

Martha L. Deed

**INTERSECTIONS**  
a twenty-day journal  
of the unexpected

LIBRARY OF MARVELS

Intersections  
a twenty-day journal  
of the unexpected

Martha L. Deed  
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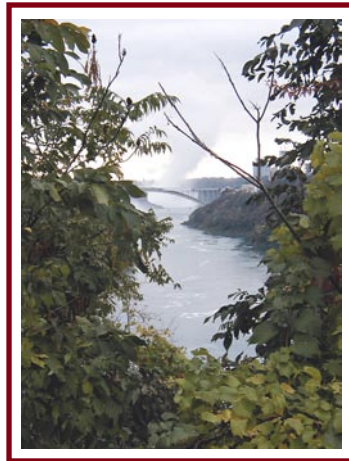
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# Introduction



*Niagara River Gorge*

*Spume from Falls rises to sky  
Rocks and trees sip waters' mist*

US Rt 62 begins its journey West to South to West just East of the Rainbow Bridge in Niagara Falls, NY. From the rushing waters of the Niagara River, the road ends in the clay and sludge of the Rio Grande in El Paso, TX. The trip will take 20 days and wind 2000 miles through hills and flatlands, old cities and old mountains, past oil fields and desert and heat.



For me, a poetry reading is special when I come away from it with a new idea of what I can do with my writing. Something fresh suggests I can do something with words and images that I hadn't thought of before or else had half forgotten.

As a student and young adult, I read Eastern texts, enjoyed literary forms not taught in English literature, and some of my writing was informed by my knowledge not only of the texts themselves, but also by the sensibility that generated those spare words.



When I began writing poetry again after years of professional and/or technical writing, it seemed that both my voice and word palette had changed.

I almost didn't recognize myself.



Poet Michael Czarnecki gave a reading at the library in Niagara Falls, NY, on the eve of his Rt 62 journey. For the next 20 days, he would drive the length of Rt 62, travelling approximately 100 miles a day, stopping for poetry readings, hikes, explorations of towns along the way.

He plans to keep a daily journal and to publish each day's writing to an email list which he invited his listeners to join. On a selfish level, I want him to write his journal and to receive comments from his readers, but as a writer, I wonder if his journal plus dialogue might alter his observations.

I am in the mood for a trip and also for experimentation, so I have decided to ride along. For at least the first three-and-a-half days, Michael will follow a road that I, too, have travelled. Then his view will be new until he reaches Tahlequah, OK where I have relatives.

Michael's journey will be physical; mine cerebral. Michael's route is on the map. While he does not know whom he will meet or how each day will be, I have no such roadmap. I will simply use this time to observe my surroundings more closely, to see what I have been missing.

My journey will end the same day as Michael's – April 30, 2006. For Michael, it will be the day he sees the north bank of the Rio Grande River in El Paso before starting the drive back to his home in the hills of New York 's Finger Lakes region.

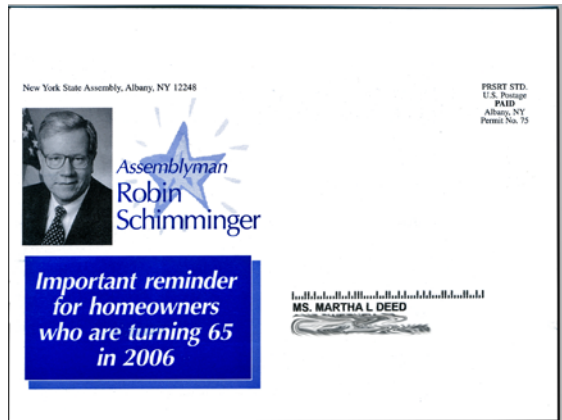
For Michael, April 30th will also mark the point where his journey takes him back through familiar landscapes. But for me, April 30th is the eve of my 65th birthday. Unlike Michael, I will not be circling back through familiar territory.

Rather, I will be crossing a divide between official middle age and official old age. The Medicare information is already starting to arrive.



*Nabisco plant, Niagara Falls, NY*

# Intimations



*Howling at the wind is not my cup of tea,  
Maplethune said as she sipped her echinacea  
through the cracks in her broken tooth one April morning.  
And whinging is not an option as I am far too old for that.  
You do know, she gasped, sucking air from stiffened lungs,  
I'm about to turn 65. Her declaration was cut short  
by pain tearing through her skull as her blood pressure  
rose to the occasion. Becoming 65 is nothing these days  
she declared peering at her listener through baby cataracts.  
They say it's getting younger all the time. Sixty-five  
is not too old for fending off bad boys with arthritic knees  
or fighting City Hall's hike in our property assessment.  
Aah! she halted with a start as the second shot of pain pierced her brain  
I meant to tell you that overnight God claimed my back as His and left  
donkey hide behind. So you'll excuse me for not getting up to greet you  
at the door. You are, after all, my favorite mailman.  
And thank you for the card.*

## Days 1 & 2

*from living room chair  
I roll south on 62  
adventures await*



*American Falls, Niagara Falls, NY*

Michael Czarnecki's first day's journal greets me in the morning (<http://www.foothillspublishing.com/poetguy/id62.htm>). He goes by "Poetguy" online, and he's uneasy at first with what he has taken on this time. Is it age? This is not his first long solo journey. His others were undertaken years ago, and in honor of this trip, he has re-issued his last road trip book, "Twenty Days on Route 20," (Foothills Publishing, 2006.)

*a Bocce pizza  
worn-down homes off Bailey's streets  
open journey's door*

After the reading in Niagara Falls, I began reading the Rt 20 book to sense his urge to travel – not unlike mine. However, unlike me, he has given in to his wanderlust. I read the entries, strung like beads from Boston to Oregon's Pacific coast. I read too fast, but slowly enough to contemplate how difficult it is to travel from one new place to another new place day-by-day.

For the trip to work poetically, one must have the gift of connection to land and people. But for the trip to work emotionally, the poet must have an equal gift of separation. If the traveler cannot disconnect as he drives, he will find himself burdened almost literally by the



regret of leaving this fascinating place, that fascinating person, that wonderful landscape incompletely explored.

I saw that in the Rt 20 book: a recurring intention to return. Yet as I read, I wondered how anyone could possibly return to so many places, reconnect with them all. It would never be the same again, if only because it would become familiar – a kind of Schrödinger's Cat version of being on the road. A reserve could set in. The people who spoke freely to the traveler passing through might be less open with the returning friend.

As for the dark thoughts that first afternoon when Poetguy revisited his old neighborhood in the Bailey section of Buffalo, I wondered if it might not have been experience speaking – not a premonition, but rather a knowing:

Whatever happens in the next few weeks is essentially unpredictable and will carry with it the challenge of response and departure.



*black ribbon unwinds  
past fairgrounds, Friends' meetinghouse  
sleeping fields and waking malls*



*Erie County Fairgrounds, Hamburg, NY*

*traveler enclosed  
in cage on wheels, eyes open  
to sky and city*

*not knowing what lies  
ahead this time, but only  
what he's left behind*



*Friends Meetinghouse, Gowanda, NY*

*Quaker meetinghouse  
sleeps in sun, its members sleep  
shaded under trees*



Serendipity begins at once at the Audubon sanctuary. A well-varnished friendship picked up unexpectedly. Something happened to the poet there. The word paintings are intact – but not quite centered. There is the need to be on time – and these appointments on the road are surely both a reassurance and a pleasure – which can hurry the haiku a little before their time.

An extra hour here would have revealed more, I think. But there is much to savor, not the least of which is a poet traveler willing to share work in infancy.

Then the first poetry reading in Mercer, PA. There's the balance. What felt lost at Audubon, despite the pleasures, seemed found in the familiar ambience of another library poetry reading. The audience at Mercer, the elderly author driven 70 miles each way to meet her editor and listen to him, the fact that this was the first time this library had offered a poetry program, and drew so many curious about poetry – and about this poet's adventure – erased the first day's apprehension as well. Reminds me of John Woolman's journeys. Did he ever have to choose between planting an apple orchard or meeting Quakers at the next village?

*writing paramount  
or sharing what he's written?  
people want to hear*

At the end of the second day's journal, Michael issues an invitation to respond to his journal entries – an invitation missing from the first day's writing, and something I had thought about. I would like to say, Your work is reaching me. I am thinking about it. This is what it brings to mind.

But then I also think – what would happen then, if those he meets, as well as those he already knows from home, start responding all at once? It would take time from the present trip. He could end up on a journey of e-mails and constrict the time he has for the journey he's constructed for himself.

I can almost hear my father's words:

*I didn't bring you kids  
to Cape Cod's sandy beaches  
to watch you read inside all day*



*What is the sound of one voice speaking wirelessly?  
How much does it weigh the traveler down?*

*In Niagara Falls  
I accept your gift of words  
to travel with you*



*Our Lady of Victory Basilica, Lackawanna, NY*

Godspeed, Poetguy

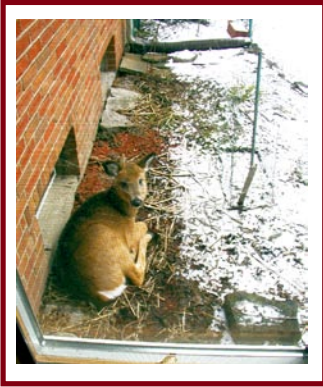
## Day 3

The centering of imagination through embarking on the journey is broken by an irate late-night phone call. Family crisis. Not my family. The blending this night turned to churning lumps – whipped cream gone too far.

*hissing wires thunder  
lightning dims polaris  
static tomorrow*

Being at home also means being open to the unexpected. Although the sudden crises of travel – the broken oil pump or closed diners – can leave one feeling vulnerable and alone, the small crises of home often cast long shadows, chores shadow days. Yet, as I think of the caretaking so many family members perform, how the caretaking diminishes well-planned retirements or shortens career ladders, or disrupts bedtime habits, I also wonder what cause there is for surprise or complaint. Humans are a communal species. The care and protection is fundamental, not optional.

Still – a structured journey down Rt 62 even in this age of cellphones and high speed wireless computer connections offers opportunities not so easily achieved at home – even in a hilltop home – I suspect.



*March 11, 2005*

For more than a year, I've followed the life of a wounded deer I found lying against the brick wall of our house last March, apparently soothing itself with radiated heat. As I stood watching, it turned its head, rose to its feet, slowly walked off through the snow, leaving behind a trail of three distinct sets of tracks and long dashes in the snow.

I photographed the deer and its tracks. I thought it had been shot, its leg broken by Bait and Shoot – a failed program going on in sections of the city.



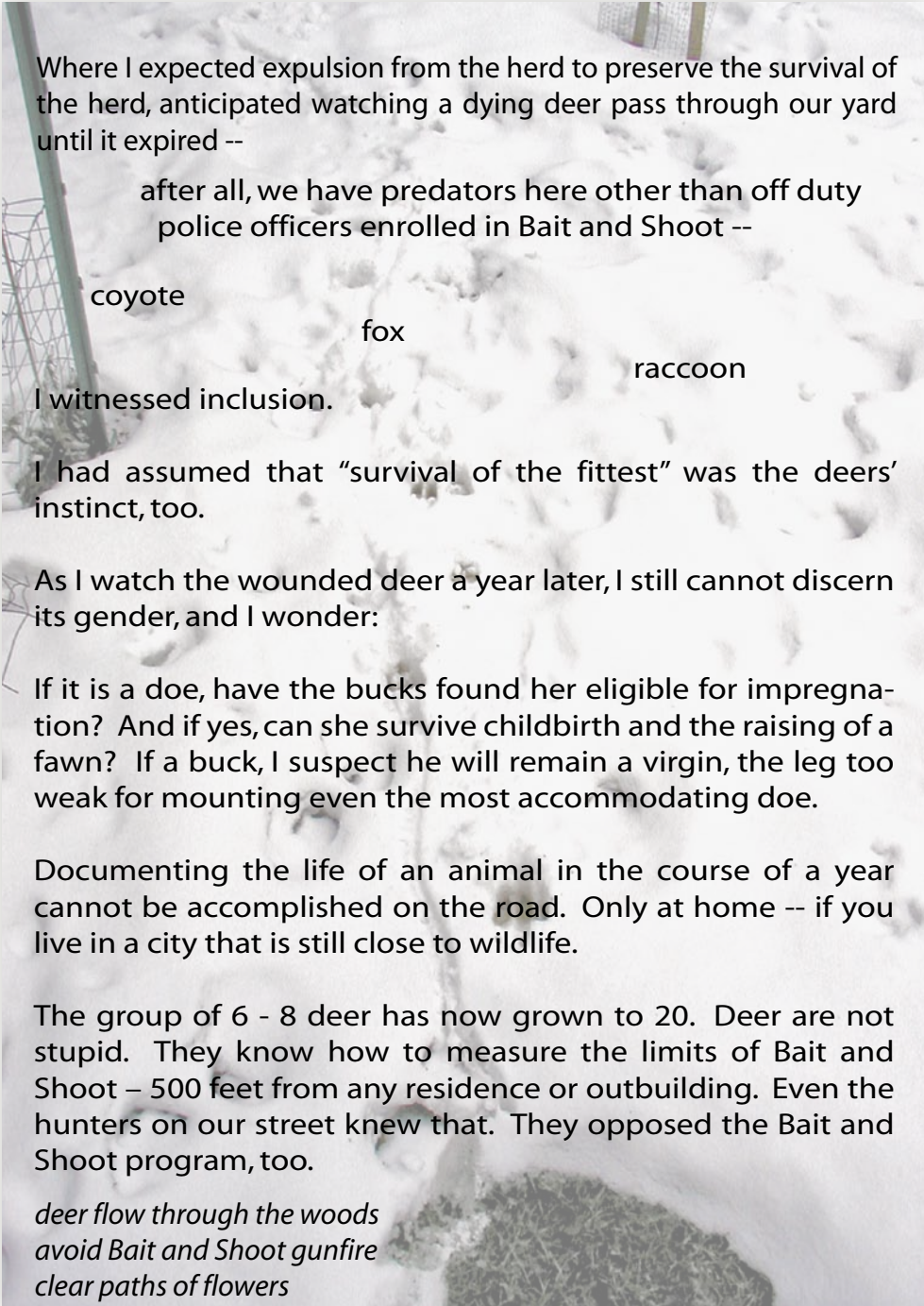
Interrupted here by follow-up call from Circuit City regarding the extended warranty I've been contemplating for this laptop. My ex-husband always buys it; he gives his laptops heavy use, and they never make it through the warranty period without replacement or repair.



*March 11, 2005*



The broken-legged deer has re-appeared many times in the last thirteen months. It has grown. At times its fur has been torn and thin, ribs showing. And almost always, it comes through the yard in a herd. In the early weeks, other deer would nuzzle its head, shoulders, lick its back. Sometimes the wounded deer would trail behind the others. But always, even a year later and somewhat healed, it is in a group.



Where I expected expulsion from the herd to preserve the survival of the herd, anticipated watching a dying deer pass through our yard until it expired --

after all, we have predators here other than off duty police officers enrolled in Bait and Shoot --

coyote

fox

raccoon

I witnessed inclusion.

I had assumed that "survival of the fittest" was the deers' instinct, too.

As I watch the wounded deer a year later, I still cannot discern its gender, and I wonder:

If it is a doe, have the bucks found her eligible for impregnation? And if yes, can she survive childbirth and the raising of a fawn? If a buck, I suspect he will remain a virgin, the leg too weak for mounting even the most accommodating doe.

Documenting the life of an animal in the course of a year cannot be accomplished on the road. Only at home -- if you live in a city that is still close to wildlife.

The group of 6 - 8 deer has now grown to 20. Deer are not stupid. They know how to measure the limits of Bait and Shoot - 500 feet from any residence or outbuilding. Even the hunters on our street knew that. They opposed the Bait and Shoot program, too.

*deer flow through the woods  
avoid Bait and Shoot gunfire  
clear paths of flowers*

March 11, 2005

## Days 4 & 5



*Millersburg, Ohio*

Good Friday - Easter Saturday

Poetguy stayed last night in Hillsboro, Ohio, the town we had planned to make the end-point of our 2001 Rt 62 voyage.

This morning, I awoke to yet another crisis, perhaps more serious than the others. I cannot tell.

Isn't this part of the puzzle – whether to travel or to stay at home? Whether to stay at home and pretend to travel? Should the constraint of the imaginary trip limit communications to those one might receive on the road? Limit the response as well?



This one started yesterday. Ailing daughter is struggling with a recently diagnosed life-threatening disease, an autoimmune disease that attacks the blood vessels anywhere in the body.

It must be aggressively treated with immuno-suppressant drugs. The treatment is hazardous, but without it, the disease has a significant lethality potential. Death is unusual now if the person is treated in a major medical center.

Sara put in a call to her rheumatologist – considering herself an inconvenient set of symptoms, but not yet an emergency. Then she got on a train and went to Boston.



*Corn Hill, Truro, MA*

In the night, she began to break out in lesions – deep ones in the mouth, bleeding one in one ear, and then all her old scars began to open, including her surgery scar from 1989. After that, she began to bruise and bleed everywhere she touched, her face swelled, she got hives, her whole body itched and burned.

Sara wrote to me just before 7 AM saying she would have to go to the ER as soon as her friends wake up. She asked me for her medical summary, a recommendation of which hospital to go to, and help with setting priorities.

I phoned a nurse I know in Boston – and she verified that Brigham was the place to go. I found Sara’s medical summary and forwarded it.

Next, one of Sara’s Boston friends phoned to let me know Sara was on her way to Brigham, but without the information she had requested or the medical record, since she left for the ER before I sent the email.

I phoned the ER. Sara was in the waiting room. Spoke to the clerk. They would like the medical summary. I e-mailed it and receipt was confirmed. It is now printed out and attached to Sara’s record.

For me by now, a lot of time has passed since I became aware of the situation. But in “ER time” with workups and tests, it’s no time at all – less than four hours since she arrived.

Whatever is occurring there is just beginning.

So the question is: What travel am I on? How many travels am I on? Can I be fully present on any of the travels I’m on? The most restful, spirit-centering travel I’m on is with Poetguy somewhere along Rt 62 in Kentucky. Whether I can stay on that road – let alone continue to enjoy that road – is open to question.

And, of course, there is the further question: Should I be on that road? Or will I end up traversing a portion of one of his other journeys – Rt 20 to Boston (though I would take the Thruway and Turnpike under these conditions)?



*Life's uncertainties  
impose themselves on road or home  
travel in the sun*

## Day 6



*Easter Moose, 2006*

Finally, Poetguy is past storms that have clogged roads, and tornado watches under yellow-green skies. The road through Kentucky is narrow and scenic. But on these quiet travels through country roads past views worthy of documentation, there are no shoulders. He cannot stop to write a poem or take a photograph.

No way to capture anything except in mind's eye.

Here, the hours unfold with stories of medical confusion and mishap, and excruciating pain for Sara. Inflamed nerve endings light fires of pain. She stands agonized in the middle of the private room she is finally given – arms outstretched so that no part of her body touches any other part – on a major religious holiday, no less.



*Skin*

She wants me there right now.  
Then will not let me off the phone.  
Needs that more, she says.

Eventually, connections are made. The doctors in Boston speak to the doctor in New York. By then, fluctuating doses of prednisone have rendered her practically a stranger to herself.



*The poet looks at mountains  
will take home only what  
he can remember*

## Day 7

Dyngus Day in Buffalo and especially in Cheektowaga where Polish men and women celebrate the end of Lent's restrictions by swatting one another with willow branches. Poetguy is a Buffalo born-and-raised Polish American.



*Pussy Willows*

Today, he continues his travels in Kentucky – where I am certain there are willows, but no beautiful women clever enough to use them on a traveling poet today to make him feel at home.

I am in North Tonawanda.

Sara remains in Boston where Easter Monday is celebrated with the Boston Marathon. The city is paralyzed by the racers. Even the “T” has difficulty since so much of it is above ground along the route.

First morning call, Sara announces calmly that she has now lost control of two more organ systems. Although she is not medically stable, the patient representative is assisting her transfer to another hospital – across town during the Marathon, and one of her friends will meet her at the second hospital's ER.

And there is no discussion. It is fait accompli before noon. The friend relays a message that they are at the ER at Tufts, awaiting triage.

Confusion abounds.

Her friends are politely dismayed that I have not “hit the road” as yet. They do not know that actually I am somewhere in Kentucky today, seeking beauty and calm in the hills even in rough weather.

I bike along the Erie Canal, take care of practical needs like a tardy haircut – and a trip to the cardiologist’s where blood pressure – for the first time in months – is perfect.

The medicine is working even though life is not.



Fast forward to today at 5 PM – Message is that Tufts is light years better than the Brigham. They seem to know exactly what to do, got her a cooling blanket at once, and she is feeling better, waiting to be transferred onto a floor – plan tentatively is to keep her until the worst is over, then send her back to New York.

As for me – the selfish question is how to balance competing demands – between places, between lives. Turmoil around Sara makes balance difficult. As events unfold, it seems to be very much related to uncertain care – despite kindness – and the uncertainty is frightening to everyone, especially since Sara is in such terrible pain.

I have all I can do to sit at the computer, check e-mail, move files to my flash drive and then to the laptop I’ll take with me so I can continue my journey with Poetguy – I have all I can do even to remember to look outside. And it is beautiful here.

The flowers are beginning to bud. I am searching the ground for a possible rosemary sprout that – well-protected – may have survived our winter. The parsley is already robust, and the rhubarb – well caged on our terrace – may make it this year. The deer got it all a year ago. David moved the remnants – and we caged them. Now we’ll see if adversity has strengthened the plants or caused them to die back altogether.

*Is this a day for poetry?  
No. This is a day  
that demonstrates  
the need for poetry  
and for contemplation.*



*Eating Plants*



Here is the constraint. If there is a day I don't write, I must create an entry after the fact, but the entry must be completely within the context of that day. There is to be no after-the-fact wisdom applied to the day, no use of anything which was not available to me that day, and I will only write about one of those missing days on any day in real time later. I will mark each entry written later with an asterisk.



## Day 8

And I am on the road myself.

The air was crisp and clear, but signs of a violent winter were still evident in overturned and bent hay wagons, the fallen-in roof of a shed here and there, and I made steady but slower progress than usual, driving this long distance alone for the first time since my mini-stroke three years ago.



*NYS Thruway Ramp, Williamsville*

Poetguy is hurting for money – and is putting out a special chapbook to help finance the rest of his trip – and I am on Rt 20 in Lee, Massachusetts, on my way to retrieve Sara when she is ready to leave the second hospital she's been to on her trip to Boston.

While he continues across Kentucky on his Rt 62 trip, I find myself retracing Poetguy's steps (backwards) from his last journey on Rt 20. But I must take the Thruway and Mass Pike, for time is important to respect if I am to help Sara and relieve her friends of responsibility. Poetguy has his deadlines, too, but they are literary, and he has time to think about the implications of what he sees along the road.



Ironically, he – on a route that barely exists in places – is swamped by views of big box stores, while I, travelling major highways, enjoy broad landscapes of rolling still-yellow fields of western NY. As I drive East, the fields begin to steepen, then the worn hills of central New York emerge, until they, in turn, give way to the deep greens of the mountains of western Massachusetts. I cross the Hudson River south of Albany. Here, the Hudson is a blue ribbon far beneath the bridge, not the broad Tappan Zee – two miles across – south of West Point and Haverstraw.

After the Waterford Mall east of Rochester, I see no big boxes at all. Yet I am traversing heavily populated states while he works his way through a largely rural South.

At the first rest stop in Massachusetts, a woman falls in front of me, coffee splashes on her clothes, one shoe flies off. I ask her if she's all right, and she says, "I don't know what happened. My mother died today, and I'm going home." I hand her her shoe and some napkins, wait until she stands, and then hand her her purse and the small bag of chips that survived her tumble.

To myself I say, You think you have trouble. And I also say, Time to stop. Do not drive to Springfield. I go inside and find a list of motels.

Find this one. Comfortable room, lousy phone – and then discover the free wireless connection. Silenced grumbling. Time for sleep. The news from Boston is better now. While Sara is still in too much pain, she is in a hospital that has redesigned itself along hotel lines. She's visiting shops and buying some food for herself in the main lobby, and has been re-assigned to a luxurious private room "by medical necessity" – a sign that the doctors now understand the risks to her of infection. The "luxurious" part, of course, is merely pleasant, not necessary.

I haven't spoken to her since yesterday early morning when she told me she was leaving one hospital and going to another. Since she was incoherent with pain when we spoke, I had little idea of what was going on.



Like Poetguy, I travel with cellphone and laptop to maintain connections with both ends of my journey as well as points in between. But I also have a blood pressure machine with me – something I presume Poetguy does not need to carry around with him.



*Hudson River, Nyack, NY – The Tappan Zee*

*No cell phone at inn  
but wireless is free to use  
chitchat at midnight*

*country roads eschewed  
I press eastward at high speed  
barns and birds fly by*

## Day 9, Part 1



I wake up from good night's sleep, heart pounding.

Are my methods flawed? Is the stress simply too great?

Speeding toward Boston at 65 mph, I could not watch the countryside with any sort of contemplation, so listened to Richard Cohen's "Blind-sided: A Reluctant Memoir," (2003, Harper Audio) for several hours. It's Cohen's story of living with MS and then MS mixed with colon cancer – his point being not to take his listeners or readers through a landscape of medicine, but rather, to contemplate the life and spirit issues, to think about how one decides to live under such difficult conditions, how one manages to flourish on bitter nuggets – life lived unpredictably, disaster always lurking just beyond one's knowledge.

Cohen is an angry man, partly due, I think, to the neurological changes of MS, but he wasn't a meditative sort – or not angry – even in the few years before his illness. What comes through is: he will not be diminished by his body. And that's a good lesson. He is angry, but his book is not angry.

I listened to Cohen to steady myself, I knew better than to listen to the news, which has been uncommonly violent and close and disheartening. If Sara were not sick, and I were not driving to collect her, I would be jangled. Does that make me a good citizen? Or simply overwrought?

Sister Karen Klimczak founded Hope House in Buffalo at the site where two parish priests were murdered in 1987 in their parish home. The building on Grider, across from Erie County Medical Center, was suitable for spiritual rehabilitation. She would make a home for newly-released prisoners, choosing the least violent, the drug-free, but felons nonetheless, whom she felt could benefit from structure,



educational resources, and her down-to-earth touch. She was careful in her choices, partly from caution, partly from political necessity. Didn't want the house to give itself or her church a bad name. She was careful personally.

She was also funny and creative. This Spring brought carnage to the streets as it always does once the good weather comes. It seems that Winter nurses grudges into murder about the time daffodils begin to bloom. Sister Karen called for peace, whether on a national or neighborhood scale. And so, she created a white dove, attached it to a stake and drove it into the ground outside Hope House. The dove has a hook on it, so one can hang numbers, like those in an old-fashioned delicatessen. The legend reads, "[number] of days since the last homicide."

Good Friday, though I didn't know it until Holy Saturday, Sister Karen was not seen again after 9:45 PM. Ominous. My immediate thought was : She's dead.

Sister Karen did not see the sign on Easter Sunday, when someone put a "1" up. A 36 year-old recently-released auto thief, whom she had invited to live at Hope House, killed her. He says he broke into her room Friday night and was stealing from her when he heard her coming, so he hid behind the door and killed her by mistake.

That he was in her room and stealing, I believe. What happened after that makes no sense.

I was part of a poetry month poetry reading in that house several years ago. It was my idea to go there – take poetry to a place unused to poetry. A poet friend was head of Hope House board of directors, and Sister Karen was a delightful host, oriented us before the meeting, took no chances with our welfare either. By the end of the evening, even though we knew enough not to suggest anyone write a poem, one man had recited one he still had memorized from sixth grade – and the baby of the group had written one spontaneously that was very, very good. Sister Karen said – and in his presence – well, he's younger than our age limits and wilder, too – but we thought we could take a chance on him. He needs to finish high school, and he has a long life ahead of him if he can stay off the streets. That poem? Now I know we were right to take the chance.

Together, the young man much involved in the conversation, we talked about finding promise in people. And the older resident said he thought having that young man present was a reminder both to him and to the older men – for the young man, he could see what could happen (life in prison) if he didn't take charge of his opportunities – and for the older residents, they could comprehend what they hadn't done to save themselves.

The evening was magnificent. You knew that people's noble words don't always match noble acts, but you knew everyone was trying – and you knew enough not to become too involved.

But in Sister Karen's case, you knew – just knew – that you were in the presence of someone special – on fire with vocation and sensible about it and above all very funny.

That she was killed by a Hope House resident and one with so bland a background – moreover, a resident from Buffalo who may well have known her work while he still lived here – and in a place she brought back from a similar hell – is unspeakable. (And I should add that the 1987 murders hit too close to home as well. One of the murdered priests, Father Ray Bissonette, was an uncle of one of Sara's classmate's.)

Of course, the man who murdered Sister Karen turned out not to have so bland a background after all. He was imprisoned for burglary, but his burglary convictions were driven by a major drug problem. He had been released from prison in January, and by March he was back inside on a parole violation for a positive drug test.

His mother was familiar with Sister Karen's work and active with her. When the son was released again in early April – nine days before he killed Sister Karen – the man's mother believed that without a facility like Hope House, her son would lapse again for sure. And so – Sister Karen took a chance – as she had with the young man we met, and she made room for him at Hope House where he did lapse, did try to steal Sister Karen's cellphone, and killed her when he was caught.

His mother, distraught over Sister Karen's disappearance, watched from her porch for any sign of her friend. Her son hid Sister Karen's body in a shed within view of his mother's porch.

As if that weren't enough, one of Sara's friends went back to work yesterday as a videographer professor. Probably he was quite relieved not to be keeping Sara company again for hours as she writhed in uncontrolled pain and didn't get quite the right help (though people were unfailingly kind). Almost in front of his building, he witnessed a shootout on the street – heard it, saw it. Called his wife and said, "I'm in shock."

Of course he was. He's a gentle person and he was already wounded by what he'd seen with Sara. A bad shooting in broad daylight. Couldn't even go to work without more trauma being visited upon him.

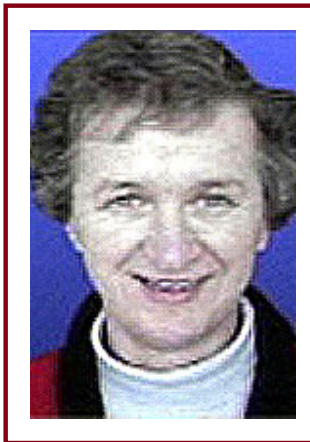


My pounding heart? Actually, what felt bad wasn't – heart rate of 76. A strong heart beat is all.



*Violent haiku  
poetic contradiction  
sun shines, stars twinkle*

*Sister Karen weeps  
for the soul of the man who  
killed her carelessly*

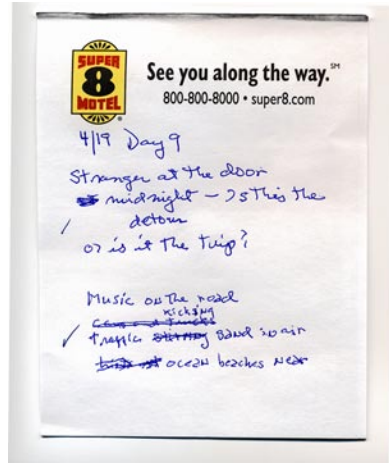


*Sister Karen Klimczak  
Killed Good Friday, 2006*

## Day 9, Part 2\*

*woods of black and brown  
slip East – hills give way to dunes  
green on the way – Spring*

*music on the road  
cars and trucks kick sand in air  
ocean beaches near*



I arrived in Hingham mid-afternoon to stay with Jason and Rachel (not their real names), to get them out of the line of fire, and to support Sara.

On arrival in Hingham, I learned Sara had been discharged (and not medically stabilized) from the second hospital in Boston – Tufts Medical Center. She would call.

She called and asked us to meet her at the ferry that goes from Rowes Wharf in Boston to the ferry slip in Hingham. It's a beautiful trip, but lengthy if you are sick. Rachel and I met the ferry and intended to drive her straight to her hotel. It was suppertime, and everyone was squeezed for time, exhausted, or both.

Sara insisted on a stop at Jason and Rachel's to rest, then found it difficult to leave again. When she was ready, I took her to the hotel.



And she wouldn't let me go.

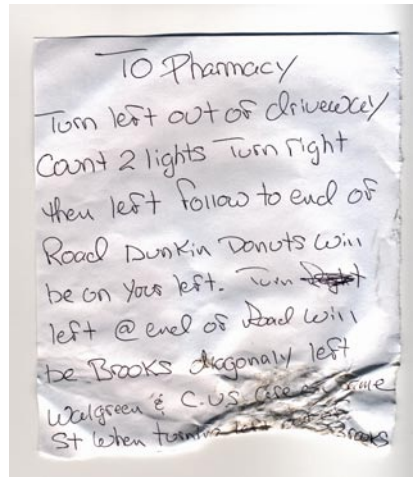
*Exiled from dear friends  
she sets siege on kitchen chair  
dread laid out to share*

I had driven too many hours and in too much traffic, and I should not have done another thing, let alone drive over unfamiliar roads in the dark, but this was truly a reasonable request, so although it wasn't good for me, I went. Sara had been in two hospitals, including two emergency rooms. She was staying at a nice hotel she had arranged for herself.

There were prescriptions that must be filled. In the dark. In yet another town. Over unlit New England roads famous for odd turnings and no street signs. Also, no map.

A desk clerk wrote out the directions for us. We made no wrong turns. We left the prescriptions. I got an Asian salad at the McDonald's across the street from the CVS. We drove back to the hotel –

or I should say, attempted to drive back to the hotel. The directions weren't reversible, for they contained no landmarks, no distances, no street names.



I had no map with me. The maps were back at Jason and Rachel's in the travel bag that had sat on the passenger seat for the trip. Now Sara was in the passenger's seat.

My second level of protection also ineffective: The cellphone did not work either. It's a pay-as-you-go whose signal wasn't picked up in most of Massachusetts.

No open gas stations, no open businesses of any kind.

Tired, tired, tired.

Then a sign for Rt 3, which I knew could get us to another intersection not far from the hotel where I could find the hotel.

We reached the hotel after 11 PM. I left Sara under protest at midnight – got lost some more (not seriously) getting back to the my hosts, slunk into their house as quietly as possible, and got to bed – disquieted and distraught.

Tomorrow will be better. Tomorrow I will stay in command of myself, if not of Sara's illness. Tomorrow morning, I will sleep until I wake up naturally.

Sara has a pain appointment at the hospital on Friday. I plan to see her later on tomorrow, Thursday, in order to get some rest myself before undertaking the trip to Boston.

I am in beautiful surroundings, but I have yet to see them.



*stranger at the door  
midnight – Is this the detour  
or is this the trip?*

*sick child – hit life's brakes  
do not kiss the burning skin  
helpless pain ahead*

*no email today  
If the wireless does not work  
are friends/kin still there?*

## Day 10\*

Bright sunshine illuminates the dried-up salt marsh on the flats below the friends' house. Road construction cut the marsh off from the sea many years ago. Beige and gold cattails everywhere. And then, just after breakfast, several wild turkeys thread their way between the boulders and underneath the trees just beneath their house. Shadows move indistinctly down a path, then emerge in full view on the edge of the road.

We gathered ourselves, ate lunch at a café (my treat) and then Rachel gave me a treat. We drove to Hull, to the ocean, and I walked across the sand, dipped my hand into the waves, and anointed the back of my parched Buffalo neck with salt water.

Back at the house, I was ready to see if I could have a better visit with Sara, to go with her for a dinner on the early side, to get what prescriptions she needed filled (there were more today somehow), and to return back here for a good night's sleep if Sara still wanted me to go with her to the pain clinic tomorrow.

A note on the pain clinic – it's for chronic pain, not for an acute situation like Sara's. I was very dubious whether the appointment was worth the trouble or whether I should go.

Sara also wanted to download various camera and mp3 recordings, videos, and images onto my laptop along with notes she's made about her care. That seemed reasonable enough, so I set off to see her before supper.

Only to become ensnared in her turmoil. Once again, we made a mad dash to the pharmacy a town away just before closing time – this time with a map.

And we did have decent Thai food nearby while the prescriptions were being filled. We picked up the medicines just before 10, drove back to the hotel.

Now it was very late for me if I was to accompany her tomorrow. The computer downloads were yet to be done.

She said she wants me to go with her tomorrow. She understands I need my sleep, but she wouldn't let me go. She asked to keep the laptop overnight to do the ten minutes of downloading she didn't do earlier in the evening.

Reluctantly, I left my laptop behind – virtual cyber-hostage – so I could get away. It was nearly 11:30 by the time I left her room, and then I feared she would be tossed out of the hotel for the ruckus she made. I went back to tell her so – which, of course, precipitated more delay and more fury.

At that point, I simply left – and hoped she would be all right.

Again, I got back to my hosts' house long after they had gone to bed. Once again, I crept around like a distressed mouse. I didn't wake them up, fortunately. Jason is working long days, and Rachel needs her peace, too.

I have to be back to the hotel to pick Sara up at 10, bring her back here by 10:30, so Rachel can drive us to the ferry – no parking available at the dock that time of day – which leaves promptly at 11 – or we will miss the appointment. I will be very short of sleep, and from what I experienced tonight, it will be difficult.

The café, the ocean, can stay with me in spirit, but the struggle for calm in the midst of such confusion is difficult.

Physically, I have taken a 475 mile journey with two days of extensive driving on top of it, so my body is stretched beyond endurance. Spiritually, the journey I had hoped to take has turned into quite something other...

I try to stay in the moment even when the moment is painful, because being scattered is more painful still. But, it isn't easy.

Through this, I can see a friendship emerging with Jason and Rachel. This is not good soil in which to grow a friendship. I am the divorced wife of Jason's childhood friend and sometime-rival. Jason is at a critical point in work on a three year-long project that is just coming into its final stages with rigid deadlines. Rachel is preparing to go to a 6-day professional seminar, and then both are leaving to go to their son's college graduation.

They need to be free to live their busy lives.



*dis-ease in the dark  
silent shadows fill the house  
sadness lurks like sand*

*weekend visitor  
sick and sick-hearted daughter  
trails tears not laughter*

## Day 11\*

Unspeakable day which really began last night at midnight. I am silenced and can only write about this day later.

After my trip and the first two days here, I had planned not to see Sara until today if she needed me to go with her to a pain clinic appointment. But, Sara needed to see me – not to wait – at her hotel in Rockland, the next town over. (Hingham doesn't allow hotels within its borders.)

It's a choice, I said – whether I stay here and visit or get rest before your appointment tomorrow.

And she decreed: Both.

So, once again I slept far too little. I set out at 9 AM to pick Sara up from the hotel, to drive to Jason and Rachel's to meet Rachel who would then drive us to the ferry, because parking might not be available near enough to the dock.

At the hotel, I saw I could not hurry Sara. I tried meditation and relaxation exercises: This is her appointment. If she misses it, what difference does it make? I cannot make anything happen here.

And for good measure, I removed my watch and placed it in my handbag. It wasn't enough.

By the time we reached the ferry, I certainly knew that things were not going well, that I was not taking care of my own needs, and that the

burden of friendship on Jason and Rachel was heavy indeed.

We made the ferry by the skin of our teeth, because Sara was writing her pain history on my laptop,

Hingham is an hour's drive from Cape Cod, one of my favorite places in the world.

I love boats and salt water. It was a shiny day, a crowded boat, but the harbor glistened.

We had scarcely left the dock when Sara informed me she had left all of her medications back at the hotel. . . She would be going cold turkey on steroids (high doses) and pain medication which people get arrested for when they use it without a prescription.

I said, You have some choices. We can go straight to the emergency room before the pain clinic, and you can throw yourself on their mercy as to why you need more controlled substances, or I can take the next ferry back to Hingham and call Rachel, and reverse the process and get your medications – which will take hours – or we can forget the pain clinic appointment and both go back.

None of the above.

*Brilliant blue water  
gulls and egrets etched in sky  
illness blocks my view*

And that's how it stood.

I watched a major disintegration over the course of many hours, chased Sara down streets, in and out of four restaurants, ate two separate lunches under the guise that she was taking care of me, sat through public scenes where she hissed at me that I am demented – neatly cutting off any avenue of help from passersby – and also dragged me from street to street much farther than I can walk from Tufts near Boston Common to west of Copley Square.

We did not get to the pain clinic appointment that had been so important the day before that it was worth my losing several hours of sleep to help Sara get there and to be an advocate. Instead, I was left with the job of trying to save myself –

until there was nothing else to do. I left Sara fuming, alone, on a sidewalk, took a cab back to the ferry, and caught the ferry. Phoned Rachel who by then had received a call from Sara who asked, politely, to be picked up from the 6 PM ferry (arriving at 6:40).

We did. We drove Sara to her hotel. We left her there without my staying with her at all, and Rachel was shocked by what she saw.

Back to the beautiful place in Hingham by 7:30. No supper. Both of us shattered by the experience. Rachel offered her rescue remedy. And we followed it with sherry once Jason got home. Also shattered.



*Rescue Remedy*

That was the day in Boston, one of my favorite cities, although I hadn't been there in at least fifteen years. And what I saw was horrified faces around me, people moving away from us in every restaurant, sometimes leaving the restaurant altogether when they took in our scene.



*Boston's silver towers  
rise from the sea, kissed by sky  
sunshine hides the pain*

*disabled daughter  
someone's child and beloved  
cries through pain-dimmed streets*



The day ended with my turning colors and shaking from head to foot in the guest bathroom, chilled to the marrow by my daughter's sickness and by my own impotence. It doesn't matter that she is an adult officially and that I am near-elderly officially. When you can't comfort your own daughter, when she turns on you, and when you stay in her company and are fundamentally abused, it is a significant parental failure.

## Day 12\*

Somehow we all slept. Somehow separately we all came to the same conclusions: We must assist Sara back to New York City as soon as she can travel. I cannot take her. No one can drive her. It will have to be the train.

Rachel wished to start the conversation with extracts from Samuel Hahnemann's "Organon of the Healing Art, 6th edition" (1842). She is a homeopath – and it is very difficult for her to oversee the medical destruction of Sara – very hard. Jason resisted at first, I think, out of a need to protect her from whatever I might think of homeopathy.

But she said the excerpt had to do with how to relate to disordered people. I was interested in what someone would write in 1842 – contemporary with Quakers' take on "insane people" because in the seventeenth century, they often had been locked up with them as a result of their counter-sermons at Anglican church services.

So she read, and we listened, and it was interesting intellectually and insightful. And troubling.

§ 228

... To furious mania we must oppose calm intrepidity and cool, firm resolution - to doleful, querulous lamentation, a mute display of commiseration in looks and gestures - to senseless chattering, a silence not wholly inattentive - to disgusting and abominable conduct and to conversation of a similar character, total inattention. We must merely endeavor to prevent the destruction and injury of surrounding objects, without reproaching the patient for his acts, and everything must be arranged in such a way that the necessity for any corporeal punishments and tortures' whatever may be avoided. This is so much the more easily effected, because in the administration of the medicine - the only circumstance in which the employment of coercion could be justified - in the homoeopathic system the small doses of the appropriate medicine never offend the taste, and may consequently be given to the patient without his knowledge in his drink, so that all compulsion is unnecessary.

<http://www.homeopathyhome.com/reference/organon/organon.html>

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to marvel at the hard-heartedness and indiscretion of the medical men in many establishments for patients of this kind, who ... content themselves with torturing these most pitiable of all human beings with the most violent blows and other painful torments. By this unconscientious and revolting procedure they debase themselves beneath the level of the turnkeys in a house of correction, for the latter inflict such chastisement as the duty devolving on their office, and on criminals only, whilst the former appear, from a humiliating consciousness of their uselessness as physicians, only to vent their spite at the supposed incurability of mental diseases in harshness towards the pitiable, innocent sufferers, for they are too ignorant to be of any use and too indolent to adopt a judicious mode of treatment.

§ 229

On the other hand, contradiction, eager explanations, rude corrections and invectives, as also weak, timorous yielding, are quite out of place with such patients; they are equally pernicious modes of treating mental and emotional maladies. But such patients are most of all exasperated and their complaint aggravated by contumely, fraud, and deceptions that they can detect. The physician and keeper must always pretend to believe them to be possessed of reason. All kinds of external disturbing influences on their senses and disposition should be if possible removed; there are no amusements for their clouded spirit, no salutary distractions, no means of instruction, no soothing effects from conversation, books or other things for the soul that pines or frets in the chains of the diseased body, no invigoration for it, but the care; it is only when the bodily health is changed for the better that tranquillity and comfort again beam upon their mind. <http://www.homeopathyhome.com/reference/organon/organon.html>

Such a mix of radical and the coercive approaches to troubled people who are sick is worth a lengthy discussion, but this was not the time. I was struck by the mind-body connections, which I found quite modern, but these insights were hobbled by the recommendation that people be given their “medication” without their knowledge to avoid argument. Shades of current laws regarding coerced medication. And -- the references to inhumane treatment of the emotionally disturbed by a hard-hearted medical establishment is all too contemporary.

Separately and together, we had all come to the same conclusion:

Jason and Rachel need to be protected further from their sense of obligation, because everything they do for Sara actually seems to delay her. I am no good to Sara at all. She simply falls apart with every contact no matter what I do. That falling apart is a danger to her, because she needs every ounce of strength she has to deal with the turmoil her life has become, due to the wrongful discharge from the hospital onto the street on Wednesday (April 19th).

It sounded harsh to us, each of us turning this over and over again, each of us so pained for Sara. Each of us concerned about our own survival, too.

We sat over colorful breakfasts of fresh bananas and bright red berries scattered on Kashi, granola, and yogurt. We drank wonderful herbal teas, green for me.

We took our time. We understood that the whirlwind which is Sara is also not Sara. And Rachel, especially, said with great gentleness that first she had been alarmed by Sara's condition, then angered by it – she has so much to do – but now, now seeing what her life is, how extremely difficult and painful it is, seeing also her artistic ability – her respect and care for Sara has reached new levels.

Later, Sara phoned – alternately telling me off for coming to Massachusetts at all because I had made everything so much worse for her – and demanding my full attention. I said, Not the latter, because you collapse in rage at every contact with me – and within five minutes, she did exactly that.



*MLD 2006*

Her further complaint was that she was exiled from Jason and Rachel's, that they are her friends and not mine, and that I had displaced her. I could certainly understand her feeling about that and tried to say that they had summoned me to help them out, that they remain her friends. The call ended badly. The call also confirmed I could do her no good at all.

Jason went off to complete a near-final editing of the video he's been crafting for the last three years. He would be gone all day. Rachel and I ate at another lovely café near the water. Then we drove through quiet and hundred year-old houses up to Turkey Hill so I could know the way from their house to Quaker meeting at the Hingham Friends Home tomorrow morning.



Rock walls wound down hillsides, the woods were full of birds, the skies bright, and at the top of the hill, vultures dove and glided across the sky, the ocean deep and blue nearby.

We stood and watched. The vultures were unfamiliar to Rachel, who marveled at the shaggy edges of their giant wings, their wildness. Until I mentioned that where I see turkey vultures most often is along the Thruway where there is plenty of carrion for them to eat. Odd that what looks exotic in one place actually has been a major beneficiary of the modern highway system.

Jason returned in early evening, his final cut ready for view. Around 9 PM we began watching his 30-minute experimental film. I was a neophyte to this medium, happy to be invited to watch, concerned I would be too ignorant to contribute anything of value. But the value, of course, is that I was the only one of us coming fresh to the viewing.

Themes of violence and destruction, taken from Beowulf in more modern guise, struck a little close to home. Once past that, I was genuinely fascinated by the process of story creation, the production values, and the choreographed quality of the film itself. The layered aspect of the story line encourages the images to stay with you, to replay in your head.

Jason had gathered four actors, two from Poland (found on sabbatical and brought here for the purpose) and two local – who began working together in a series of improvisational jazz dance sessions until the story emerged from their working together. Gravosky developed this method of story creation probably around the time that Method acting began to emerge in Germany and here. But, such an approach may not work unless the production and direction are also imbued with the wisdom of that approach. Jason has it. A former BBC filmmaker, he has been trained himself in that school.

A real act of courage for him to expose his not-yet finished work (there is more to do with the sound track) to someone so naive. I loved the structure, the colors, the settings, the movement. I had not one criticism (constructive or not) to make. And I did say, I am not well-known for unmitigated approval.

And so to bed, the three of us keenly aware that the next town over, my daughter was really suffering and alone, and that here, a very fragile set of friendships was emerging under unlikely circumstances.



*Beowulf in woods*  
*woman in black at World's End*  
*death dance by the sea*

## Day 13

Sunday, April 23rd, and the journey continues. Not exactly a moment in my life for contemplation. Survival is more to the point. But – this is also New England, and so, crisis or not – I look at the sea – and am infused.

Also, apparently not a day for haiku, although I am holding on to some form of openness to the world around me at least for today. And let myself wonder how Poetguy is doing – with the six-person tent he just bought despite its complicated poles and stakes – alone on Rt 62 somewhere in Arkansas the best I can tell.

As for Sara, she is a phenomenon at this point, a suffering, wild force of her own illness, taking no prisoners, circling the same ground over and over, felling everything in her wake. She's a tornado acting like a hurricane. Tornadoes pass over the house only once. They do not swirl to catch it yet again. It is sad beyond sad, scary beyond fear. She will regroup herself – or not.

The day started with Sara phoning Jason to say – she needs a prescription filled, she's at a café in Hingham. Stranded.

Jason had graduate students scheduled to arrive to film at the house. Rachel had consigned them to the garage. He went out for goodies to feed the students.

I discarded my plans to go to Friends Meeting and drove downtown where Sara sat sick, loud, pissed off, nasty – but claiming her life was in hand except for *my* arrival and *my* being confused and impaired.

I should not have gone to meet her.

The prescription was not important. She refused to go to the pharmacy.

After lunch, I drove her back to the hotel in Rockland. She wouldn't get out of the car, held me hostage. I finally drove away from the hotel reception area since I was blocking the driveway, and dropped her off in a sorrowful heap on the sidewalk in the rain, her impedimenta piled around her.

Such a mean, awful Mommy.



*Mommy drops her child  
on a sidewalk in the rain  
Some mother she is*



Then back to Jason and Rachel's for Rescue Remedy, a lovely supper of dark greens, poached salmon, brown rice, supplemented with delicious goat cheese I had found.



*Swiss chard & poached salmon*



And in the evening, off to Quincy to meet Betty, a special friend of Rachel's, a woman who grew up on a ranch in Nebraska with nine brothers and a few sisters, a slender blond registered nurse newly retired, who seemed so interesting. But, we didn't let her talk – which is a loss – because we bumbled with tension and ranted – and ate her Black Forest birthday cake with her.



*Betty – blonde and bright  
a loss not to hear her speak  
her laughter calms pain*



I saw how much she could have said, if we could have let her speak. She is a wonderful listener – quiet and gathered – but I felt I missed a great opportunity. We did laugh and laugh and laugh. Should make for a better night's sleep, I think.

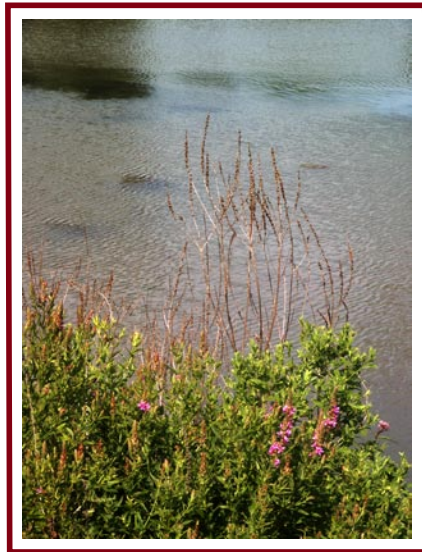
## Loosestrife



Purple Loosestrife

*I have a cat named Loosestrife, Hilda announced to her garden group one third Monday afternoon as if they all had not heard this story before. The women groaned inwardly as one, cats being forbidden topics of conversation for this group unless they had roots and required periodic horticultural attention. Besides, as Velma noted with deep inward sigh, it was highly unlikely that any story about Loosestrife would be either new or entertaining, and the agenda was overflowing already with bulbs, unruly forsythia, and dormant roses going back to their unattractive hosts. Is this something we need to hear about – now? She querulously inquired. Not at all was the response unless you are my friends. Well, now, that is a quandary, poor Velma muttered to herself. Loyalty to Loosestrife being a Medieval test she did not wish to fail. Loosestrife, she ventured, is a beautiful, but invasive plant, not unlike that giant thingamajig plant – a mullion is it – that non-gardening types find in the woods, plant by their houses, and the plant first eats their children and then their houses. Oh yes, Hilda added, the rest of the garden group stunned into mulling and searching cerebrally for the Latin of the thingamajig plant which fortunately none of them had planted in their gardens although dear Althea had found one once and wanted to take it home but Henry begged off saying he'd left the shovel at home, that he would not uproot any plant*

*bigger than six inches with his ice scraper, and that it was state property besides, Pink, is it? She continued with apparent nonchalance, still searching for a weedy exit. The tension, Hilda declared, the tension in this room, the rigidity of your fauna rules, you are – all of you – so misaligned today you'll return home to find your African violets dead in their pots. But not so, in my home, she beamed, I am trying to tell you that my Loosestrife has had her fill of the downies, chippies, and veeries in my yard, has not touched a feather since yesterday's brown creeper, neatly left for me to find outside the garage. She turned instead to the eating of my flowers, every last one, whether white or yellow or vivid red. Extraordinary for a cat, don't you think? I heard the munching from my bed this morning, I prayed it was my Fred getting into my granola again. But Fred lay blissfully unaware from last night's tussle – here she paused to smile what she hoped was not too smug a grin given that in one non-gardening conversation three meetings ago the others had all ventured they weren't getting it anymore but loved their weak old gentlemen even so, especially for their dishwashing ability spiced with their ability to make compost – and so it is a garden story after all I have to tell. Loosestrife to Loosestrife, the kharmic error of naming a sweet kitten after plant invader living out her fate, and with that, she pulled a tiny pistol from her purse and opened fire.*



*Purple Loosestrife*

## Day 14\*

*three days blur to one  
agonized disharmony  
disengage with care*

This was a day for another café, for a visit to Barnes and Noble for a web design book for Rachel, which I helped her select, for a book for me: Malidoma Patrice Somé's "Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman" (Penguin, 1994). That seemed a fair trade-off for my help with the web design book and my recommendations of mysteries by Donna Leon and Linda Fairstein. In the midst of hurt, and pain, and terrible confusion – with Sara about to go to yet another ER – No, not going after all – too sick to move – No, out to a mall for supplies, etc., etc. – I could almost watch myself do something unusual under stress. Instead of closing in upon myself to conserve mind energy, I could still be curious.

Somé's story – as Rachel described it – of kidnapping at the hands of Jesuits in Africa – rang true to me. The story is familiar, because the residential Indian schools in North America were doing the same thing to the Seneca and Iroquois, the Tuscaroras on the Niagara Frontier, both sides of the border. Taking the children from their parents, then raising them in boarding schools where the priests and nuns struggled to eradicate the language and culture from their prisoners. Children were punished for speaking their native languages, singing the songs they'd learned at home. They were rewarded for forgetting, beaten for remembering.

(<http://www.peace4turtleisland.org/pages/preservingtradition.htm>)

I had heard the story told intermittently through my years in Western New York, but the time it was really brought home to me was through training provided by two women counselors from the Tuscarora reservation. They told of the destruction of a generation of children,

and they described the legacy that comes from that extermination of identity: alcohol, child abuse and domestic violence, and a more fundamental loss as well. For these now adults, ripped from their families, did come back to the reservation, did marry and have children – but how to parent, how to be part of a family when the history of violently ruptured families was so recent that the very act of connecting with a new family brings uncontrollable grief at the loss of one's original family.

Obviously, I had to buy this book and read it with the care, respect and awe that terrible story inspires. I knew, of course, that such things had happened overseas, but for some reason, as Rachel told the story, it really struck me – that link.

*School for stolen kids  
catechism taught by thieves  
children hide their speech*

*fractured families  
children lost for years and years  
weep through the ages*

At the market, we shopped for the greens Rachel buys fresh nearly every day, cooks simply with a little oil and garlic, then steams. Very simple, very tasty. Again, revelation and something new in the midst of what so easily could have been unmitigated disaster.

Then back to the house for packaged curries I had seen, but ignored, at my local Asian grocery. Won't make that mistake again, and a Seal Harbor goat cheese I added to the meal. Seal Harbor cheese from the Seal Harbor on Mt. Desert Island, Maine – one of Poetguy's alternate home bases, one of my favorite places. Excellent, tasty cheese.

Topped off the meal (me only) with a slice of natural turkey – turkey that actually tasted like turkey. I had frightened Jason with the package a day or two before. He pulled it out, unwrapped it and yelled,

“What is this meat doing here? In the cheese keeper? I thought it was mozzarella slices with horseradish. It’s tur-key.”

So he is the more sensually committed vegetarian of the two. When we stopped laughing, I said, “I’m sorry I scared you, but I didn’t know where the meat keeper would be in a vegetarian’s refrigerator.” I guess I should have warned him.

But, good to be punchy for once. And he did survive the trauma.

I have now learned that Rachel’s 6-day seminar “next week” actually begins Sunday morning. Late at night, as I prepare for bed, blood pressure and pulse where they belong for once, I make a vow I will repeat tomorrow.

Enough. I cannot stay here necessarily until Sara leaves. Instead, we need a safety net for Sara with me gone (even though she thinks I – not she – is the one who needs help) and the safety net needs to include Jason and Rachel as well. Rachel needs to be free to prepare for this major event, Jason and Rachel possibly might like some time together without me and a crisis on the scene before she leaves.

Sara phoned just before we went to bed to say she is on the way to Tufts’ ER, because her NYC doctor told her to go to the ER.

So I know, this could be difficult. But I want these people freed to lead their own lives, and I want to have it happen bloodlessly. I go to sleep wondering how I will ever accomplish this.

*what is the sound of  
one mother leaving her child --  
sick child blind with pain.*

## Day 15

Before getting out of bed and while still a little collected for the day, linked haiku:

*Turkeys on the run  
cat-tails waving in the wind  
woodlands – still in sun*

*Beige-lined ponds near Hull  
nearby sea pounds rock to sand  
laughing moon rises*



Soon Sara's father was interrupting my attempts to tell my husband what was happening. "Call forwarding" was never intended to make it possible my past and present husbands try to talk to me at the same time. Sara's father was trying to make sense of Sara's situation by ordering me around. Much of the conversation included his friend, Laura, with me on speakerphone.

Laura had been phoned by Sara. Everyone has been phoned by Sara. And Laura – like everyone else – said that Sara is more concerned about me and my "dementia" than about herself. This comment was followed by, "You don't sound like your old self".

Fortunately, I have so little privacy with these complex machinations that people are shocked anyone should be questioning my mental acuity at this point. They just hear it and laugh – for which I am grateful.

Later, I introduced Maria, who has great expertise with film, to the concept of “gaslighting” – a concept somehow missing from her theatre studies. She was angry on my behalf which was reassuring.

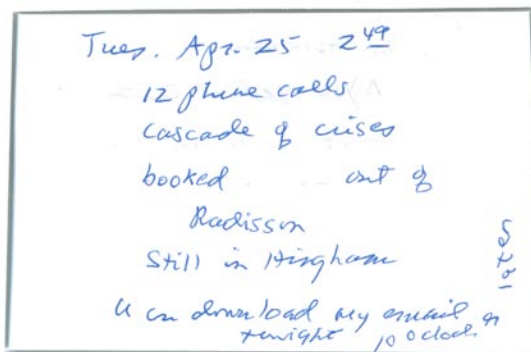
The task today – it took 2 ½ hours – was to extract Sara’s belongings from the Radisson Hotel in Rockland and to make certain she is checked out, so there will be no further billing. I needed to do this because Sara has installed herself in the Hampton Inn in Boston – where she went in the middle of the night and has to leave by noon today – which apparently is not a problem I have to solve.

The difficulty with my marching orders was:

Sara is an adult, and I have no right to act on her behalf, let alone remove her belongings

Also, I was to pick up an envelope the hotel had been phoning Jason and Rachel about. The envelope was from Sara and addressed to Jason.

My name is not “Jason.” (I realize the sarcasm is out of keeping with the intended tenor of this journal, but we all have our limits. And if I don’t get snotty about something minor like this, I could lose my temper over something far more important and serious in its consequences.)



Tues. Apr. 25 - 2<sup>49</sup>  
- 12 phone calls  
cascade of crises  
booked out of  
Radisson  
Still in Hingham  
u can download my email  
tonight 10 o'clock

10:05

Notes for answering machine message for husband



So I went to the Radisson.

I told them Sara is registered elsewhere. They called the hotel and, of course, did not reach Sara. They informed me that they can stop the billing charges and that they have done so, but no one but Sara can remove her belongings from the room – by state law.

I said I understand, and I don't want them to do anything that will put them in a bad spot. What can we do? Eventually, it comes out that I've visited her there, I know her room number (which they hadn't told me), and that I have a key to her room – that happens because I hand it to them and say, "I have this. It belongs to you."

Oh, to her room?

Yes, but I'm sure it no longer works, because she said when she extended her stay, you re-programmed her key.

At that point, they made a copy of my driver's license, reprogrammed my key and sent me on my way with the comment, "I wish my mother felt so responsible for me."

Naturally, I worried what I would find.

This is what I found:

an orderly room, cleaned out of her own valuables. The belongings I retrieved were several books, a pair of undies, and an orphan sock.

refrigerator filled with healthy foods

You would not know that someone had been sick in the room, and I was pretty proud of her for that.

The note for Jason contained a \$20 bill but no indication of what it was for. I left \$20 (my \$20) as a tip for housekeeping. I thought they deserved it. Everyone there had been unfailingly kind to Sara.

So, I took everything and got back to the house briefly before leaving again to work on my laptop at the Hingham Public Library at the bottom of the hill. The library has free wireless service.

Rachel could have the house to herself to do her work.

I could spend quiet time alone.

Is this the stuff of meditative rumination?

No.

Of haiku?

If haiku are supposed to be egoless and expunged of feelings like frustration and rage – No.

But I am laughing, too.

And before this silly day began I wrote two haiku, linked them, and left them on pathetic scraps of paper in my room.

It does not escape my attention that my daughter whom actually I still love without reservation (demented me) is a sickened sweetheart who is trying very hard to live.



*Teasel*

## Day 16

*Twittering, twirling  
skittering, sliding  
cormorants fishing  
wind farm whirring  
piercing sky  
a city of suffering  
noise  
crowds  
innocent towers at harbor-side  
water the divider  
water the healer  
at Edward's memorial  
at World's End  
jack-hammers  
the train is coming  
the land is crying  
the ocean doesn't care*

*houses cling to cliffs  
red tanker where sea meets sky  
salt-sprayed pueblo isle*

or

*houses cling to cliffs  
red tanker at horizon  
pueblos by the sea*



The poet has not written for several days – Poetguy, I mean – not since Day 12. I hope his silence is with the web and not himself. I spend the morning at World’s End in Hingham, Massachusetts. In the sun, the trees still glisten black and bare against the sky - the shrubs and sky alive with birds.

And the higher I walk, the farther from park ranger and restroom, the louder the jackhammer working nearby on a new train spur to Hingham.



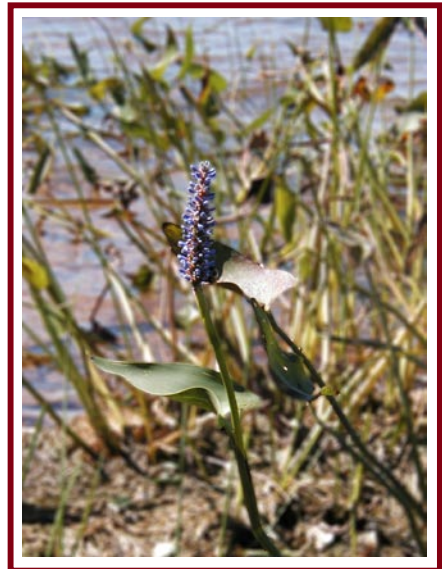
Sara is in yet another hospital – Boston Medical Center – and I am no longer listed as “next of kin” and so – conscience lightened by this declaration of independence in a place known for revolutions – I am free to go, having made a place for Sara’s friends to call, so they are no longer first in line to respond to each “news of fresh disaster.” In fact, I’m just this side of smug – which is a state to be avoided — too easily pierced by the next disaster– and an attitude in any case – not consonant with the views, the sunshine, the salt marshes filling with the sea at high tide.

At the summit, a stone:

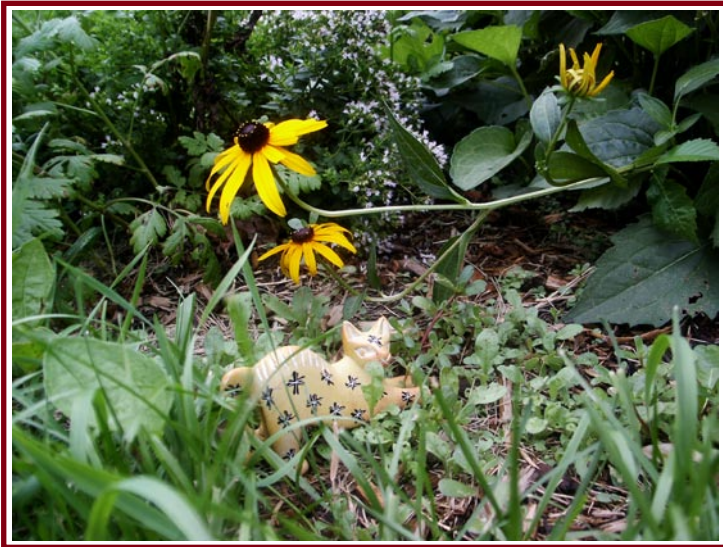
F. Arthur Edwards  
1907 - 1967

Died younger than me.

Back at the base of the hill, the tide is retreating from the salt marsh, has foamed and turned as I climbed and sat.



## Day 17, Part 1



*The wise, smooth, stone cat  
and the silly tiger cat  
shimmer in the sun*

*View from cliffside chair  
a salt marsh no longer there  
vultures undeterred*

*Pink cloud puffs in sky  
empty promises of rain  
somewhere, elsewhere – Now!*



*First Talbot's Store, Hingham*

I will start for home today without Sara, without a visit to Cape Cod, without a walk along the Charles River, without photographs, without – as Poetguy has done – side trips to craft workshops, artists' centers, or B & B's trading a poetry book for a free night's stay.

This is not a rant. One takes her side trips where she can find them. In the absence of time and opportunity, in anticipation of the coming season, a trip to the original Talbot's will have to do.

And does. For Rachel, too. We part company at Talbot's.

The store occupies a classic 17th century white clapboard house in the center of Hingham with black shutters and a red front door. Although known nationally for its conservative, classic clothing for women, no dresses are offered here.

Sweaters, shirts, pants, accessories fill the racks and shelves, and there is a sale.

The second floor slants in various directions. One could race trucks or marbles here, but I doubt such frivolity would be encouraged in such a serious store.



*Souvenir*

## Day 17, Part 2

Lee, Massachusetts

### *Housatonic Sam*

*Housatonic Sam commenced to howling outside my door at the Super 8 in Lee at about 4 AM. Why are you doing that, I asked, puzzled from sleep. Please excuse the inconvenience, Housie replied. I've been howling like this for years, and you are the very first human being to ask me why though I have begged for the question many times. Howling at the moon is not my cup of tea, he continued. Not at all. I am howling for our children being killed in Iraq. I am howling for the ill winds that blow our bushes there to kill even more of their children than our own. I am howling for spilled oil, the spilled blood and broken levies of New Orleans and for gaping holes in New York. I am howling for feathers left in bathtubs by murderous cats and for sad and broken children and the mothers in hospitals and unrestful homes. I am howling for the fathers who don't know what to do and for all the people who do it anyway. I do so appreciate the sensitivity and nuance of your yowls, I said, but your timing is bad so shut up. Thank you for your rapt attention, Housie Sam replied. I haven't had such a grand audience as yourself since I last held forth near Alice's statue in Central Park. But I'm afraid I've lost my sense of smell. If you could direct me to the Mass Pike pointing West, I'll be on my way – and have a good day.*



# Day 18

My response to Poetguy's Day 13

I think of him – strong and independent, accustomed to his long journey by now, almost hardened against the aloneness. But a moment's reflection causes me to realize that to respond to the sights and the people, one must be supple and sensitive, not just "strong," because "strong" may too easily denote a rigidity or focus of thought that would block out exactly what one wishes to be open to. It's a strain, I'm sure. And besides, though I have been away for 11 days myself, my days have been well-peopled. Hard to be lonely or a little bored in a crisis when you need to be in charge – especially when you're not allowed to be in charge and the crisis itself becomes a runaway trip on a surrealistic journey through the mind. It's similar to a week-long trip on LSD when only you have not used it.

Passed over and through the Berkshires today, and the land grew flatter, the soil thinner. Arriving in Utica, suddenly I see depressed landscapes again, ghosts of barns, ghosts of factories. The people not dressed as well, fatter (though I should talk), sloppier. I'm close to Appalachia here.



*Tahlequah, OK Roadside*



Sara has e-mailed me sweetly expressing the hope that I can get better and advising me to see my cardiologist and neurologist right away...



Does not seem a day for a poem. Too gritty somehow, but maybe later.

Meanwhile, Poetguy will spend tonight in Tahlequah, surely one of the most interesting places – although the 1978 landscapes were forbidding – I’ve ever spent a couple of weeks. I’ll be curious to see what he can do with Tahlequah in an overnight with a few daylight hours on either side.



Churches and gun shops  
line streets in equal numbers  
oil wells gush tribe’s cash

bare tribal land leased  
to speculators in gas  
cash prairie rivers



*Tahlequah, OK*

## Day 19

More difficult to write in a motel room with a view of a grassy bank sloping down from a highway ramp, than from a place with a lovely view.

No word from Poetguy yet today, but again, he is driving through intense thunderstorms and tornadoes. If he is safely off the road, he must be seeing the weather of a lifetime. And I am conscious of that. But we are having bright, calm sunshine.

Sara is back home. She downloaded hospital images and videos onto my laptop back in Rockland. This morning, she invited me to look at them. I looked at the images – which look promising for her future work on contemporary American health care.

The voice recordings and voice videos depict someone talking so fast you can barely understand her. I stopped midway through the first.

Too painful.

## Day 20

I am home again.



I sit at my computer, gaze at the yard empty of deer, brilliant color everywhere I look. While I was away, Spring arrived with deer-proof flowers scattered everywhere – many kinds of daffodils with single, double blooms in palettes of cream to yellow to orange; pink, blue, and white hyacinths in miniature to giant forms, the lilies of the valley not quite in bloom, and within its cage, an endangered red trillium with fat buds waits for just one or two more bright sunny days to burst into bloom.

The deer which are not here have retreated as they always do this time of year deep into the woods along the canal. They will not be seen again for a week or two. When they emerge into our yard once again, there will be fawns. The does will be emaciated. I will meditate on motherhood just at Mothers Day no doubt.



I have come full circle in this twenty day journey, in which I set off with Michael Czarnecki (Poetguy) intending to follow him down Route 62 from Niagara Falls, NY to the bank of the Rio Grande in El Paso, TX, to take from his journey a trip of my own, with twists and turns – but no detours – until, in spirit, I, too, reached the Rio Grande. The goal was to move myself away from quotidian concerns to examine my own surroundings with a more contemplative spirit.

To some extent, I have succeeded: I have written every day, I have made space in my mind to think about the implications of the life I live, I have almost discovered new aspects of what my life is about, not what life means – but perhaps a little more about what my life means.

I have certainly found that a journey is unpredictable by its very nature. One can set out on a 20 day journey and mark some places to visit along the way, but this journey – my journey – illustrates better than anything else I've ever written – that as long as we are connected with others, as long as we love other than ourselves, our lives are not predictable. Whether it is our brains, or our technologies – from automobiles to computers to communication systems – these accelerate our journeys to unknown places.

Today – if he has been able to follow his schedule – sometime today, Poetguy will look out over the Rio Grande River. He may focus his gaze on whatever surrounds him – urban landscape? the color of the river, birds flying overhead – and he may consider what that river means to those on the other side who live in abject poverty, who challenge the river's dangers to get to our side of that river. Is there an urban landscape on that side as well? If so, how tall is it? What are its colors? What is its smell?

And then, tomorrow, he will start back to his home – the one-way journey officially completed. Since he is a writer, no doubt, he will stop at beautiful and quiet places he finds along the way and he will write. But the subject will no longer be "US 62," and I'm guessing that connection with family will be a dominant theme at least in his mind as he contemplates arriving back home to children with adventures to report, a wife (who must be exhausted by now – maintaining a publishing house and family is hard, hard work. If she were not able to do it, this poet man would not have been able to take to the road).

So while his Rt 62 journey is over, his travels are not, and much surprise – mixed perhaps with dismay – lies ahead.

And I – who traveled 1,000 miles to his 2,000 in the last 20 days – am already home again, changed somewhat by my circular journey – perhaps even more than he has been changed by people and places he has encountered along the way.

This day – April 30th – I will read a single poem along with 97 (last count) other local poets at the Unitarian Church in Buffalo for “Urban Epiphany” a poetry celebration completing a month of poetry each April nationwide. All of the work will not be “good,” of course. Can’t imagine 98 excellent poets in one urban area – but each will have a voice and a hearing – and to me that is quite wonderful. I will try not to wonder if I am one of the better ones; I will be the poet who speaks with my voice.

This day – the final day of this journey – is the day before my 65th birthday. It is the final day – at least was the final day until both AARP and the Social Security Administration began monkeying around with the age brackets – of official middle age.

Tomorrow is a birthday I have both dreaded and anticipated for years: my 65th birthday. The anticipation is based on greed perhaps, along with the legitimate need for financial simplicity – all the old age discounts kick in that I haven’t yet enjoyed. The dread – obvious, is it not? – one does not return from her journey through old age a more vigorous or better person.

From a distance, the path from old age to death has looked short indeed. Now, it stretches ahead with both the promise of illness, diminishment, and death – and even more painful, the certain suffering and loss of precious friends and family members along the way – but also, if these past 20 days are a lesson at all, with surprise and connection, work and enjoyment of the physical beauty around me.



When this journey began, I was unaware of the synchrony of age and travel this journey would entail. Once I realized that as Poetguy met the Rio Grande, I would cross over into the land of the elders, I became both amused and apprehensive about what lies ahead – in my journey at least.



*yellow green grass, trees  
nothing new under the sun  
spring flowers surprise*

*deer retreat to woods  
fawn sleeps on coiled garden hose  
a doe waits nearby*

*broken-legged deer  
member of the family  
maiden aunt of fawns*



# About the Author

Martha Deed is a poet and web artist who lives in North Tonawanda, New York (USA) on the north bank of the Erie Canal. Her poetry, multimedia projects, and video web publications include Iowa Review on the Web, Big Bridge, Shampoo, dvblog.org, nthposition, Unlikelystories, and many others.

Previous work on Regina Pinto's Museum of the Essential and Beyond That includes "Stove" (multimedia) <http://www.sporkworld.org/Deed/stove/rebellion.html> and "Stuck in Middletown" (with Regina Pinto) [http://www.artonline.arq.br/festival/martha\\_deed/index.html](http://www.artonline.arq.br/festival/martha_deed/index.html).

Print publications include a chapbook (#9 in Furniture Press Po25centsEM series, 2004), Gypsy, The Buffalo News, and she has work forthcoming in anthologies published by Iowa University Press and Red Hen.

Martha Deed is a retired psychologist.

For links to Martha Deed's published work, visit [www.sporkworld.org/Deed](http://www.sporkworld.org/Deed)

Recent online work includes:

15 minimalist concrete poems [http://www.logolalia.com/minimalistconcretepoetry/archives/cat\\_deed\\_martha.html](http://www.logolalia.com/minimalistconcretepoetry/archives/cat_deed_martha.html)

Aftershocks, a nonfiction narrative about the impact of a murder in Western New York <http://www.sporkworld.org/Deed/aftershocks/index.html>

Videos of life on the Erie Canal, reviewed at <http://www.dvblog.org>  
<http://www.sporkworld.org/Deed/warandpeace>  
<http://www.sporkworld.org/Deed/winterstorm.html>  
<http://www.sporkworld.org/Deed/birthday/birthday.html>