

# News and Views *Ávila*

*A publication of the Resident Council at Avila Retirement Community*

*Albany, NY*

*April 2018*

## BEAUTIFUL BISTRO BREAKFAST

Mickey Fleishman

When we walk into the Bistro in the morning, we see large platters of fresh fruit all over the counter: strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, sliced melon and pineapple, oranges, apples, bananas, grapes, and halved grapefruit. Muffins and croissants are also on large platters.



Photograph by Max Tiller

Cold cereals are in three different self-serve glass tubes. And hot oatmeal is in a crockpot to keep warm. Everything looks refreshing and colorful.

I stop over at the Bistro daily around nine o'clock to get a cup of coffee. Earlier, eight or more people were seated around the large table but they've already had their breakfast and left.

However, at corner table four or five Avila men sit together having breakfast and talking. I often stop at this table to give them daily greetings, "How are you?" and to find out what they are eating. All have bowl cereal – hot or cold. Raspberries, strawberries and blueberries are heaped up to cover the cereal bowl. Muffins are on the side of cereal bowls. It's a healthy sign to see people enjoying getting together, daily consuming nutritious food and sharing conversations.

When I was at college, we ate in a cafeteria. One day when I was going through the line to get my dinner, the woman behind the counter said to me, "Pick up food on plate with color." At that moment I wondered what she was advising but what she meant was that I should eat the foods with deep color because they have the most vitamins. For the many years since then I have tried to follow her advice, "Be sure to have deep color fruits and vegetables on your plate daily."

The daily colorful breakfast offerings make it easy for us (and Brian Shuman, above) to enjoy nutritious foods.

**MARY SUE AND TERRY DOBBIN****Interviewed by Suzanne Hanson**

Photograph by Max Tiller

Mary Sue Dobbin was born in Omaha NE, moved with her family to Minneapolis MN and finally to Peoria IL when her dad had accepted a position at NBCTV. She finished grade and high school in Peoria and attended college at Western Illinois University and went on to teach in Champaign, IL.

Terry also grew up in Peoria and attended the same school which is where they met and became a couple. He graduated from college in Monmouth, IL, and in 1968 he and Mary Sue were married in Peoria. Terry enlisted in the Army and spent 18 months in Viet Nam during which time Mary taught school. On his return from Viet Nam, Terry attended law school at the University of Illinois.

Terry went to work at the Caterpillar Tractor Co. in Peoria. When they moved to Syracuse in 1986, he was employed in the law department of a company there. When that company folded in 2006, Terry was 62 years old and decided to retire. They moved to their Wilmington, NY home where they remained until coming to Avila in 2018.

Their first daughter was born in 1973 in Peoria and Mary Sue became a stay at home Mom. A second daughter was born in 1977.

Mary Sue was elected to the school board in Peoria in 1977, having successfully run against Terry's boss. She served until 1986 when she and Terry moved to Syracuse. Both daughters and one son-in-law teach at a private school in Manhattan. They have a 12-year-old grandson.

Terry and Mary Sue played tennis, baseball, racquet ball and golf. They also did a lot of skiing and walking. In 1999 they walked coast to coast in the Lake District of northern England with the Sierra Club, doing 12 miles a day. Terry also enjoys reading law books.

At age 53 Mary Sue was diagnosed with cervical dystonia, a painful condition in her neck which prevents her from participating in her favorite sports and such pastimes as knitting and bird watching. But she remains an enthusiastic baseball fan, cheering on her favorite team, the Chicago Cubs.

Welcome to our Avila community, Terry and Mary Sue.

**TED AND SHERRY PUTNEY****Interviewed by Karl Gohlke**

After moving to the Capital District in 1959, Ted and Sherry Putney settled in the Bethlehem area. Ted went to work at State Bank of Albany, then with Norstar before moving to Cowen Asset Management. Sherry began teaching at Albany Academy for Girls when their three daughters were young, continuing there until she retired in 1983.

The Putneys moved several times within the Town of Bethlehem. They first lived in the Cedar Hill area, then relocated to Colonial Acres before moving to Avila in March.

Both Ted and Sherry have an extensive history of community service. They have served on a large number of boards in the health, human services, historic preservation, community planning, and environmental areas. Additionally, Sherry served on the Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk school board. Ted was a member of the town board and a number of other committees in Bethlehem for several years. Both were active participants in the activities and governance of these organizations.



Photograph by Karl Gohlke

Their daughters have pursued careers that complement those of their parents. Each has been involved in professional management, education, and environmental preservation. One resides on Long Island, another in North Carolina, and the third in California. There are six grandchildren.

The Putneys have known a number of Avila residents previously and are assimilating easily into our community.

## KATE SULLIVAN

Interviewed by Erin Teichman



Photograph by Max Tiller

Cathleen Gallagher Sullivan, "Kate", was born in and grew up in New York City. The youngest of six, she graduated from St. Patrick's Cathedral Girls High School; attended Katherine Gibbs Business School and worked at Reynolds Metal Company in Manhattan until expecting her first child.

Her mother, Ellen Ryan, and her father, James Gallagher, emigrated from Ireland; met in New York City at an Irish county dance and raised their six children in the Bronx. Kate is the youngest of her siblings and the mother of six herself.

Kate met her husband, David, at an office party. He graduated from St. John's University and became an accountant. After their marriage in 1949 they lived in the Bronx where their two oldest children, David and Nancy, were born.

The family moved to New Milford, NJ where Maureen, Denis, Kathleen and Janet were born.

When the children were in full-time day school, Kate returned to work as an executive secretary in an engineering company in NJ. Kate said one of their projects involved supporting the building of the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant.

In 1990 David retired. He and Kate moved to Hamilton, NY to be near daughter Nancy and her family. On their five acres David planted apple and peach trees, raspberry bushes, grape vines and vegetables while Kate weeded and put up preserves of the harvest. Kate also volunteered at the food cupboard, the Ecumenical clothing thrift shop and church luncheons.

Kate and David traveled to Italy, England, Hawaii and fished in Alaska. On a trip to Ireland they visited relatives in the counties of Mayo and Roscommon where her parents were born. In 2005 they attended the Supreme Court swearing -n ceremony of their nephew by marriage, John Roberts. Kate said she had some interesting conversations with Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg and Mrs. Scalia about being grandparents.

For the past 27 years the entire family, totaling 38, had come together to celebrate Thanksgiving in Hamilton. The last time was 2017 as Kate was planning her move to Avila. She told me she put 16 numbers in a bowl; then had her 16 grandchildren draw a number. In numerical order each was allowed to choose something from their grandmother's home as a remembrance. Definitely a clever way for Kate to facilitate downsizing her home.

Welcome to Avila, Kate.

## TELISA CLAUS

### Interviewed by Wilbur Shapiro

About four years ago, Telisa could be found at the Reception Desk at the Lodge. We are very glad she returned as our Program Coordinator, even though she has a 60-mile commute to her home in Oppenheim, west of Albany.

Telisa is married to Jordan. They have two girls, Ava age seven, and Maya age three. Jordan is self-employed in Information Technology, and he works from their home. Telisa is a graduate of Fulton-Montgomery Community College, where she majored in Academic Studies.

Her job at Avila has many facets to it and keeps her quite busy. She is responsible for most of the activities that keep us entertained and busy. She conducts on-line research to find out which entertainment and educational activities in the Capital District are available, and which would be of most interest to seniors such as the residents of Avila. To assist her in making choices, she has a Program Committee of Residents, which she chairs.

The schedule of entertainment programs that Telisa sets up for many Wednesdays and Sundays in the Great Room is varied and is a major asset of living at Avila. The lectures and other programs of interest she arranges during daytime hours are both educational and informative.

Telisa arranges for and coordinates the various trips that are available to all of us. Theater stage performances, SPAC, Tanglewood, Jacob's Pillow, the HD Opera performances at Crossgates, Turning Stone Casino, and movies at Spectrum Theater are among the ongoing activities that Telisa arranges and coordinates.

Shopping trips, the availability of Mobile Banking on the premises, trips to the Guilderland Public Library are all coordinated by Telisa; as are special events like the Halloween and New Year's Eve parties. In addition, she assists the Movie Night Committee by obtaining films from Netflix. She also oversees the beautiful and interesting displays in the Lobby Show Cases at the Main Building.

We are most appreciative of Telisa's work in keeping us well informed of all that is available to us. She writes and distributes the monthly schedule of events and activities. She issues reminders to us shortly before each event or activity. She coordinates the TV advertising in both the Lodge and Main Building.

Avila is very fortunate that Telisa Claus decided to return and do such a great job as our Program Coordinator.



Photograph by Max Tiller

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## TWO MOTHERS REMEMBERED

*Joann Snow Duncanson*

*I had two Mothers-two Mothers I claim  
Two different people yet with the same name.  
Two separate women, diverse by design,  
But I loved them both because they were mine.*

*The first was the Mother who carried me here,  
Gave birth and nurtured and launched my career.  
She was the one whose features I bear,  
Complete with the facial expressions I wear.*

*She gave me her love, which h follows me yet,  
Along with the examples in life that she set.  
As I got older, she somehow younger grew,  
And we'd laugh just as Mothers and daughters should do.*

*But then came the time that her mind clouded so,  
And I sensed that the Mother I knew would soon go.  
So quickly she changed and turned into the other,  
A stranger who dressed in the clothes of my Mother.*

*Oh, she looked the same, at least at arm's length,  
But now she was the child and I was her strength.  
We'd come full circle, we women three,  
My Mother the first, the second and me.*

*And if my own children should come to a day,  
When a new Mother comes and the old goes away,  
I'd ask of them nothing that I didn't do.  
Love both of your Mothers as both have loved you.*

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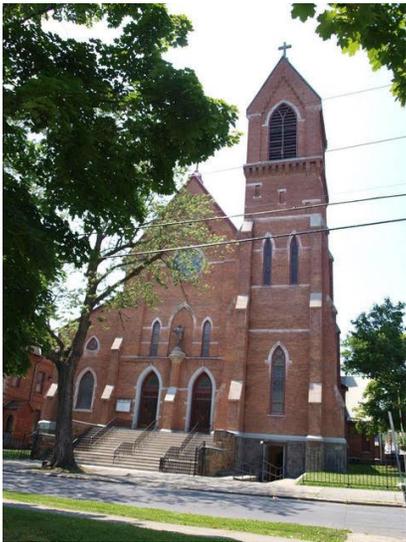
## A SPECIAL MASS AT SACRED HEART

*Alice Begley*

Several weeks ago, I attended an event that will remain in my mind to the end of my days. I went to a Mass and an afternoon party in the old Sacred Heart Catholic Church on Water Street in North Albany.

It was the church I was baptized in many, many years ago, where I had made my first communion, was confirmed, and in which I was married on December 22, 1943 to Ensign James F. Begley. He, also, was baptized and made his first communion there. At that time, the churchgoers were probably 90 percent Irish.

Jim was 24 and in the Navy. I was 18. It was the start of World War II. Jim had just been made an officer after graduating from Siena College. He was assigned to a YMS (minesweeper) that was to be put into action in Astoria, OR to sail down the Pacific to WWII action. I watched from Telegraph Hill in San Francisco Harbor as he piloted the ship out into the Pacific Ocean.



The recent Mass in Sacred Heart Church was held by Bishop Edward Scharfenbeger. The community was celebrating Tet, the lunar New Year, a major holiday in Viet Nam. The Mass was said and sung in both Vietnamese and English.

The party that followed downstairs in the church basement where I had attended religious instruction was attended by several hundred Vietnamese families, adult and children. They were the families that made up the congregation that filled the pews on Sunday.

A brief ceremony commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tet Offensive, and was conducted by a squadron of Sons of the American Legion. Two Viet Nam veterans were honored and presented with medals; Captain Lawrence P. Wiest who had reported to the 4<sup>th</sup> Special Forces on the first day of the Tet Offensive, and Major Tran who spent 15 years in a Communist Labor Camp after the war.

Red was the official decoration color. Many of the Vietnamese women wore beautiful AOs Dias; satin Vietnamese dresses worn over silk trousers. One of the Vietnamese priests actually took up a microphone and sang to the groups at the tables.

It was a lovely, grand affair. I was proud to attend. Especially proud to see that the Vietnamese families are enjoying doing a great job using that special old church in fine style.

PS: By the way, Captain Wiest is my nephew.

## **CATS**

### **Gloriana Clark**

Several months after my husband died, I decided it would be nice to invite some live company. As my grandson had been fostering cats, I asked him to look into getting one for me to foster. Soon Priscilla, a small, young, black and white female came to live with me. After a month or so I knew she was just what I needed to fill the void in my life. But when I looked into adopting her, I learned I was "too old" for that particular cat. I offered the shelter an attractive donation but was told it wasn't about money.

Feeling very disappointed, I phoned my daughter in Ithaca to commiserate. She called the shelter to inform them that her mother was, indeed, a vigorous 86 year old whose own mother had lived to a healthy 103 years. After assuring the person on the other end of the line, that should anything happen to me, my daughter would definitely assume ownership of the cat, they weakened. I soon received a call saying they were considering letting me keep Priscilla.

However, there was one condition; I would have to take a second cat because Priscilla was a "social cat." The conversation was long and involved focusing mainly on "how difficult it was to place older cats", and asking me to please go to their website and have a look?"

I came across a picture of a declawed six-year old sibling pair. Now I know that declawing a cat is considered painful and cruel, but the deed had already been done. Somehow, I agreed to accept this pair rather than take Priscilla with a companion.



The exchange took place several days later in my Avila apartment. When I opened the carriers the two animals that emerged were huge; certainly too large to be house cats. I really found them rather frightening. They must have felt the same way as both of them immediately found hiding places. Nevertheless, I sat down with the delivery woman and signed the contract. The cats did not come out of their hiding places when she left.

I couldn't sleep when I went to bed that night. All I could think was, "What have I done? What have I done?" Close to tears, I got out of bed, sat in my husband's recliner, and huddled under a blanket. Before long the cats appeared and walked by my chair. I was much too frightened to lean over to try to touch them. After a while I went back to bed and stayed there until morning.

My daughter made a routine visit later that day. After listening to my plight, she crawled under the bed and pulled out two very frightened animals. Eventually, I lost most of my fear and was able to pet them. At some point I found the larger of the two cats lying beside me on the sofa. My daughter, who loves taking snapshots, texted a picture to her son in Boston. He replied, "What is this? Little Red Riding Hood? It looks like the big bad wolf is going to eat up grandma."

Now, a year and a half later, I have two of the gentlest, most loving cats anyone could wish for. Max and Maggie are a great comfort, and they have lifted an overwhelming sadness from my life.

## GRIEVING THE LOSS OF MISTI

Joyce Gibbs

As I write this article I am still grieving the loss of my beloved dog Misti who was 17 years old. At first all I could do was cry for hours on end. My heart felt like it had actually broken in tiny little pieces and would never be put together again. I would leave my apartment and when I returned and opened the door I would expect her to be there waiting for me. But then I would remember that she was gone and my eyes would fill up with tears. It felt like I would never stop crying for her. I hadn't realized how much of my day revolved around her and now my days felt so empty. Two weeks went by and I could not bear the emptiness I was feeling. I longed to hold and cuddle a fur baby in my arms.



To fill the void in my life, I began scouring the internet to see if there was a dog who really needed me that I could adopt. As I was looking at many sites I finally saw her. She jumped right out at me and her eyes seemed to say "I need someone to love me." I showed the picture to my husband and then we began the process of adopting her. I know in my heart that my little Misti girl sent her to me because she knew that I still had a lot of love to give to another animal.



The minute Lizzi walked through the door she ran around with her tail wagging away and she came right to me kissing my hands as if she knew that she had found her forever home. She needed me and I needed her; we have so much love to give each other. There may be some who think I did not give myself enough time to grieve but there is not a day that goes by that I don't think of Misti and Lizzi does help me to get through those days. Everyone grieves for their beloved pets in their own way.

Anyone who has ever lost a pet will understand exactly what I am talking about.

## ETHICAL WILLS

### Maxine Koblenz

In contrast to a Last Will and Testament which designates the heirs to whom favorite material possessions such as art or jewelry are to be passed, Ethical Wills discuss the values that you want to preserve and transmit to the next generation, and the impact these values have had on your life and the lives of others, as well as the stories they tell.

An Ethical Will is a written statement of your ideals. It is a reflection on your life and your experiences. The purpose in formulating this "sketch" is to engage and inspire; to identify through the written word what you have learned from your life. These words provide a guide to the "essentials" for which the author stands and wants bequeathed to family and friends.

The gift of this Will, can evoke important memories, quote favorite sayings, and introduce to our heirs the people who have been most influential in our lives. The Ethical Will is often, though not always, presented after death as a codicil to the Last Will and Testament. It may include:

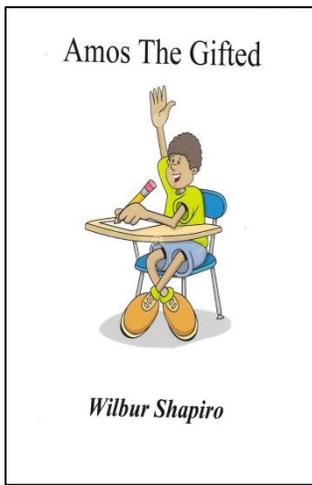
- Formative events and important occasions
- Family responsibilities and relationships
- A retrospective look acknowledging strengths and failures.

The Ethical Will is a gift of caring for the well-being of those who follow after us. It memorializes and energizes.

If you are interested in a deeper exploration and discussion of these concepts, please call me, x652.

## QUOTE FROM ST. TERESA OF AVILA

Today may there be peace within. May you trust that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith in yourself and others. May you use the gifts that you have received and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be content with yourself just the way you are. Let this knowledge settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us.

**AMOS THE GIFTED (A BOOK REVIEW)****Wilbur Shapiro**

Amos was abandoned by his father at birth. His single mother Soriana vowed to provide everything she could for her child. It soon became apparent that the little black boy Amos, was special. He walked at six months and conversed fluently at one year. He excelled in school and was valedictorian of his high school class. Amos and his mother planned a medical career and he was admitted as a pre-med student to SUNY Albany. Kingfish, the local gang leader, needed someone of Amos's talents and if he did not go voluntarily he would be kidnapped. However, the Kingfish's plans were interrupted by a turf war with another gang from downstate, enabling Soriana and Amos to escape. They landed in Berry-Berry, a farming community in New Hampshire. Soriana, who was an expert with Electronic Health Records, landed a job at the local hospital much to the delight of Dr. Andrew Goldbaum, the principal doctor at the hospital. Dr. Goldbaum recognized the brilliance of Amos and received state support for Amos to enter college and medical school. As a

principal doctor at the Berry-Berry hospital Amos encountered many adventures. Some implications from the story follow:

- Brilliance is color blind. Those who are endowed should use their intelligence for the common good.
- There is an unbreakable bond between mother and child that cannot be broken.
- Even though they were the only black people in Berry-Berry, they were received graciously and admired for all they did for the community.

I will make the book available in the library of both the main building and the lodge for those who have the interest or curiosity to learn more about Amos.

**AVILA FLAPPERS (CIRCA 2007)**

Joan Bluhm, Irene Dahlstedt, Gloria Daley,  
Julia Blanchard, Amy Martinez, Teresa Avelino,  
Louise Giminiani

**SEPTEMBER MORNING****Don Stauffer**

It was a bright crisp Cape Cod morning in September. Not a cloud in the sky. Morag, my wife, and I had the use of friends' house for a few days in Brewster. I decided to take the car down to the beach to take a walk.

When I got back, Morag had a stricken look on her face. When I asked her, what was the matter she said our son Andy had called from New York and was sobbing, and kept repeating, "I'm OK, Mom. I'm OK." When she asked him what that was all about he said, "turn on the television." Which she did (and it stayed on for about three days). He then told her he had narrowly escaped from the second tower of the World Trade Center and had made it safely back to his apartment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

Andy was working as a video producer for Morgan Stanley, which had offices on several floors of Building Two. His was on the 44<sup>th</sup> floor, which is where the elevators from street level ended, requiring a change to those going to the top of the building. He had come to work early and was preparing for a meeting when he heard a loud thump. His boss ran in and said a plane had just struck the other building and they should evacuate. He remembers looking out the window and seeing a lot of paper floating down through the air. At this time everyone assumed it was an accident. He and his colleagues went out to the elevators, and he and a friend decided not to use them, but to take the 44 flights of stairs down to the street. It was an orderly descent, people walking not running and helping handicapped people along the way. This was partly because of the bombing which had occurred several weeks earlier, followed by evacuation drills in which everyone participated.

At some point a voice came over the speakers saying everything was OK and it was safe to return to work (it has never been determined who said this). Fortunately, Andy chose not to follow this advice and continued to street level. When they reached the plaza, police were directing people to assemble at a point on its far side. Again, Andy chose not to obey; he and his friend had noticed a subway entrance in the opposite direction and decided to go for it. When they arrived at the platform the last E train was about to pull out. His friend managed to pry open the doors as they were closing, and they got in and headed uptown. When he got home he turned on the television in time to see his building in flames.



There are a lot of things to be thankful for. First of all that he made it out in time. Another is that Morag had sent the phone number of the place we were staying to all three of our children. She had rarely if ever done that. If she hadn't, it might have been hours, even days, before we knew whether or not he was safe. Another is that he did not always follow directions, if he thought he knew better. Not always wise, but in this case it may have saved his life.

He did not come away completely unscathed, of course. The mental trauma lasted for weeks in the form of bad dreams. It didn't help that because he is a videographer the company asked him to search out survivors among his colleagues and interview them on video. This naturally reinforced his bad memories.

But those too gradually lessened, and he is back to being thankful for the way it turned out for him.

As am I.

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*I'M FINE*

*Richard Cardinal Cushing*

*(via Fr. Leo O'Brien)*

*There's nothing whatever the matter with me.  
I'm just as fine as I can be.  
I have arthritis in both my knees  
And when I talk, I talk with a wheeze.*

*My pulse is weak, and my blood is thin  
But I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.  
I think my liver is out of whack  
And a terrible pain is in my back.*

*My hearing is poor, my sight is dim  
Most everything seems to be out of trim.  
But I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.*

*I have arch supports for both my feet,  
Or, I wouldn't be able to go out on the street.  
Sleeplessness I have night after night  
And in the morning, I'm just a sight.*

*My memory is failing, my head's in a spin  
I'm peacefully living on aspirin.  
But I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.*

*The moral is, as this tale we unfold,  
That for you and me who are getting old,  
It's better to say, "I'm fine," with a grin  
Than to let them know the shape we're in.*

## **AIN'T MISBEHAVING**

**Erin Teichman**

Remember that wonderful sense of anonymity when you are traveling? No one knows you. You can be carefree about what you say and do. But Ray and I have learned "it ain't necessarily so."

In September 2008 on a Road Scholar trip to China we met another couple from Albany. While chatting one afternoon they asked what kind of work I had done. When I replied that I had worked in foster care for the Dutchess County Department of Health, they wondered whether I had known the husband's stepmother. I certainly had. As Director of Children's Services, she had been my boss.

I was really happy that I had not been complaining about how difficult she was to work with at times.

Two other 'small world' encounters occurred on a family cruise in 2014. On our last port day, our son-in-law Brent, and granddaughter, Paige, took a walk along the rail trail onto a beach where they bumped into their next-door neighbors who had been vacationing on the island.

And on the same ship our grandson, Nick, played basketball with a passenger who turned out to be from a rival Hudson Valley high school. They had actually played opposite each other during the regular school year.

A group of 21 in China? A cruise ship carrying 3,963 passengers? What are the odds for these meetings to take place?

The moral of the story? Always be on your best behavior – especially when traveling.

## THE PURLOINED PEN

Murray Block

How many of you attended school in those pre-ballpoint pen days--or in the pre-fountain pen era? I did — and I still remember the excitement of using the old fashioned straight pen. Fortunately, I just missed the era of the feather quills!



Of course, there were no pens of any sort in first grade. Little kids were only allowed crayons and pencils, until old enough to master the complexities of using pen and ink. Our desks, bolted to the floor together with our seats, contained tantalizing inkwells in the rear right corners. We were warned not to play with them. You could use your right thumbnail to lift the round flat metal cover, when the teacher was not looking, of course. When I first lifted that forbidden cover, I looked into a gaping hole. I wondered how in the world that hole could hold any ink. I was then, as I remain to this day, mechanically challenged. I later learned that the round glass dish into which the ink is poured was removed from the desks of the first graders. You had to be much older to use a pen and ink. You had to be at least a second grader.

It was a most exciting day when my second- grade teacher announced cheerfully:

"Children! I have great news for you! If you are all very, very well-behaved and promise to be careful, we can start writing with pens next week!"

Moving from pencil to pen was no easy task. There was much preparation in advance of the big day. We were given careful instructions concerning the tools we would need for the operation: a straight pen, two removable steel pen points, an envelope-sized blotter, and a soft cloth to serve as a pen wiper. Although we were given the list a full week in advance of when needed, I nagged Mom that same day to take me shopping for these wondrous grown-up supplies. My mother did not need much nagging. Buying school supplies held a high priority for Mom, right up there with having her three sons eating and sleeping properly so they'd be alert in school.

Although her budget was very limited in those days of the Great Depression, Mom never skimped on food *or* school supplies. She did not know how to write herself, but she selected the best and sturdiest pen that a dime could buy. She really splurged on a pen-wiper. No dirty rag from home to wipe the ink off the pen of her young scholar. She bought me an oval-shaped tan chamois-like cloth, distinguished by its edge, notched as if cut by pinking shears, and bold lettering on it declaring it to be a real *Pen Wiper*. I was thrilled.



I knew that my older brothers were using those new-fangled, often leaky, fountain pens, but I was happy to be making my own progress. I knew one had to learn to crawl before walking. I was ready to make my modest start at real penmanship. I understood the importance of the new grown-up phase I was entering. You can always erase errors with writing in pencil. Ink called for perfection the first time. I was prepared for the challenge.

The teacher carefully filled the glass inkwells and cautioned us not to jar the desks, lest we cause the ink to spill over. The desks were bolted down, but P.S. 20 was an ancient edifice with creaky floors. Desks kept coming loose and the bolts could not be fastened any tighter into the dried-out wooden floors. We all sat perfectly still, hands clasped in front of us on the desks, while the wells were being filled. Later in the term, our teacher selected two of the bigger boys to be her "ink monitors." We checked our inkwells in the morning and raised our hands if the level was perilously low. One of the monitors would come by to "fill 'er up." One of the monitors was a real nasty bully. He'd kick you or step on your foot, if you were a girl or a smaller boy, while he was transferring the ink from the large supply bottle to your well. You didn't dare raise your hand to complain, unless you wanted some of the ink spilled onto your desk — or worse yet, onto your shirt.

The first attempts at using the old-fashioned pens were trying for all of us kids. We were shown how to insert the shining new pen point into the slot provided for it at the end of the pen. This was easy to do — with new, unused pen points. Then we were taught the precise art of dipping the pen into the ink. Not too deep, lest you end up with too much ink that made ugly blobs on your clean white paper. And not too high, or you would not pick up enough of the black liquid to write more than one word.



For some of my classmates, the inkwells served a purpose that went beyond mere writing. One bratty little boy enjoyed dipping the braid of the girl sitting in front of him into his open inkwell. It was a nasty thing to do, but we all rather enjoyed his bravado. He was so adept at this, the girl never felt his hands manipulating her braid. He probably grew up to be a prominent brain surgeon — or perhaps a pickpocket. One other boy had a disgusting habit. He'd roll up a small wad of paper, dip it into the inkwell, and then chew it! It was sickening, but fascinating, to watch. I can't imagine what *he* grew up to be. A gourmet wine taster, perhaps?

By third grade, I had fully mastered the art of writing with a straight pen, and we were ready to progress onward. The teacher said that if we could bring in a fountain pen, we would be permitted to use it in class. Now I really felt grownup. With two older brothers who had a surplus of fountain pens left over from their Bar-Mitzvah cache of presents, I had no problem getting one to bring to class. I thought the fountain pen was a wondrous invention. No more ink stains on my right thumb and index finger. You can write for ages and ages! Pure magic!



I loved the fountain pen I brought to my third grade class. My oldest brother gave it to me. It was a Waterman Pen, and Mom said it was very expensive.

"Now don't be careless," Mom cautioned. "Don't lose the pen. It's your brother's. So be careful. Ya hear me?"

I was extremely careful, but the pen disappeared, nevertheless. One day, I was using it in class and left it on my desk when I had "to leave the room." Even at the age of nine, I showed signs of prostate problems! When I returned from the Boys' Room, my beautiful Waterman Pen was gone! I was frantic. I looked all around to see if it had rolled off the desk. When the teacher saw my agitated movements, she called out, quite impatiently:

"What's wrong now, Murray?"

"Someone stole my pen!" I blurted out, accusingly.

"You come right up here at once!" she commanded.

When I got to the front of the room, she continued her tirade:

"How dare you accuse one of your classmates of stealing your pen? You probably lost it on the way to the Boys Room."

"But I *know* I left it on the desk, and it was gone when I came back. I know someone *stole* it!" I was on the verge of tears.

"You know nothing of the sort! You must have lost it. No one stole it." Some kids were snickering.

"But —"

"Apologize to your classmates for your silly accusation."

"But —"

"I said APOLOGIZE!" she shrieked.

"I'm sorry," I mumbled as the tears flowed freely down my cheeks. I returned to my seat, crushed and embarrassed, and wishing I could disappear into the floor. My pen was gone. I was shamed in front of the class and would probably get teased for it, but I knew I was right.

At 3 o'clock, I rushed out of the room without looking up at anyone. My teacher had branded me a liar and I knew I'd never live it down. Worse yet, how could I tell Mom the pen was gone? Well, I should have had more faith in my dear mother. I cried as I related the events, including the embarrassment the teacher put me through in front of the class. Mom put her arm around me and soothed me.

"Don't cry, sonny. It's only a pen."

Mom did not comment on the teacher's handling of the situation. Invariably, when one of her boys complained of a difference of opinion with a teacher, Mom would counter with:

"The teacher's always right. You musta done something bad."

She did not say it this time, and that was a moral victory for me. Mom believed me, and that was all that mattered.

To hell with my third grade teacher who gave me my earliest realization that life sometimes sucks!



## REASONS WHY THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS HARD TO LEARN

1. The bandage was wound around the wound.
2. The farm was used to produce produce.
3. The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.
4. We must polish the Polish furniture.
5. He could lead if he would get the lead out,
6. The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
7. Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present,
8. A bass was painted on the head of the bass drum.
9. When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.