and grime into something  
new.  
Trees are transforming too,  
their crotchety arms silhouetted stark against the sky  
sending messages of untamed possibilities:  
and the birds, especially the lone cardinal, red, standing  
defiantly against the encompassing white.

Cross country skis used to carry me, two knees ago,  
sliding across slopes, down easy valleys, wind in my  
face.

But today, sensibly, I can only crunch the snow under  
my boots.

Longer ago I skated on country ponds, teaching  
bundled children how to fall down and laugh again,  
how to skim and scamper, regardless of the biting  
wind.

No skimming now. I know too much about the fragile  
ice, the unforgiving dark spaces, melting at the edges  
of the lake.

Yet I wonder still why I enjoy so much  
the sharp cold bracing my cheeks:  
would the grandfather I never met understand?  
Did he love the whiteness, the winds of Sweden?  
Did he too celebrate the sun within the bracing cold?  
And by what mystery does he live on in me and walk  
with me in the crunching snow?

Ellen Frankenberg, a recovering English teacher, psychologist,  
and lover of everything outdoors, enjoys exploring the messages  
of nature that link us across time and generations.





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Cate O'Hara

## Vision Statement

OLLI is the premier organization offering educational and social experiences to the mature residents of Greater Cincinnati by:

- Nourishing intellect, expanding knowledge, and exploring new ideas.
- Sharing interests and experiences.
- Cultivating friendships.
- Being a resource of the University of Cincinnati and supporting its goals.

## Mission Statement

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Cincinnati provides opportunities for lifelong learning and social interaction to the mature residents of Greater Cincinnati.

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