

Village Voices

In Our Own Words

Volume 19 Number 170

February 2025

LITTLE LOVE STORIES

It's the month with Valentine's Day at its center. So we asked you to celebrate the love and write from the heart about someone or something you loved. Sharing your wonderful, heartfelt stories with the entire Community is such a joy.

With Oodles of Love,

Your *Village Voices* Editors/Staff

*Anne Baber, Henry Baird, Nan Fremont,
Kathy Hoff, Mea Kammerlen, Nina Moyer,
Sara Pollack, and Lisa Williams.*



JANUARY TO JUNE

by Lynne Waymon

January: As we sat in front of your fireplace, you pulled out the *Burpee Seed Catalogue* and said, "Let's decide what to plant this summer." February: OMG! You're growing lettuce under lights in Pyrex dishes in your kitchen! March: You, the never-had-a-pet guy, like my cats! April: I suggested, "Let's have an

Easter egg dying party." "Fun!" you grinned. May: I confided to a good friend, "THIS is a man to be reckoned with." June: Looking back, it's clear you had me at *Burpee Catalogue*. Forty-six years later: So many enchantments. So little time.



LOVE IN ACTION

by Richmond Shreve

My granddaughter's eyes lit up as she handed me her broken toys, trusting I could fix anything. She'd sit close, watching my every move, and when the job was done, she'd sprint around the house, shouting, "Poppy fixed it!" For decades, I've poured my heart into restoring what's broken—epoxying earrings for neighbors, reviving corroded flashlights, rescuing crashed computers, and outwitting hackers' scams. My greatest joy, though, has been salvaging over 200 devices to give refugee youth a chance to rebuild their lives. For me, fixing isn't just a skill—it's love in action, making the broken whole again.

TENDERHEARTED
—LIKE YOU
by Peggy Pollock

Dying, you said I would find someone else. I said never. Then I tested the waters of online dating. A guy named John. Professor. Age seventy-five. Tenderhearted—like you.

Was it you who sent John to me?

Forty-nine years ago today, we placed gold rings on one another's fingers. Now, I cherish your gratitude for life as you faced its end.

Four days ago, I married John and placed one of our gold rings on his left hand. He will never take it off, believing he is the beneficiary of my deep love for you.

You would have liked John.



TURNING OUT
by Todd Waymon

She wasn't much to look at, hiding there in the back under some other kittens. One eye-patch white and one black, like a pirate. But she was his sister, and I figured you do not separate a brother from his sister. So we got them both. She was shy, withdrawn even. I said she'll come around, she's still turning out. I remem-

ber the day when she meowed and climbed up my pant-leg into my lap, curled up, apparently deciding I was OK. I decided that I was in love with Petunia.



WINTER'S SPOON
REVISITED
by John Wood

Especially now,
Warming pans, down quilts, flannel
sheets *passé*,
One calls on body heat
To blunt the North Wind's bite.

In this a younger you excelled
And still are a delight.
Spooner without parallel,
Closing out the bitter winter's night.

I am content, at peace,
As, side-by-side, warm bodies share
Cold noses, in rhythmic cadence,
Breathing frosted air.



À LA NANCY DREW
by Anne Baber

Often on page one, certainly by the end of the first chapter, the main character returns—and my heart leaps. Nancy again hops into her red roadster and

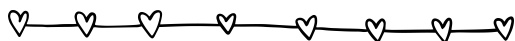
speeds off to solve another mystery. Writers churn out series at a rate of more than one a year. I read a slew. Chief Inspector Gamach, Maisie Dobbs, and Hieronymus “Harry” Bosch are old friends. I can’t wait to open the newest volume and see them again. I’ve been known to pre-order the latest—and stay up til midnight to download it. “Hello there, you’re back,” I murmur.



YES IS A PLEASANT COUNTRY

by Todd Waymon

It was the 70s. I had been to California. I was dating a hippie. We had chosen the same spiritual community. She had two cats. She lived downtown in a three-story walk-up. She had made a hooked rug with a quote from e e cummings: *YES is a pleasant country*. In her bathroom, a claw-foot tub and a mural of wild animals. A loft bed. She was easy to talk with, and she was gorgeous! She was about to co-lead a course in Relationship Building. I signed up. I was in love!



LOVING SERVICE

by Marguerite Chandler

As a high school student, my biggest achievement was winning the bookkeeping award. But in college, I discovered I had a facility for organizing and coordi-

nating events. Later, as a business professional, I used this skill to found a number of non-profits—the county Food Bank Network, a HomeSharing program, historic tours of our Revolutionary War sites, and later, Celebrate NJ! What I love best is helping groups achieve big goals, being of service, being a contributor to my community, seeing us do together what none of us could do alone, creating beauty, and experiencing the spirit of unity and belonging! Joy!



BABY NOISES

by Carolyn Michener

Jane and Hans Peters had grown up in different churches, so they looked around when they settled in Bristol and found Bristol Friends Meeting in 1941. They enjoyed the fellowship and quietness of worship without ritual. When their baby was born, they took him to Meeting for Worship with them. One time, he was making little baby noises as babies do. Jane was about to get up and take little Hans Jr. out of the room when she felt a hand on her shoulder. It was a woman sitting on the bench in back of her who then whispered, “Please stay, we love babies.”

Thank you, Bristol Friends Meeting for being welcoming to my parents and to my brother and me.

HEAVEN SENT

by Elaine Ferrara

Around dawn of the day of my older sister's viewing, I experience a glorious dream. Facing me is the top of a deep purple umbrella. It is covered with tiny pink plum blossoms. Ever so slowly, it starts to spin, until it is lying horizontally. I become aware that there is someone standing, gracefully, in the center of the now cupped umbrella. The person, wrapped completely in a white robe, except for the eyes, absorbs my entire attention. With deep sadness, I recognize the energy of my sister's eyes. Then, with a few moments of shared meditation, her eyes envelop me in a tranquility that is tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of times more than any tranquility that I can possibly comprehend.

Upon awakening, I see one of my younger sisters staring at me with wonder. As she tells me that I am surrounded with golden light, my thoughts change from disbelief to certainty in the existence of Heaven. I inform her that our older sister, Celeste (meaning Heaven), is there with us. We both thank her for her gifts of life and LOVE.



SEARCH AND RESCUE

by Lisa Taylor

"The more it snows!" Kippy yodels,
Nose deep in fresh snow,
"The colder my toes!"
"Tiddely pom,"
Adds a muffled voice.
Kippy blinks and
Pushes the snow away.
Three shivering, miserable animals
Huddle together.
"The snow took my tail!" laments a small donkey.
"I am hungry!" shouts a small bear.
"I am scared," whispers a small pig.
Gently, Kippy mouthes each animal and carries it to her rug.
Lying down, she rolls on her side.
"I miss my puppies," she says, tucking each little animal
Against her soft, furry stomach.
And they all fall asleep in the sun.

(As related by Kippy, The Big White Dog, to her Person, Lisa Taylor.)



ABOUT MARY & ME

by Lynne Waymon

Four decades ago, we watched a TV show about the trials and tribulations of "elderly people." It all seemed rather remote, yet we must have been moved in some way, because that night, although

we'd already been gal pals for 10 years, we pledged to be more than just friends. We promised to stick together, to support each other into old age. Now it's not remote at all. It's here—we're in our 80s—she's in Maryland, I'm here. So, with weekly Zooms, funny cards, rich memories, hard conversations, shared sadness, celebrated joys, we're just what we always wanted to be.



ONE LOOK WAS ALL IT TOOK

by Joan Menschenfreund

I never had the experience of falling in love at first sight. But, that day, there he was . . . handsome, regal, and aloof. I was besotted.

Why was I even thinking about him? I'm still grieving over Archie, who is not replaceable. I thought this while stopping at a pet shop that allowed rescuers to display pets for adoption. On the spur of the moment, I went in just to take a peek. When I left, I held what has become one of the joys of my life for the last 17 years. His name is RamBeau, a huge feline fluff ball. And I'm still in love.



IT'S A MYSTERY

by Lynne Waymon

You don't know me. But I know you. I've seen you three times in 10 years. You're such a tease! Early one morning, lucky Todd spied you in your handsome red coat drinking at our small patio pond. I was still snoozing. A smorgasbord of delicacies—insects, mice, rabbits, squirrels, fruit—lure you out of your den to the meadow and woods. I love how you jump high up in the air then come down hard where you hope your dinner is hiding! Of all the creatures I could fall in love with, why you, Mr. Fox?



WORKING TOGETHER

by Kathy Hoff

“Don't go on the roof to take the stone off,” I ordered Dad. “Get Leonard from up the road.” The large, flat stone covered the chimney winters to keep birds and squirrels out of the Maine cabin. Now, as both neared 90, it was time for my parents to get younger help opening up for their summer stay.

Mid-summer, when I visited, I asked, “Did Leonard take the stone off?” Dad shook his head. “Nope. I did it.” Then, quickly, to forestall my scolding, he added, “But it was all right. Mother went up with me.”

ODE TO THE SKUNK CABBAGE

by Mae Kaemmerlen

You can love your dazzling Orchid
Or your fragrant spicy Lovage
But my treasured winter sweetheart
Is the lowly Skunk Cabbage.

Why do I love thee,
Symplocarpus foetidus,
Born deep in sodden muck,
Dark and malodorous?

You always rouse my heart
As upwards you thrust,
Melting swamp, snow, and ice,
Boring into brittle crust.

Up from slithering rhizome,
Your leaves of reddish blood
Pierce winter's frosty air
And furl your fruitful bud.

You're not so much a beauty,
As a lovely alien beast.
Fierce pioneer of the onset
Of a brimming vernal feast.

You welcome Spring
Long before Spring
Is a Thing.

Thank you, Skunk Cabbage



THE SEASONS OF MY LIFE

by Judy Kleen

Ever since I was a child, I have loved *The Four Seasons* by Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741). Vivaldi was the Violin Master, then Music Director at Ospedale della Pista, an orphanage in Venice, followed by Maestro di Capella at the court in Mantua. During his lifetime, he wrote over 500 concertos for string and wind instruments. *The Four Seasons* is a set of four violin concertos, one for each season of the year, written during his tenure in Mantua. It is one of the earliest and impressively effective examples of program music, or music with a narrative that evokes a story or scene.

I began violin lessons at age eight. My grandfather, a WWII refugee, bought me a ¾-size violin when my grandparents visited what had been their home in Vienna. I studied with the violin professor at Ithaca College, Alcestis Perry. The Perrys bought the house next door to us. Alcestis paid me to supervise five-year-old Bobby on the violin, so that she did not have to hear him practice. With my \$85 earnings, I purchased a better violin bow. (It was recently appraised for over \$5,000!) When I was a senior in high school, I decided to change teachers and requested to study one of *The Four Seasons* concertos. I was very excited for my first lesson. When my new teacher arrived, he told me that he had selected another Vivaldi concerto for me, not one

of the *Seasons*. I don't think that he quite understood how disappointed I was. I never stopped thinking about these pieces.

Over the years, I have heard many performances of *The Four Seasons*, from early music ensembles with period instruments to modern orchestral performances. A memorable performance was at Sainte-Chapelle in Paris with gorgeous stained-glass windows as the backdrop. Most recently, Bob and I, along with Jude Cobb and Larry Hurst, ventured into Trenton to the historic Masonic Temple for a performance by candlelight. With maybe a thousand battery-powered candles twinkling, the Vivaldi *Seasons* were intertwined with Astor Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*. It was a breathtaking concert.

So, 62 years after I didn't get to study the *Seasons*, I have decided that it is time to give it a try. Fortunately, I did not downsize my violin music, and there it was, the music that I had purchased in 1963. I am working on the first movement of the *Summer* concerto. Vivaldi wrote a sonnet with each movement of these concertos. The sonnet that relates to this *Allegro non molto* movement outlines the scene:

*Under the heat of the burning summer sun,
Languish man and flock: the pine is
parched.
The cuckoo finds its voice and suddenly,*

*The turtledove and goldfinch sing.
A gentle breeze blows,
But suddenly the north wind appears.
The shepherd weeps because, overhead,
Lies the fierce storm, and his destiny.*

Maybe when summer emerges from this frigid January, I will be ready to share this wonderful music with you, and you can hear the cuckoos, the turtledoves, and the raging storm.



WINTER'S SPOON REVISITED 2 by John Wood

We lie there cheek to jowl,
Your muzzle on the pillow next to mine,
My close and selfless friend, my Lab,
Now that it's winter time.



THE WAY by Betsy Bennett

I love walking on the towpath.
It restores the soul.

SNAKES I HAVE KNOWN

by Alice Warshaw

It started in seventh grade. As part of a science project, I wrote a report about snakes. Soon after that, Dad asked if I wanted a snake. Why would I want a snake?

I wanted a puppy!

But since I was allergic to furry things, Dad seemed to think that a snake would fit the bill. He was right.

A friend of the family in the Science Department at the college suggested that a Florida kingsnake might be a good choice. They are constrictors, passive, and don't mind being handled. Also, our friend offered to provide a white mouse from time to time for dinner.

We got a comfortable screened cage with a screened top.

The snake arrived as promised, and it was a delight. Stunning black and white markings. Easy to handle. (Snakes are not slimy, you know.) Always testing the air with its tongue, it became my pet. Whenever I entered my bedroom where it lived, it would slowly climb the cage side expecting to be taken out.

In the course of its time with us, there were several remarkable events.

Within several weeks of arrival, SHE laid several eggs. We found out they needed to be kept moist, so we placed them in a wide-mouthed jar with some damp soil. Of course they got brown and moldy. We never knew if they were fertilized.

Eventually, this 14" reptile discovered the lid of her cage ajar one day and went exploring. We searched the apartment thoroughly, saying, "Where would you go, if you were a snake?" While she was in residence, we had always provided fresh water; so that was our main concern. Would she die of dehydration?

A good month later, Mom found her stretched out in the linen closet sheet drawer—slim, but alive. You'll be disappointed to learn that Mom didn't go shrieking, "Snake! Snake!" Mom liked her, too, and was glad she was alive.

A constrictor's eating is a fascinating process, an exercise in speed, strength, and expansion. Once the prey is subdued, the snake separates its upper and lower jaws and inches the whole mouse down its gullet beginning at the nose. Stretching, stretching that mouth bigger and bigger, while back-facing teeth take hold. A little grab left, then right, then left again till the tail slowly disappears. I cannot imagine how the snake can breath during that whole stretching process, but it appears to do just fine.

I liked to imagine a wink and licking of lips when she was finished.

During the two years that we had her, occasionally she would ignore an offered mouse. We would leave her alone then, and if, after an hour or two, it was clear she was not hungry, we would retrieve the mouse.

Sadly, one evening we returned to find that the mouse had won. My pet lay mouth agape with a huge gap where the back of her neck should have been.

I cried.

Mad at the mouse—which I now called a RAT!

This was a lesson in the ways of nature.

All my friends knew and liked my snake. After she perished, a variety of snakes decided to take up residence with me. Each is interesting in its way. None handled as well as the Florida kingsnake.

There were two eastern hog-nosed snakes. This kind is stout-bodied, and their snouts turn up at the tip making them look vicious. They are actually quite timid. It is notable that when threatened they play dead, just like an opossum, flipping over onto their backs, mouths open. Mine were both youngsters—one 5" the other 7".

Another was a lovely young ring-necked snake. About 8" long and slender like a pencil, it had a shiny chocolate-brown coat with a tan ring at the neck.

In recent years, I've had occasional encounters with snakes here at Pennswood. Watching an adult garter snake slither across the sidewalk in front of me was a delight.

In the Elwood stairwell one day, a garter snake had reached the third step, when I disturbed its travels. Remembering that garter snakes turn into defecating pin-wheels if picked up by their heads only, I grabbed this one by the head and tail and placed it in the greenery outside.

Most recently, I found a 6" DeKay's brown snake just inside an exit door near J building. It seemed nearly dead though looked uninjured. In the midst of that long drought, I wondered if it was dehydrated. Limited by time, I took it outside and placed it on the mulch, doubting it would make it.

And finally . . .

In Florida several years ago, I was weeding the front garden. While glancing at the cleared dirt, I was treated to a glimpse of a slender, maybe 5" snake slithering like quicksilver from one side to the other. Blue. Blue quicksilver!

Trying to make sense of what I saw, I questioned whether it was a snake at all. It definitely moved like a snake!

Inside the house again, I looked it up online. Infant Blue Coral Snake? Probably not. Mine was smaller. More likely a blue garter snake. Who knew there was such a thing?



TOSpv.org

SPREAD MORE LOVE

As part of the Telling Our Stories celebration of Pennswood's 45th Anniversary, you can say "Thanks!" In Passmore Lounge, on a column in front of the long wall of displays, you'll find a bowl holding special notecards. Take one—or more—to write a special "Thank you, I appreciate you" to a staff person or fellow resident.

Our caring community of staff and residents is a legacy of love we receive when we arrive here and pass from one generation to the next. Help spread the love.

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