

Thoughts On Paper

WBPL's Writers Group Quarterly Journal



A Letter from the Editor:

New Year, New Journal! It's been six years since we started this journal and what a journey it has been! Members of our WBPL's Writers Group are always working hard and, coming up with fresh ideas and writing for each and every journal. This January, our theme is "renewal." This journal is dedicated to ideas about re-thinking, re-doing and starting over - about looking at things, ideas, events and people in a new light. We hope all who take the time to read our quarterly journals enjoy them, we look forward in this new year, to share even more of our writing, our "thoughts on paper."

*Sincerely,
Nicole Peters*



What are you doing New Year's...by Patricia Soper



Long ago, in my late teens and twenties, as each year wound down with holiday excitement, the radio stations, along with Christmas carols, seduced me with the tune, *What are you doing New Year's Eve?* Those romantic lyrics conjured, in my mind's eye, a glamorous and glitzy vision of dazzling nightclub ambiance, soft light and champagne bubbles, bejeweled and sophisticated party-goers, and me, among them, in my navy sequined dress, high heels, and sparkling earrings, dancing to the wafting strains of Guy Lombardo's tuxedo-clad band.

At 11:59, in my vision, dancing stops and all eyes turn, with excited anticipation, toward a TV and the frenzied, freezing revelers at Times Square. A glittering ball begins its descent to the waiting, soon-to-be-flashing neon numbers of the new year. There's a chorus of "...5...4...3...2...1," then gleeful shouts of "Happy New Year!," kisses, noisemakers and nostalgic, tear-stung, alcohol-fed crooning of *Auld Lang Syne*.

The song, even now, in my 70's, nudges a moment's nostalgia, though the glitzy illusion is distant and fades quickly, reality never having quite matched my youthful fantasy and, in truth, one of the last things I'd want to do on New Year's Eve. I don't even own a pair of high heels any more. No, now the question, *What are you doing New Year's Eve?* is contentedly answered with my image and craving of a cozy night of peaceful sleep, blanketed in silence, oblivious to the clock striking 12 or the noise of pot-banging neighbors (who are fewer now that I live in a senior complex, where most around me, instead of singing *Auld Lang Syne* are soothed by the melodic tune of their own snoring.)

What I do look forward to each year is the blissful quiet of New Year's morning. All the revelers still sound asleep, there is, if any sound, only the twitter of a brave little sparrow greeting the morning as any other. I treasure and gently guard those first few hushed and sacred hours of a brand new year as I would an infant whose first human touch may determine the course and well-being of its unfolding future. I ceremoniously open the fresh clean pages of my new book-style calendar, neatly enter reminders of birthdays and other occasions, and wonder how the rest will fill in. I light a candle, sit in meditation, and then give myself a special breakfast treat. The length of my indulgent musing depends on whether I have plans for the rest of the day.

Two years ago, an English friend, whose chronic illness is a constant reminder of her mortality, checked off her Bucket List item of wanting to see the New Year's ball drop at Times Square, a scene she had witnessed from England all of her life. She and her husband invited me to join them, but I declined, warning them of the midtown chaos, especially in these days of security frisks, etc. I did, however, suggest we meet on New Year's Day and we had the great good luck of the mildest first of January I can remember.

We strolled leisurely through traffic-free Times Square, the detritus of the previous night's celebration around us, no security in sight. There was an air of casual festivity. Sprays of confetti floated on the balmy breeze. Tourists lounged on empty bleachers or danced to the music of street entertainers. It was as if a herd, once tightly corralled by police barriers or daily schedule, was now released and peacefully roamed without rules or agenda, no one rushing, a day out of time.

I was reminded that the only real fences are in our minds. There is no prescribed route for the journey ahead. The choice is ours. Just like a blank calendar, the new born year, unspoiled and not yet tamed, offers us its unmarked pages of hours and days, and the freedom to write on them as we wish. I recall these inspiring words I saw engraved at a meditation garden in England: "*Wanderer there is no path. The path is made by walking.*"

My Precious Gifts
by Tony Trapanotto

What does one consider their most precious gifts that they hold dearly to them self. Could it be a family heirloom, a photo of a love one, a special piece of jewelry or maybe a dear letter. Surely all of these and many more could easily be listed here. But does one really ever consider that a precious gift could be their own self.

Take me for instant, I consider myself the most precious gift that one could have. For me my hands are one of my many precious gifts. The very hands that held my granddaughter the day she was born. I had the joy of my granddaughter as a baby using her small soft hand and grabbing one of my fingers, that I believe gave her all the security in the world that she needed to know that some one with love was there with her and she never let go.

Later on it was the same hands, holding hers, as we walked side-by-side throughout the years as she was growing up. The same hands that hugged her every night as I put her down to sleep. And the very same hands that held her as she fell asleep in my arms.

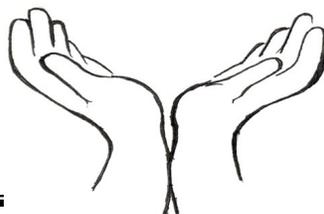
My eyes, is another one of my most precious gifts. For with my eyes, I got to see my granddaughter the very first day she was born. The same eyes that saw her smile every time I came to visit her. I got to see the surprise look on her face the day that she saw Santa for the first time. I got to see her first crawling on the rug, her first steps as she was learning to walk.

I got to see her go to school the very first day that she started, with all the excitement on her face, and the smile that went along with it. The wave good bye she gave to me as the school bus pulled away. I got to see my granddaughter in her first fancy dress, as she went to her first father and daughter dance, with her eyes glowing so proudly. I also got to see her in her wedding dress, she looked so lovely, an image my eyes will never forget. My eyes have seen many of the beauties of my granddaughter throughout her life.

Next are my ears, for with my ears I got to hear my granddaughter's first cry, her first words. I got to hear her sing happy birthday to me. I got to hear her say good night grandpa, I love you as she went to bed. I also got to hear her read her first story to me, play her first piece on her violin. But most of all, I got to hear my granddaughter say over and over "grandpa I love you".

Lastly are my feet, for with my feet I was able to take that first step with my granddaughter holding her hand as she was learning to walk. And throughout the years I got to take my granddaughter walking in the park as the autumn leaves were falling down from the trees. Christmas shopping, as the snow was silently falling down from the sky. And most of all, I got to see my granddaughter on her wedding day with a radiant glow in her eyes and a beautiful smile on her face. My hands holding hers as my feet did the last dance with her and with the day ending hearing my granddaughter saying "grandpa thank you and I will always love you".

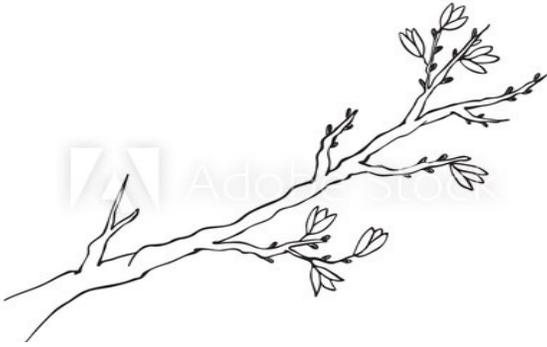
For these are my most precious gifts that life has given to me, to hold all of my precious memories that will last me a life time, thank you my granddaughter, "I love you always".



Holiday Mis-Givings
by Julie Newman

To be born perfect,
only to be maimed.
A missing eye, a missing limb, all for what?
It's the season of giving, they were not given, but taken.
There are those that are poor, without enough food and clothing.
The good people donate.
No ending to the injustices for many.
To be born perfect, only to suffer.
It is important to know the plight of other's.
It is imperative that we learn the value of life.
On this Thanksgiving and season of holiday festivities, all those who take the time to help and donate, should be thanked.
More importantly, we should take the time to Think.
Thinking is for free.
We should use that Freedom so that the future prevents the "scars of war", and no one suffers from lack of food, housing or disgrace.
On this Thanksgiving and holiday season that encompasses Christmas and Hanukah, let us pray and think how to have an enduring future of love without war, kindness without fear and a place to call home, to feel safe and happy.
The world is a place with many kinds of people.
Even mean people need love.
Who knows how or why people get to be the way they are.
Thinking, is the answer.
Before a bad act is committed to ruin a life, think of consequences.
Think once, twice and again.
Each year will become richer.
No one will be hurt or maimed.
No one goes hungry.
All will have a safe place to live.
The basics of living, is that too much to ask?
Happy Thanksgiving.
Time to Think again.





Life of a Branch

By Tony Trappanotto

High above the ground below sits a branch of
loneliness,
as it waits for the first sign of a Spring kiss,
and with it will bring with each passing day,
many buds that will surly makes it's way,
to blossom into leaves of many shades of green,
and start it's life as it comes on the scene,
and as time goes by so fast it seems,
many shades of golden hue appears like a dream,
than as I watch each golden leaf as time goes
around,
turn to rustic brown and falls to the ground,
there again above the ground as I sit all alone,
watching the snow of winter come and go,
and wait for the coming of another Spring,
for with it will bring the leaves of green and the
birds will sing.

Origins

by Carlo Frank Calo

They were simple folk,
Leaving the familiar for the unknown;
A new home, a new land, a new life.
What is their legacy and gift?
My past, my present, my progeny;
A new foundation, a new beginning, and new origins!

I Love the Season's

By Rita B. Rose

I love the seasons, don't you?
The flower bloom of spring as it nears
Pleasant bouquets which fills the air
Autumn, with its gold, red and brown—
I watch leaves happily cascade to the ground
Tumbling like chocolate sprinkles from vanilla
ice cream cones,
I dream of summer fun; wearing few clothes,
As winter appears with its drowsy restful ways
The melting snowflakes tickle and stick to my
tongue
Dissolving on the ground making way for spring to,
once again, come round

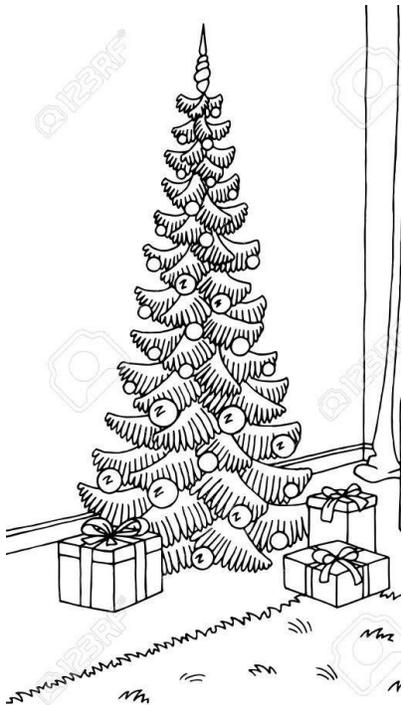
**Author's note: this is a reverse poem*

A Childhood Epiphany

by C.W. Bobell

I was about to complete my fourth year in this current physical life and begin the next, wondering whether certain of my relatives (thankfully not my parents) would, as they had the year before, choose to be frugal by presenting me with a single gift that, in their mind's eye, covered both Christmas and in my mind's eye, the seemingly momentous occasion of reaching my fifth year of life. Of course even at that young age it hadn't gone unnoticed by me, starting the year before, that there was a distinct conflict between what I'd been taught to believe and what was plainly evident to my almost, but not quite, five-year-old self: my suspicion that it might just be people providing gifts at Christmas, namely my parents and some others, just as they had on my birthday; and not this big hulk of a man with a snowy white beard, dressed in a fur trimmed red suit, complete with black boots who, on Christmas Eve, would swoop down on the roof of our little Cape-cod house, in flying a sleigh pulled by eight reindeer, who, as it had been told to me, was magically able to stay parked there without thought to the roof's steep angle.

Then there was the idea, that this same red-suited character was somehow able to shrink down enough to fit down a narrow chimney that actually lead to a fuel-oil burning furnace; and not a fireplace and still blow himself up again long enough to climb the stairs to our living room and the waiting tree in order to deposit all the goodies, which had miraculously made the transition big to small and back again, along with him. Still, for some unknown reason my four-year-old mentality needed more proof of my suspicion before relinquishing a belief that had always been the truth to my, oh so young, way of thinking.



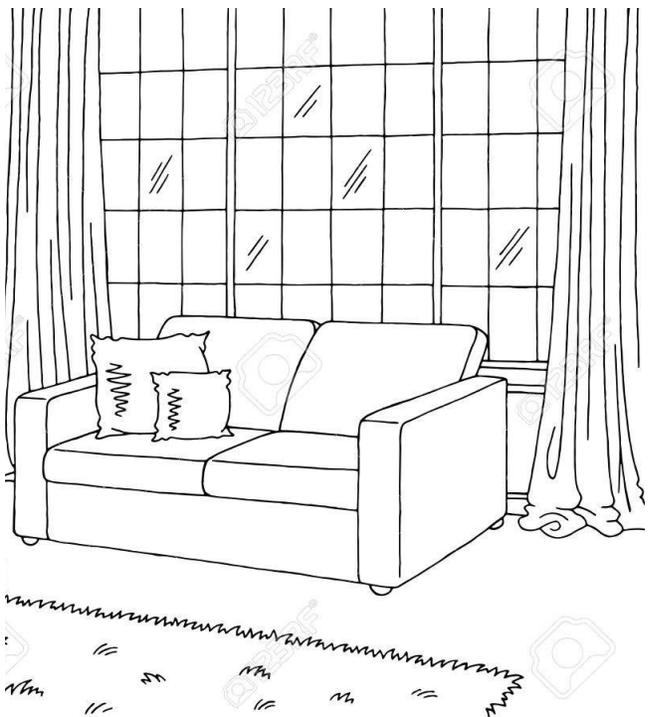
With the latter in mind, I willingly and happily experienced my fifth birthday celebration on the 21st of December, complete with the homemade chocolate cake covered with chocolate icing my mom made especially for the occasion. Waiting the three days and two nights until Christmas Eve was usually the time frame for Mom, Dad and I, to trim the tree and that year was no different with the star at the very top, always the crowning glory of our effort. After the eleven o'clock news on Christmas Eve it was time to go to bed. And as I climbed the stairs I paused to look at the tree I'd helped trim, looming larger than it actually was, all lit up, the glow of its different colorful lights filling the small living room with a warm glow of color, consuming and canceling out the cold stark light of the twelve inch black and white screen that was by then letting mom and dad know whether there would be a white Christmas or not.

I got in bed and lie there for a while, listening to mom and dad talking at such low volume that I couldn't really hear what they were saying. A few minutes passed and when I could no longer hear my parents' conversation or the sound of the TV any longer, it seemed my que to eyeball what might be taking place down in our living room. With that, I quietly slipped out of bed making sure my feet didn't make a sound as they touched the floor and went to the door at the top of the stairs. Lying down in the dark, tummy to the floor I cautiously peaked at what would demolish forever my fantasy concept of Christmas. Mom and dad were setting out brightly wrapped gifts at the foot of our beautiful little tree; and as I watched it all take place it occurred to me that it must have been Dad and/or mom who had eaten the cookies we'd left out for Santa.

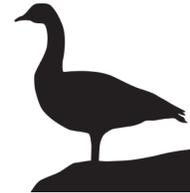
Having seen what I needed to see, I congratulated myself for finding out the truth and quickly retreated back to my bed to sleep the night, dreaming of the electric train set I hoped would be under the tree (Santa or no Santa).

Christmas morning turned out to be just as wonderful without the man in the red suit; and after all had been said, unwrapped and done, I did in fact receive the train set and thought all was right with the world. As dad helped me connect the train tracks it was, in my mind's eye, time to confront the perpetrators of the now disproven concept of Santa I'd been sold as Gospel. "No, he doesn't actually exist as a person, only in spirit," my dad answered. Shocked a bit at his being candid and very honest, I listened intently as he went on to explain that Santa represented the spirit of giving during the holidays season; and I should concentrate more on the celebration of Jesus, Christ's birthday, because after all, Christmas meant Christ's mass. On and on he went trying with some amount of success to deflect what he thought might be my disappointment at finding out the truth. When he was done, I knew my world would be different from then on, but said nothing except, "Thanks dad." We continued to set up the trains.

So it was that reality which became dominant over fantasy that Christmas. Santa, The Easter Bunny, Tinkerbell and all the other fantasy figures would exist only as fictitious entities in my mind from that day on. Though nothing is fact, would ever be the same for me concerning Christmas over the rest of my Childhood, I would grow up believing that though the stuff I'd receive at Christmas was usually awesome, the holiday was, after all the glitz was over, really about celebrating the birth of a man who preached we should love one another.



The Gift
by Jane Malone



Janus is the roman god for beginnings and endings, gates and passageways. His image has two faces; as he is able to look to the past and the future. This story is about beginning again when and where you least expect it. Our story takes us to an abandoned copper mine in Butte, Montana. It was once called “The Richest Hill on Earth” having supplied over one billion tons of copper, zinc and lead.

It closed its gates and shut off the water pumps, at the time of our first Earth Day in 1982. Water began to seep into the enormous crater, rising one foot per month. The water was turning iridescent blue, red and copper. The environmentalists noted that nothing was able to grow in or near the lake. Not even an insect could be found crawling or buzzing around!

It soon had a nickname “The Lake of Death” and became a tourist stop. Can you imagine a top superfund site in America charging spectators to visit, and they even have a gift shop! The website Atlas Obscurer recommends a stop.

OK now let us get to the backstory. In 1995, a local resident reported that 342 migrating snow geese had landed on the lake. When he returned the next morning, all of them had died. Years later, at nearby Montana Tech, a couple of biochemists had left for an expedition to collect research samples. Upon their return to the college, they find that their refrigerators holding 15 years of samples were unplugged! They were devastated and figured out quickly that without samples you haven’t any proof; which also meant no further funding.

Working through their shock, they began to look for new sources of funding. But they had lost their enthusiasm. One morning, their friend and colleague Bill walked in with a stick in a plastic bag. It was covered in green algae. “Look at this” he said, I found some slime forming at the lake. Can it be, they thought. They sent out samples of the algae to their scientific community, hoping that someone could identify the source of this new growth.

They got their answer. Someone had the perfect match. The algae growing on the stick matched perfectly with - Uh Oh, buckle up folks -cells inside the snow geese butts, putting it nicely!

You got it! The 342 snow geese that stopped overnight left the lake a present. This algae is the formula for renewal, to get life going again where nothing has been able to survive. Funding has been granted since they are demonstrating that it has the capacity to remove heavy metals from the environment and possibly patients who have been exposed.

But according to the myth, Janus roams the hallways at night, repairing and monitoring what needs to be fixed, we call him the janitor.



Just Keep Walking

By Patricia Soper

On New Year's Day, I had the profoundly beautiful experience of my first formal group Labyrinth Walk. It was held indoors at the Unitarian Universalist community of Stony Brook. Large windows overlook the surrounding woods, creating a lovely meditative setting which was enhanced by celestial strains of live harp music.

Linda, the facilitator, gathered us in a seated circle for introduction and sharing of John O'Donohue's essay on beginnings. I was first introduced to the author's poetry on the last morning of a retreat 8 years ago, when I was at a pivotal moment of transition, although I had no idea then what form it would take. The writer insightfully captures, in his poem, *For a New Beginning*, that gradual deepening awareness that you've outgrown the safety of sameness, and have begun to walk in a new direction, even though the destination is not yet clear. It made me weep in recognition. I'm experiencing another more gradual change now, so Linda's reading about "beginnings" from the poet's book, To Bless the Space Between Us, was also very meaningful to me.

Linda gave us suggestions for choosing an intention for our walk. Among the possibilities was to use the Labyrinth to feel close to someone who had died. I lost my brother at the very beginning of 2018, but I am at peace with his death, after a painful illness, so I chose her next suggestion and dedicated my walk to a loved one's current challenge. Linda gave us cards for writing and wearing our intention close to our heart as we followed the Labyrinth which is painted onto the floor at UUSB and was surrounded by tiny lights for the occasion. After I wrote my intention of support for another, I added my awareness that I was also beginning my own path into 2019, which I want to travel with deliberate consciousness.

About 40 of us had chosen to walk the Labyrinth this New Year's Day. To fit comfortably, twelve would begin, a group that included me. As each of us finished, someone from the next twelve would enter. Linda instructed us to pause at each turn, as we slowly spiraled toward the center. The turn creates a shift from left brain to right brain thinking, and vice versa, and a new perspective on our intention may arise. That was indeed what happened. My intention gradually sculpted itself into the realization that strengthening and standing in my own truth is the best way to support others.

After I reached the center and stood there awhile, deepening my resolve and releasing old patterns and energies, I did not know how to exit the Labyrinth. I stepped forward and walked along the path, but became increasingly confused. Others walked toward me, instead of in the same direction and I began to think I was doing it wrong and getting more into the Labyrinth instead of heading out. I was very conscious that people were waiting to enter and I feared I was taking too long, but I did not want to cross the lines to short cut to the outer part of the circle. I felt a bit panicked as I neared where Linda stood guiding each new walker into the Labyrinth. I caught her eye and whispered, "How do I get out?" She smiled and answered, "Just keep walking." Her response reassured me, and though I could not see how the paths between the lines would spiral back to the exit, I followed her advice and kept moving forward. Gradually, I felt a smile form on my face as I realized the words "just keep walking" held a message from the Universe for my journey into the new year.

Finally, I reached the last segment of the Labyrinth, and saw the end just steps ahead. I paused, felt the power of my evolved intention, and walked out. My eyes caught Linda's, and my smile broadened into silent, grateful acknowledgement of her inspired guidance. "What a metaphor for life," I said to her later, "for all those anxious moments when we don't see the solution, or way out of a dilemma, and feel hopeless."

When all had completed the walk, we again sat in circle to reflect on our experiences. Linda read more of John O'Donohue's essay on beginnings and then passed a velvet bag from which we blindly chose a 'Fortune Cookie' style strip of paper with a line from the reading. The one that came to me also spoke of going forward. "*Beginnings are new horizons that want to be seen. They are not regressions or repetitions.*" Beginnings, he tells us in the next line, "*fiercely free us from the grip of the past.*" Take that first courageous step, he encourages. Even when you don't know where the path will lead, guidance will appear and lead you to yourself. Consciously, step by step, *Just Keep Walking*.



About the Authors' Six Word Biographies

Carlo Frank Calo: **Pondering life's journey; enjoying it more!**

Christine Colligan: **Star-drop in a cosmic sea.**

Megan Goff: **Always writing from the heart.**

Julie Newman: **Perceptive, honest, kind and open-minded.**

Nicole Peters: **Forging the road ahead, endless skies.**

Katherine Regina: **Shelving books, writing stories, exploring worlds.**

Rita B. Rose: **Resilient, Perceptive, Honest, Kind, Sage**

Patricia Soper: **Discovering mystical wisdom in nature & crone-hood.**

Tony Trapanotto: **Energetic, Helpful, Friend, Companion, Dad, Grandparent**

J. Roland Sullivan: **Womb to crypt; so be it!**

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