



THE LABYRINTH

St. Luke & St. Stephen Review

Spring 2022

The Labyrinth Review is a quarterly publication (primarily electronic) featuring the thinking, writing, and visual arts of St. Luke and St. Stephen members and friends. Richard Rohr says the labyrinth is a powerful spiritual tool reminding us that life is more like a plate of spaghetti than a grid. If you have suggestions for features or would like to contribute, email Marcia Casey at caseymarcia99@gmail.com. If you like this issue, please let us know. Previous issues can be found on both churches' websites.

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St. Luke & St. Stephen Review
Spring 2022

Contents

Letters to the Editor	3
Editor - <i>Linnea Harper</i>	4
Felted Community - <i>Jackie Wolfe</i>	5
God of Unconditional Love - <i>Education for Ministry Class</i>	5
Community Renewal - <i>Linnea Harper</i>	6
Rhododendron - <i>Laura Gill</i>	7
First Wednesday in April - <i>Doug Yunker</i>	8
The Oregon Coast - <i>Sandra Gangle</i>	9
Evanescence - <i>Doug Yunker</i>	10
Spinning Sands - <i>Linnea Harper</i>	11
The Cold War - <i>Dennis Moler</i>	13
O Sustainer of Life - <i>Education for Ministry Class (arranged by Susan Thompson)</i>	14
Broken Open - <i>The Rev. Martha Wallace</i>	15
Raku Vase - <i>The Rev. Martha Wallace</i>	16
Rainbow - <i>Laura Gill</i>	17
Arcoiris Cultural - <i>The Rev. Dr. Judith Jones</i>	17
Faces - <i>The Rev. Deacon Senitila McKinley</i>	19
Remembering My Parents - <i>Martha Varo</i>	20
How You Come to Life - <i>Marcia Casey</i>	22
Crocus - <i>Doug Yunker</i>	23
Bleeding Hearts - <i>Kae Bates</i>	24
O Divine Gardener - <i>Education for Ministry Class</i>	24
Seashore Family Literacy Update - <i>Sandra L. Stephens</i>	25
An Extra Treat - <i>The Rev. Deacon Senitila McKinley</i>	26
The Drifter - <i>The Rev. Deacon Senitila McKinley</i>	27
We Were Here Once - <i>Dennis Moler</i>	28
O God of All Seasons - <i>Education for Ministry Class (arranged by Susan Thompson)</i>	29
Finding Christ-in-the-Desert - <i>Jeanne St John & Kae Bates</i>	30
This Morning I Saw a Hawk - <i>Michele Hogan</i>	32

You Must Ask for What You Really Want – <i>Jeanne St John</i>	34
Gold & Turquoise Vase - <i>The Rev. Martha Wallace</i>	35
Red & Black Vase – <i>The Rev. Martha Wallace</i>	36
Tarzan at the PAC: An Interview with Annie Pusey & Vera Kyei – by <i>Marcia Casey</i>	37
Dining Out in the Hood – <i>Linnea Harper</i>	39
Barn Quilt – <i>Linnea Harper</i>	40
In Beloved Memory: Jean Evelyn Bishop	41
No, My Mother Was Not Cute – <i>Rand Bishop</i>	41
Let’s Hope So – <i>Dennis Moler</i>	48

Letters to the Editors

Thank you so much for putting me on this list!

Katharine Salzmann

Marcia, I love your Noah poem (isn't that what we all must do-focus on the next nail?), and also Rand Bishop's piece about his mom (I went to high school with him). So many glories here. You are doing something fine. Be well,

Kim Stafford

This Thanksgiving Day morning I read the Fall 2021 Labyrinth Review. What an exceptional publication! My congratulations to you and the congregations of St. Luke's and St. Stephen's for the poetry, art, writing the Labyrinth Review contains. It is exquisite. Thank you so much.

Sandy Roumagoux

Congratulations! Bravo.

Shinan Barclay

Thank you for including me in this sharing. I find deep beauty in the sharing of grief. Grief is meant to be shared. I think we're alive when we share.

Leah Shrifter

Marcia, This edition was so beautiful. I read it from cover to cover the first day I got it and was like balm for a broken soul. And I LOVED your poems. I copied them out so I can keep them in handwritten form with me. I also loved the poem by Doug about his friends. Touching and sad, but good.

Mary Montanye

I'm thoroughly enjoying this issue of the Labyrinth. I appreciate the hard work that goes into compiling and delivering an outstanding publication. Thank you,

Susan Thompson

Well done! Happy thanksgiving,

Karin Ellison

Most Excellent, Marcia & Jeanne. A beautiful issue. Good work.

Thank you for your stewardship. So much power, so many enlightening slaps up the side of the head, in the Buddha tradition. The red star at the end is genius... as are many other moments. Maybe we'll do it again some day. A toast to the ediTrixies!

Linnea (Harper)

Kudos to you, and all those who contributed to the Labyrinth. Warm reading on this dark, rainy night. Thank you for putting together such a rich collection of writings and art.

Dorothea Derickson

Thank you all for Labyrinth. I enjoyed the whole creative community of St. Luke and St. Stephen.

Cynthia Jacobi

Jeanne, thank you for sending this. I was very moved by your beautifully written piece. It inspires me to write more down rather than always wanting just to "tell" the story, even though I feel inadequate about writing. I would love to receive further issues of this wonderful publication. With appreciation,

Catherine (Drew)

Thank you for this. I love this journal and look forward to receiving it. Such wonderful artists we have! Peace,

+Diana (Bishop Diana Akiyama)

Editor:

Those stone tablets were a read for the ages, by God, but when I delved into the Fall '21 Labyrinth issue, I realized what The Big Ten were missing. Photographs by Dennis Moler, for one. The shapes and shadows of the human spirit revealed in his images beckon our better angels by touching us deeply. They affirm what is best in us: Compassion. Heart. Connection. They command nothing but our attention; and given that, they leave us in awe.

And Marcia Casey's tribute to Noah, to work, to craft, to the enormity of life's smallness, to committing to one true thing is a tiny epic in its own right. The *Shalts* and *Shalt-Nots* are silent on this topic, except for prescribing devotion to the OnHigh. Surely a disciple's reverent attention to even the smallest task is an anthem to the whole of God's Creation, and a transformative act of worship. An important addition to the canon.

Moses /lh



God of Unconditional Love

Who challenges us to reflect on the uniqueness of each being,
Help us rise above our smallness and mirror the way you love,
So that we can seek healing and wholeness,
Seeing the Light of God in all Creation.

In the name of Divinity,
Amen

*Collect by the EfM Class
11/19/2021*

Community Renewal

I'm not ready, dammit. I still haven't learned to keep my house clean or rid myself of social angst, fished my derelict son out of his slough of despond and self-destruction, or mended the holes in my clothes. Can't even find the cord to plug in the sewing machine. And what, anyway,

is *community*? A batch of cells that shimmies into an organ? The folks in the hood, or just the ones you're on speaking terms with? A group of whomevers corralled in a circle without any gates? A gaggle who share a story they long to belong in?

We all belong. We're here in the *In-it-together Club*, which is a kind of community, located in a slightly better neighborhood than the *Going-down-together Club*, where the stairways are slicked with vaseline and the rooms smell of hothouse roses.

If you're looking for the story with the happy ending, you won't find it here. Knowing this, are you still reading? Rapidly blinking, deciding whether to quit while ahead, or risk waking up with a strange tattoo, a sign you now belong to some new *who knows who*?

We live in risk. We rise in the mornings. Release ourselves to sleep again, leaving our other faces awake on the pillow, mesmerized by the slow steady rain of unknowing, the thunderclaps of covid and her sister disasters playing havoc with charts and graphs. And now a new war.

Alone on a breezy beach, adrift in a ghetto alley,
aloft on love or the fiery thrust of a rocket blast
breaching our thin umbrella of sky, we ponder
the options for renewing community ties- hands
in the earth, I'll be planting clusters of flowers
along established borders in trenches and mounds.

Come visit. We'll tour the grounds.

By *Linnea Harper*

Rhododendron

By *Laura Gill*



First Wednesday in April

At high tide, I throw Riley's ball
into the sun's rays as they fall
down the valley to a sandy ledge
where river's lips kiss ocean's edge.

By ebb tide, my hair is trimmed.
She did swell, I looked well groomed.
Made my way to a Sign of spring,
the local nursery's opening.

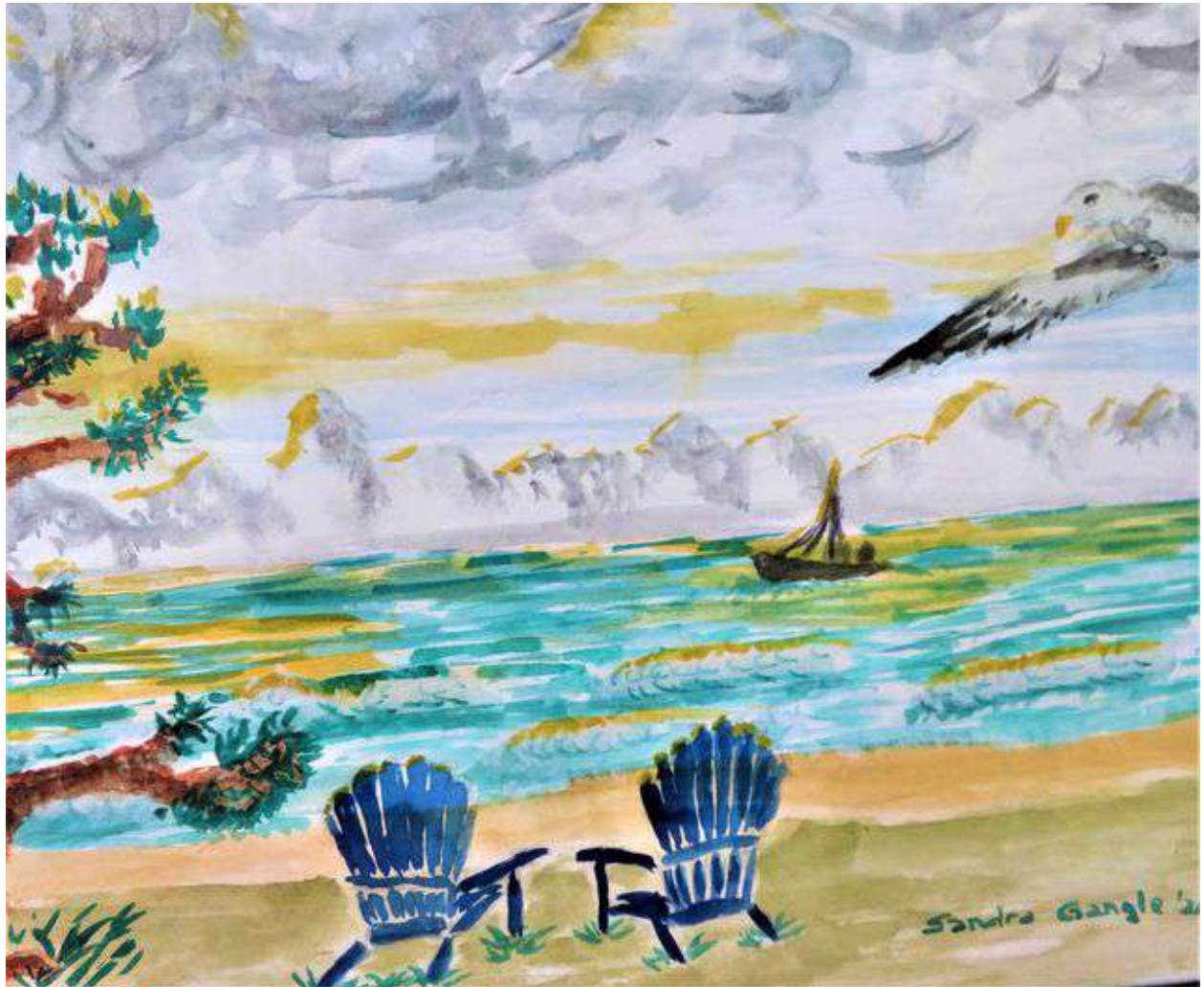
Sun in my eyes, I drive to town,
Beach Daisy is open—I slow down.
Friends are there: Beer Guy and Matt.
I have a glass of wine and join the chat.

The Beer Guy has just married in Belize.
Matt is bored and looks ill at ease.
At low tide, two boy-men sounding glum.
Me? Happy—still have some hair, plants, & sun.

By *Doug Yunker*

The Oregon Coast

By Sandra Gangle



Evanescent

My gardens are kin to mandalas,
the vibrant patterns, painstakingly
laid down by Tibetan Monks over
long, backbreaking days, only to
be ritualistically brushed away—
life is ephemeral, I am told,
eternal transit.

Yet, every dawn I stroll outdoors
to view the depredations of night's
creatures, to learn acceptance of
impermanence. But come spring,
I'll dig in anyway—
resisting thoughts of their
unmaking.

By *Doug Yunker*



“If you look the right way, you can see the whole world is a garden.” ~ F.H. Burnett

Karen Chalmers’ wonderful sand mandalas help us see the blooms. On her Spinning Sands Facebook page, Karen’s introduces herself with a simple artist’s statement: *My beloved dog Beau Beau and I, rake mandalas, labyrinths and other designs in the sand.*

Her work often appears on local Lincoln County beaches, including Seal Rock, South Beach, Newport, and photos on her Facebook page are sometimes paired with quotes from others, or with more personal messages.

“I live my life in growing orbits which move out over this wondrous world, I am circling around God, around ancient towers and I have been circling for a thousand years. And I still don't know if I am an eagle or a storm or a great song” ~ R. M. Rilke

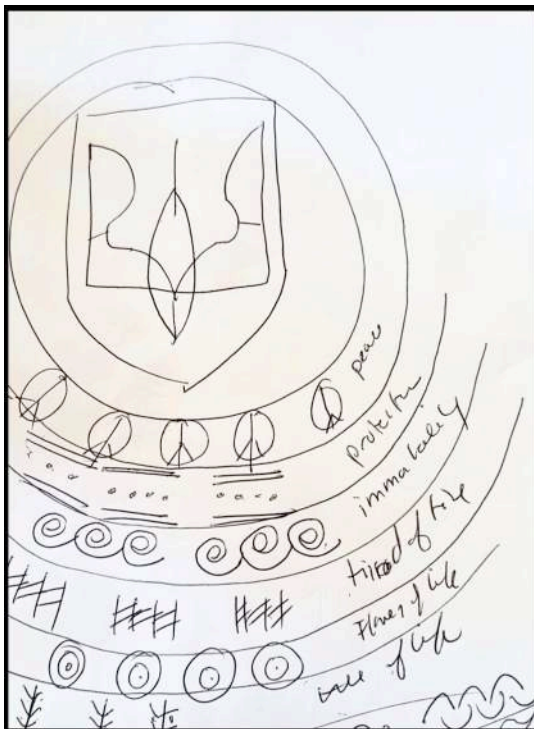
I am often asked HOW I rake such symmetrical circles, freehand... My life of circles, spinning, weaving, tearing, circles... in all their many forms... is exactly WHY I can do this. PAIN is a truly powerful illuminator... I am now aware... of every inch of my body... To rake a circle... I put my ENTIRE body into position... and stride forth... without ever changing ANYTHING. To nail the circle... I MUST BE CONSTANT. One giant circle... is a magical, all-natural, BLISSSED OUT experience. From the little circles of pain I have drawn great strength and beauty. And I am grateful.

On February 27, Karen raked a mandala for Ukraine as Russia began its military assault.



Mandala with Ukrainian Coat of Arms

Karen Chalmers



My Ukrainian rake used Ukrainian Easter egg symbols of: peace, protection, immortality, triad of time, how everything comes together, mountains, and the sea... I had to look them up.

Folks often ask "How"... and I explain, I'm not really sure. I cannot draw these designs on paper very well. These are my notes.

Follow Karen on Spinning Sands for community rake events, great photos, and short videos.

The Cold War

By *Dennis Moler*



**O Sustainer of Life,
Who has been with us throughout history,
In times of peace and war,
Help us keep vigilance against evil, never forgetting the
sacrifices,
So that we don't see the other as enemy, but instead
embrace the opportunity to love and honor all.

In the Name of Resilient Poppies,
Amen**

11/12/2021



Collect by the EfM Class
11/12/2021

Broken Open

By *The Rev. Martha Wallace*



Raku Vase

By *The Rev. Martha Wallace*





Arcoíris Cultural

By *The Rev. Dr. Judith Jones*

Arcoíris Cultural—"cultural rainbow"—is the aptly-named new Hispanic cultural center in Newport. Its name reflects the vibrant, varied beauty that Hispanic immigrants bring to our local community. Immigrants not only from Mexico and Guatemala, but from countries throughout Central and South America and the Caribbean have found a home in Lincoln County. Though Spanish is the birth language of many, others grew up speaking tribal languages such as Mam or Quechua. Each country and region has its own traditional foods, clothing styles, dances, music, and art forms. Arcoíris Cultural celebrates this cultural diversity and lifts it up for all to see.

Martha Varo, a member of St. Stephen's who works at Arcoíris, told me that it is sponsored by the Olalla Center and is funded by grants. The cultural center is open Monday-Friday from 8-12 and 1-5. It has been operating for roughly a year but has only recently moved to its new location at 324 SW 7th St.

Martha introduced me to her co-worker Alex Llumiquinga (who is originally from Ecuador) and together they gave me a tour of the beautiful new facility. Arcoíris provides a safe and welcoming gathering place for immigrants. Martha and Alex help people navigate the challenges of adapting to the culture, language, and customs of their new community. They provide assistance with documents and paperwork,

answer questions, and connect people with agencies that can help them find housing or other kinds of necessities.

The cultural center has a small food pantry with a stock of foods that are familiar to the Hispanic community. Food Share and other local agencies can be confusing places for some among us. A person who grew up eating beans and rice may not even be sure that Kraft Macaroni and Cheese is food, much less have any idea how to prepare it!

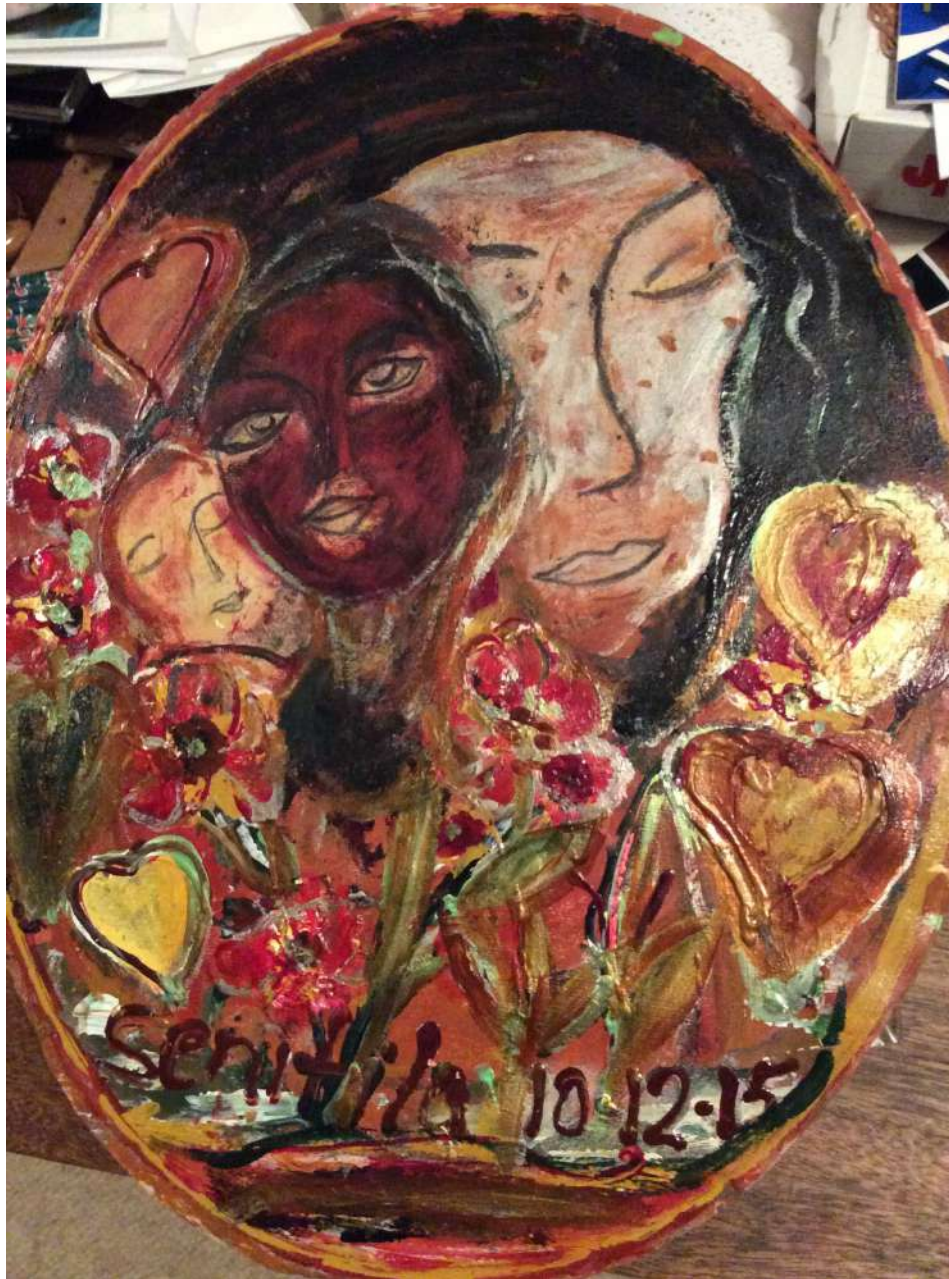
Arcoiris also promotes the work of local Hispanic artisans and artists. The beautiful woven goods, embroidery, paintings, and photographs on display are available for purchase. All proceeds go directly to the people who created the products.

At least once a month Arcoiris hosts cultural events such as dances, a visit by the Art Bus, or demonstrations of Guatemalan weaving. Everyone is invited to drop by to participate in a cultural event or browse through the goods on display. Come enjoy the colorful beauty of Hispanic cultures!



Faces

By *The Rev. Deacon Senitila McKinley*



Remembering My Parents

By *Martha Varo*



My father, Joaquin Varo Daza, was the epitome of a hard-working immigrant. He got up at 4 a.m. and walked to the fish canneries every day from 1993 to 2020. Before then he worked on the fields for most of his adult life, picking strawberries, blueberries, grapes, apples, etc. (My brother Joaquin and sister Blanca worked alongside him. They were 11 and 13 years old, and do they ever have stories to tell about that time!) My father even worked as a forest firefighter. He was hard working, loyal, and always on time!!

Even though my father was a very quiet person, he LOVED birthdays!! And, he made his family love them too. He was big on presents even when we were low on money. He would always walk to the second hand store and buy the birthday person some tacky jewelry. My sister and I hated it. We would always look for the box and get the horrifying initial reaction out of the way, and then practice in the mirror a pleasant reaction saying in a VERY exaggerating way, “¡Ay papi! ¡Qué precioso! ¡Muchísimas gracias papito! And then my sister and I would look at each other and say, “Nah, too much. Tone it down.” And, we would try over and over again. I look back on those memories and look at the tacky jewelry; that cheap metal has become my most prized possession.

And what can I say about my mother, Maria Del Refugio Cornejo González? She had the loudest laughter I've ever heard. As a kid in Mexico, I used to dislike her laughter; it wasn't how women were “supposed” to laugh. You see, my mom was from a big city and she moved with my father to a tiny town in Oaxaca, where women are supposed to walk quietly with their heads down. Well, my mom was just not that person. She challenged everyone in that little town and never stopped being her happy/witty self.

With the years I learned to LOVE my mother's laughter and would do just about anything to make her laugh out loud so I could hear it; especially in her last years when she was in so much physical pain.



I love my parents and the memories and lessons they left me and my two girls. I pray that I can fill my father's shoes and be at least half of the hard, responsible, loyal person he was. And, I hope that when I throw my head back and laugh out loud, I fill my kids' hearts like my mom's laughter used to fill mine.



How You Come to Life

And one day
you step into time
and you're trapped—that second
seizes—you grasp
at the quick
the quickness
of light, all flickering
bodies
call you to touch,
and, trapped by love,
you move to follow.

By *Marcia Casey*

Crocus

By Doug Yunker



*A single crocus blossom ought to be enough to convince our heart
that springtime, no matter how predictable, is somehow
a gift, gratuitous, gratis, a grace.*

David Steindl-Rast



Divine Gardener of Souls

Who tends us as we grow and mature,
Nourish and water us with your loving care,
And give us the courage to see our reflection in the fruits of our choices,
So that we may discern and embrace our possibilities
In your Kingdom on Earth.
In the name of Eden Reborn,
Amen

Collect by the EfM Class
1/14/2022

Seashore Family Literacy

By *Sandra L. Stephens*

When the virus lockdown occurred in our community, for Senitila McKinley, Founder and Director of Seashore Family Literacy, her first thought was, “Where are our friends (those without a permanent dwelling) going to use a bathroom and how will we be able to serve their needs?”

True to Senitila’s unbreakable spirit, she set a plan of action into place. An extra outdoor portable bathroom was ordered, and a hand-washing station was set up outside. Also, a picnic table with coffee, a water cooler for drinking, and a portable cooler set-up with ready-to-eat food.

Following all the guidelines—daily disinfection of bathrooms, tables, and information given out on the importance of washing hands and wearing of masks—was always done.

Second issue Senitila asked, “How are we going to continue feeding our community during this time?” With contributions from the community, at Seashore, meals were and are still prepared and delivered to families daily.

In addition to coping with the closures, Green Bike volunteers were willing to keep the doors open. Hula dancing is taught along with Ukulele classes twice a week in the Joy Garden at Seashore. The Joy Gardeners still come out and keep the plants watered and plant new ones. These programs continued even during the fire and smoke crisis.

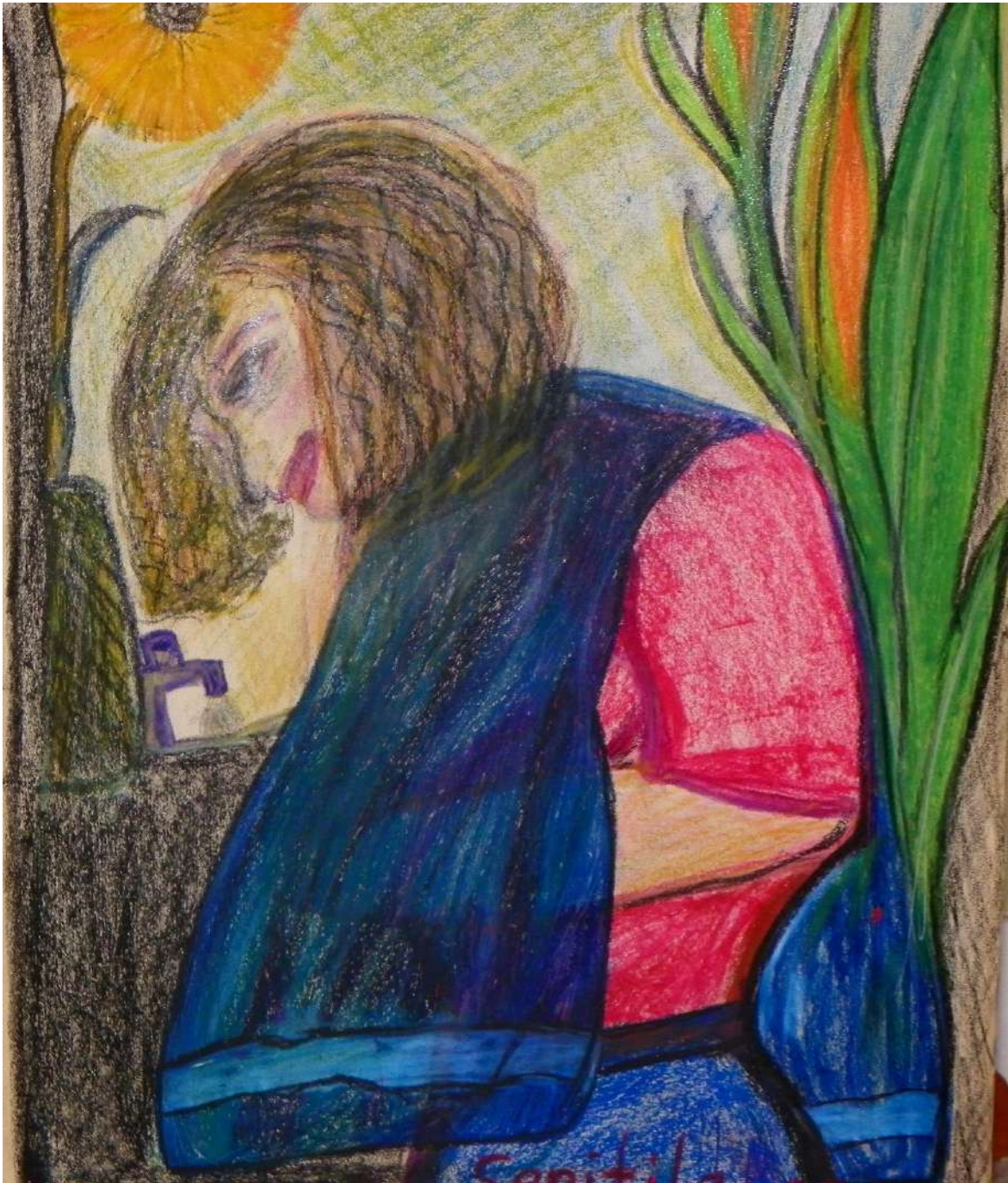
Seashore Family Literacy is run by volunteers only. “Our programs are built to meet the needs of those that may not have basic resources to get through the day. The key is to be consistent and get to know the people in our community. I find during this time is an opportunity to extend our love and care for our community. It has been a great blessing to go through this and learn how to be better people with you all,” shared Senitila.

Seashore is located on Bay Street next to the City Hall.

In times when doors were closed due to the pandemic, Seashore managed to—and continues to—serve and provide for the community. With gratitude and thanks to Seashore and the many volunteers who have committed themselves to doing what is necessary to provide basic supplies and necessities for those who are without and who may need to be comforted and cared for!

An Extra Treat

By *The Rev. Deacon Senitila McKinley*



"All she needed was a bit of water to wash her face.
The clean towel was an extra treat." Senitila McKinley

The Drifter

He stopped by this morning,
I could tell from his face he was hungry.
He did not want to be here,
But where else could he go?
When you are wet and smell,
It's not easy to find a place to sit.
He looked very tired.
“May I give you a cup of coffee?”
He nodded his head with a smile.
Coffee with a warm breakfast.

He ate slowly and did not talk.
I did not know what he might be thinking.
We all need shelter.
I gave him some warm dry clothes,
Clean socks and helped him change his shoes.
He smiled even bigger when I gave him lunch in a bag.
Before he left,
He said, “Thank you.”
I gave him an invitation to come back when he is hungry.
Jesus was smiling upon both of us.

By *The Rev. Deacon Senitila McKinley*

We Were Here Once

By Dennis Moler



*“Hold on to what is good, even if it’s a handful of earth.
Hold on to what you believe, even if it’s a tree that stands by itself.
Hold on to what you must do, even if it’s a long way from here.
Hold on to your life, even if it’s easier to let go.
Hold on to my hand, even if someday I’ll be gone away from you.”*

Chief Crowfoot

O God of All Seasons,

To whom light and darkness are the same,
Help us to weather the dark storm as we wait for the brightness of sun,
So that we find comfort in our vulnerability,
Trusting in your love and feeling joy in your presence.

Shine in my heart,
Lord Jesus



03/04/2022

Collect by the EfM Class
3/4/2022

Finding Christ-in-the-Desert: Meditation on a Dirt Road

By *Jeanne St John & Kae Bates, photographer*

Want a quick lesson in slowing WAY down and taking each moment as it comes? Then we can highly recommend the hour-long drive on the 13-mile journey from Highway 84 to the Christ-in-the-Desert Benedictine Monastery in far northern New Mexico.

Driving the red clay dirt road at 10-15 miles/hour was a meditation in itself. As a driver you must stay fully present to each moment's ruts, rocks, and rivulet runs. This time I didn't use my natural instinct to go faster, to be efficient, to "hurry it up," but willingly surrendered to the rough road and tried to go where it was leading me—at the right pace.

Being the driver for a well-known photographer (my wife) made the slow pace an even greater visual feast. The landscape of rich red, yellow, pink, and cream layered rock was mesmerizing—all spread against a bright blue sky with spun cotton clouds. I began to see exactly which combinations of rock formations and exactly which flora would make a good photographic combination. And I maneuvered the car for photo-shots without once backing off the good part of the dirt road.



Christ-in-the-Desert Monastery Chapel, Abiquiu, NM

We repeatedly pulled to the side of the single-lane road to marvel at the colors, forms, and magnificence of the natural landscape. God’s artistry at hand—and a sense of God’s time in the eons represented in the multi-hued layers of rock. These magnificent formations were ocean floor in the range of 150-250 million years ago—and now they line a fragile roadway for modern pilgrims to pass by.

Wind, water, and time have created a visual masterpiece that touches the soul directly—as you are placed at the “center of God’s time” in this isolated and beautiful place. We began to see these pull-outs as opportunities to “pray with our eyes” and to thank God for such inspiring examples of natural beauty. Rather than resent the slow pace, we savored every moment, looking this way and that, to see the stunning rock formations that appeared around every bend in the long, winding road.

Then we saw them—hooded monks clad in dark red robes rising high in the rock face of the walls behind the monastery compound. Who could have known that God sculpted these “Guardian Monks” in those millions of years, awaiting the day only 50 years ago, when the Benedictines were ready to establish a small community in this remote canyon.



Red Rock Monks Standing Guard

This Morning I Saw a Hawk

This morning I saw a hawk
It perched on my forearm
What is the raptor message I wonder?
Cultivate a quiet observant mind
Release the tethered energy from long ago
Speak the begging memories
Free the leather lead
Step onto the elevator within
Fetch the blue-green sky from above
Calm breezes rearrange each hair
Soften the landscape within
Brighten eyes, loosen clutch fingers, spread toes, sprout roots
Feet lightened
Wings spread
Eyes widened
Skin warmed

Welcome flickering star lights
Sparkling with pin prick clarity
And fill me with soaring images
Sense an ancient aliveness
That has always been there
Lifting souls earth grounded
Take flight

By *Michele Hogan*



You Must Ask for What You Really Want By *Jeanne St John*

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other"
doesn't make any sense.
The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.*

Rumi

What do you really want? Towards what is your labyrinth journey taking you right now?

While we live in unsettled and unsettling times, there is a presence that brings peace to our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls if we slow down enough to receive that gift, that experience of Divine Unity.

That is my prayer.

Gold & Turquoise Vase

By *The Rev. Martha Wallace*



Red & Black Vase

By *The Rev. Martha Wallace*



“Tarzan” Comes to the PAC: An Interview with Annie Pusey & Vera Kyei By Marcia Casey



After two years of darkness and silence in the theater at Newport’s Performing Arts Center (PAC) due to Covid-19, live theater leapt full-blown back to life in Coastal Art Production’s (CAP) presentation of “Tarzan, the Stage Musical” this past February and March. Two members of the St. Luke community—Annie Pusey and Vera Kyei (age 11)—took part in the production, and they agreed to talk with me about their experience. What emerged from our conversations was a portrait of a vital, loving, giving community on several levels.

Drawn from the community-at-large by word of mouth, people young and old applied to CAP to act in “Tarzan.” Like Annie & Vera, those applying for the Gorilla Ensemble, the extended gorilla family that adopted orphaned baby Tarzan and raised him as one of their clan, were automatically accepted – everyone was welcome because CAP is a non-profit, 100% volunteer organization whose mission is “to foster, promote and increase public knowledge and appreciation of the arts and cultural activities in Lincoln County through youth theatre.” Only those applying for main parts had to audition. Once the cast of 40 – about half children, half adults – was set, the hard work of putting together and putting on a musical show began in November of 2021. It was in the midst of another surge of Covid-19 and no one knew whether the show would come to fruition. In a note in the show’s printed program, director & producer Jody Hanna wrote: “...we decided that... we had to move forward with faith that things would work out. It was risky, but we needed something to fill our souls after so much personal and community loss.”

Everyone – director, cast, crew, orchestra, and extended theater family – threw themselves into their communal work: the wife of the actor who played Tarzan was the choreographer; the director’s husband helped construct the set, which was designed by the actor who played the leader of the gorilla clan; the costumes were designed by the actress who played the mother gorilla who originally took baby Tarzan in; cast members sewed all the fringe on each gorilla costume. Later on, members of the cast also did hair and make-up for everyone, starting with the youngest children & working on up to the adults in a kind of assembly line. Everyone pitched in with chores to keep everything organized and tidy and to save on cleaning fees. Vera said that for her “it was like one big, giant family—everyone

knew everyone else's names, everybody brought food to share a lot. I made lots of new friends." The troupe became its own hard-working, bonded community.

The story of "Tarzan of the Apes," by Edgar Rice Burroughs, was originally published serially in a pulp magazine in 1912, came out as a book in 1914, and was made into a silent movie in 1918. I asked Vera and Annie why they thought it was still so popular more than a century later? Annie, who is a musician and sang as the Gorilla Soloist in addition to being in the general Gorilla Ensemble, felt that Phil Collins' score with its modern music and choreography brought the age-old dilemmas of love, belonging, self, conflict, and diversity alive for contemporary audiences. Vera had a strong sense that the main intent of the play was not to present a message but was more about fundamental human connections: "It's still popular because of the humor, because people can relate to the characters. It's a classic! People want to find out about the jungle, they just want to be part of it!"



Though the opening nights of the public performances started off hesitantly, the last several shows had almost no empty seats. After two years of being shut down due to the pandemic, the small community of the "Tarzan" troupe gave this funny, touching, thoughtful, exuberant musical feast to the larger community of Lincoln County & brought us back to life.

Vera said she was "definitely going to do it again next year!" and Annie said, "I didn't know it would be as neat as it was!"



Dining Out in the Hood

By *Linnea Harper*

One day, someone hatched a plan. To keep it simple, let's call her One. Well, One shared her musings with Two, who had known Three and Four forever, and the plan involved them, you see. Now, everyone knew Two can't keep his yap shut. He spilled the beans to Three, but wouldn't say who cooked them up. Three shrugged, but couldn't stop pondering who had proposed such a scheme. Two, who had already said too much, bit his tongue and kept his mouth closed.

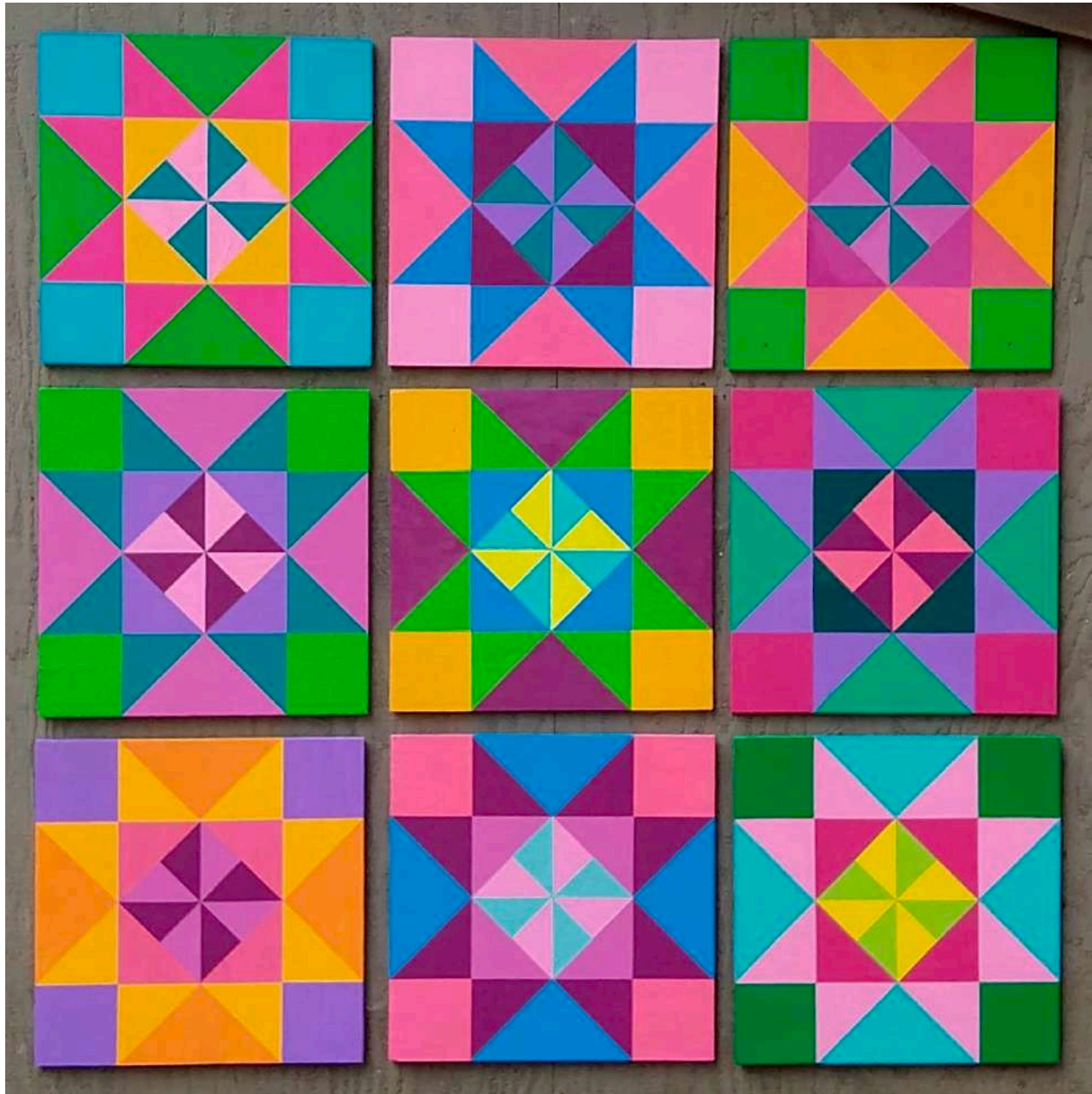
A week or so later, One told Five, and soon Five, having failed to grasp the secret nature of One's grapevining tale, mentioned it in the presence of Two and Four, and Two said Uh-oh, and Five said Uh-oh? and Four said I'll be spam! What does One think I am?!? taking fierce umbrage, which Five mistook for faux outrage cuz really, it was all so silly.

So Saturday's usual dinner out with One through Six (but not Three, who flew south for the winter), started with the usual banter and egg-toss, when Four, overcome by compassion fatigue (there's always a reason), started spewing hot rocks at One for the damage One had done, or potentially done, to Four's thing with Three, as Four might now think Three was the source of the plan, which clearly, is not how it happened.

After the food arrived, Two tried to soothe Four, opining that One was acting from kindness, but Four blasted back, tongue-lashing One again, noting the kindness was quite misdirected, and not only missed the mark but threatened the mission. Twice-stung, the stunned One gulped her whole enchilada, gave stink-eye to Five, and blew out the door. On Sunday, One said she was done and planned to leave town. On Monday, a lady stopped by to load up her chickens.

Barn Quilt

By *Linnea Harper*





In Beloved Memory
Jean Evelyn Bishop
April 10, 1927 - February 13, 2022

No, My Mother Was Not Cute

By *Rand Bishop*

That little, white-haired lady? She was ferocious!
“Your mom is so cute!” Nearly every time I visited her at the memory care center, one of the staff would exude those exact words.

No doubt, they always meant it sincerely and affectionately. After all, to them Mom was a tiny, frail woman with crystal blue eyes, snow-white hair and a faint, faraway smile. She was the sweet lady who reached out for their hand and pressed it to her cheek. Sometimes, she would even kiss their fingers.

If this one-dimensional, paper-doll description of my mother revealed anything, it was that these people didn’t know her at all. So, time after time, I found myself holding my tongue, screwing my lips into a grin and nodding in feigned agreement.

This is how I wanted to respond:

My mother is not cute! My mother is ferocious and formidable; a force to be reckoned with. She is a powerhouse, a brilliant, gifted, creative artist; indefatigable,

inexorable. She has the resolve, the heart and the moral fortitude of a saint. No person could ever live up to her lofty standards or meet her expectations.

That sweet kiss on your knuckles? Yes, it was an expression of love and gratitude. But, it was also a kiss of forgiveness for your mortal flaws. With that tender gesture, she was acknowledging you for trying your best, but with due consideration for your all-too-human, obviously limited, Earth-bound deficiencies.

No one was more stoic than my mother. No one I've ever known made greater personal sacrifices. She never prioritized her own interests; Life, to her, was all about being of service. And she believed, to the very end, that if she didn't tackle the task herself, no one would. Or, if someone else did happen to step up, they couldn't possibly do it right, at least not without her supervision.

The mother of my childhood was unhappy, dissatisfied and unfulfilled. Having come from 100% Finnish stock, she was born under a cloud of fatalism. Mom and her three siblings were children of the Great Depression, raised in a small, Craftsman cottage across a grassy field from Grampa's general store. The house, which lacked running water and indoor plumbing, stood a mere 50 feet from the steel rails that provided the east-to-west and west-to-east route for locomotives pulling freight along the Columbia River between Astoria and Portland.

The train would slow down once a day at the store/post office to hang the mail bag on a pole. And every few days, one would stop long enough to uncouple a car full of burlap feed bags or goods for the store shelves. These layovers provided the perfect chance for a hobo to hop off. And when an itinerant traveler knocked on Gramma's kitchen door, she never turned them away. They were always served a hot meal, no questions asked.

So, imprinted by her own mother's example, the child who would become my mother naturally developed a dedication to help her fellow man. And, if her life's mission hadn't been put on hold for 20 years, the mother with whom I grew up might have been a happier camper.

Instead, as females of her generation were expected to do, she followed the normative script by marrying Dad and getting pregnant with me, which meant abandoning her nursing career before it even got started. After I was born, two weeks before their first wedding anniversary, Mom looked directly into Dad's eyes and declared, "This is it. You're not getting out of this now."

I was the first of five sons. Mom and Dad were married for 73 years.

1951

She was smarter, more educated and possessed far greater talent than her husband. Still, Mom found herself stranded on the furthest edge of suburbia in an 800-square-foot, red-shingled box with no friends, no outlet for her save-the-world compulsions and a sickly toddler. Soon, there was a second baby on the way.

While Dad was living his dream, blissfully selling Oldsmobiles in the city, Mom channeled the jangled, manic energy from a dozen daily cups of black coffee into one creative endeavor after another: mosaic tile art, rag-rug making, stripping and re-finishing antique furniture, knitting, more knitting.

I still have this image of her in my mind, standing at the kitchen sink, gazing forlornly out the window. For what seemed like hours, she peeled carrots and cut them up meticulously. Every fourth stick would go into her mouth. She devoured so much carotene her skin began to turn yellow.

Raw veggies and caffeine; her firstborn hacking painfully from chronic bronchitis; son #2 causing morning sickness; a dearth of adult companionship. Add to those ingredients her hard-won RN certificate gathering dust. Not a recipe for a contented housewife, especially a brilliant, fiercely independent one of dour Scandinavian heritage.

1966

Mom didn't want to move to Boise. She was living in the dream house of her own design, with a view of the river and three mountain peaks. But, as always, her husband's career aspirations took precedence over her desires. It was the fall semester of my high school senior year. Dad was away, establishing his Volkswagen dealership in Idaho, leaving Mom to wrangle five boisterous sons, ranging in age from four to seventeen.

My rock band was banging out arrangements in the basement. My brothers were no doubt banging on each other. My band mates and my brothers' posse thought nothing of invading the kitchen to devour Mrs. Bishop's infamous, homemade chocolate chip cookies before they'd even had a chance to cool.

I don't recall the final straw. I do recall walking down the hallway and hearing an odd, alien sound. A woman crying; No, *sobbing*. I peeked through the open door of the laundry room. There was my always stern, stoic, unflappable mother leaning back

against the dryer with her head buried in her hands, her shoulders heaving, tears cascading down her quivering forearms.

Suddenly, the floor beneath my feet turned into shifting sand, leaving me wobbly and unrooted. Who was this distraught person? How could I possibly comfort her? I felt embarrassed by her fragility. And had she known I was there observing, she probably would have been embarrassed, too—for showing weakness, for crumbling under the stress of it all.

Years later, Dad confided that those months nearly stretched their marriage to the breaking point. Unbeknownst to my brothers and me, Mom actually threatened divorce.

I never saw my mother shed another tear, not even when her husband's heart stopped beating in the 74th year of their marriage.

Idaho

Ironically – and happily – it was the move to Boise that finally set the stage for Mom to live the life she had always envisioned for herself and become the person she always believed herself to be. The state famous for potatoes, of all places, introduced her to a core group of talented, brilliant, highly motivated women. In them, she not only found profound, lifetime friendships but partners in noteworthy achievement. Mom co-founded not one, but *two* alternative schools. Meanwhile, she discovered her ultimate creative expression, quickly mastering the fine art of quilting. As a founding member of the Boise Peace Quilt Project, she played a featured role in the Academy Award nominated documentary *A Stitch For Time*. And, in her late 40s, she aced all her classes at Boise State University on her way to earning a teaching degree.

The rest of the story

But Mom had always dreamed of living on the Oregon Coast. Dad purchased a condominium overlooking Agate Beach in Newport, a cozy spot that served as a family getaway destination for the better part of the 1980s. Then, when Dad's auto dealership went belly up, my parents came to abide on the left coast full time. In Oregon, while Dad made stab after stab at launching new money-making ventures, Mom took over as primary bread winner, quickly becoming one of Lincoln County's most in-demand substitute teachers.

I had no idea how appreciated and admired she was in the local teaching community until I returned to my home state from Nashville, Tennessee, in 2012. My folks, 84 and 85 at the time, had just lost their treasured condo to foreclosure. For them to

continue to live independently would require extra assistance. And that responsibility fell square upon yours truly.

My mother's classroom renown was revealed to me at a friend's birthday party. The honoree was a retired teacher. Naturally, several of the other party attendees were also former teachers. When word got out that I was Jean Bishop's son, they gathered around me and the gushing began:

"When I needed a sub," one woman declared, "Jean was always my first call."
"Oh, me, too!" agreed another. "Jean didn't take any guff from those kids."
"Nope!" a third chimed in. "She wouldn't just put on a video and kick back, like most subs. She stuck to the lesson plan. With Jean, you always knew your syllabus would be right on schedule when you got back."

That was my mother. You want the job done right? Call Jean Bishop.

Not that she ever cared much about what anyone thought of her.

I was chatting with one of my parents' longtime neighbors. "Your mother is..." the elderly fellow began, before pausing to scan the thesaurus in his head to find the perfect word to describe her, "... *opinionated*."

There was a definite subtext of misogyny in this cryptic description. Here was a man who hadn't a clue how to relate to a woman as powerful as my mother. To him, she wasn't remotely "cute." It seemed evident that, at some point, he'd come toe-to-toe with her—which must have looked comical because he was a full six-four and Mom was five-two. Mom didn't take any guff from those unruly students. Neither would she ever have backed down when confronting a pushy, patronizing neighbor.

As co-founder of the Oregon Coasters Quilters Guild, Mom's intricate, inventive quilts won multiple awards at the Guild's annual weekend-long show, where she also conducted workshops for local children. At last summer's County Fair, I approached the Guild's booth and introduced myself to some of her cohorts. The women made no bones about it. In Newport's quilting community, my mother was the O.G. Her peers were intimidated by her lofty standards and extraordinary artistry. I think Mom would have enjoyed hearing that. She may have been reluctant to express pride in herself but she had no false modesty when it came to her quilting skills.

As if those accomplishments weren't impressive enough, Mom's most exemplary legacy has to be The Stone Soup Supper. She must have had her own mother's openhearted Depression-era beneficence in mind when she proposed the weekly

charity dinner for the disadvantaged. And because of my mother's undying advocacy, every Monday evening – even when Christmas falls on a Monday – 70, 80, sometimes as many as 90 hungry folks receive a hot meal.

And for 30 years, my little white-haired mother was always there in the kitchen of St. Stephens Episcopal Church cracking the whip, keeping volunteers from five local church congregations in line. She was beloved and respected. She was also feared. Any volunteer who dared to slough off received a squinted glare and/or a verbal jab from the petite, grandmotherly Drill Sergeant.

Post supper and clean-up, Mom would drive two or three of the homeless men to their shelter or camp site. Their body odor would linger in her Mazda for days. Mom's carpooling ended the night she neglected to turn her car's lights on, drove up onto a sidewalk, and became so disoriented she had no idea where she was. It was beginning to become evident that her cognition was beginning to slip. She never got behind the wheel again.

After a stroke in February of 2017, Mom reluctantly relinquished her Stone Soup responsibilities. Partial blindness meant that, for her safety, she had to be kept clear of knives or the electric range. With her wifely domestic role now severely restricted, she still stubbornly insisted she was capable of preparing a meal. Having assumed the chef's responsibilities, I was constantly challenged to find safe tasks to keep her busy and feeling productive. Mom's quilting inspiration had died several years earlier, when my brother Bart succumbed to a heart attack. She'd long since lost the mental acuity and physical stamina to lead a classroom.

So, one by one, the various missions that had given her life meaning were taken from her. Gradually, her daily walks became shorter and more belabored. The mysterious sudden fainting spells she'd been having for years came more frequently, precipitating numerous ambulance trips to the ER.

In 2019, the ever increasing dependency of my parents finally became too burdensome. Mom's world was becoming a maze of distorted mirrors and Dad's body was failing. They agreed it was time to move into an assisted living facility. I spent three of the five days prior to their move at the hospital – two with Dad, one with Mom.

Occasionally, Dad confided how difficult it was to get along with his bride. Still, right up to the day he died, Dad claimed that her wicked insults and wild hallucinations didn't really bother him. But I could tell how deeply wounded he was, witnessing his

strong, brilliant, beautiful life partner transforming into a spiteful, delirious, distant stranger.

I was driving Dad back to their assisted living apartment from a podiatrist appointment. His toes were black with dry gangrene, literally dying from lack of circulation. As it often did, the subject of conversation returned to the daily, exhausting challenge of co-existing with Mom.

“It’s horrible what a stroke can do to a person,” he said.

“It’s not the stroke, Dad,” I reminded him. “Mom has Alzheimer’s.”

“I didn’t know that,” he asserted.

“Yes, you did,” I insisted, my heart aching with sympathy for his sorrowful plight and continuous denial. “I can’t imagine how difficult this must be for you, Dad. But you were in the doctor’s office when he said the word Alzheimer’s right out loud. You were there when she took the test.”

After a 10-second lull, my father diverted our repartee to a less painful subject. “The Trailblazers game last night was really exciting, wasn’t it!”

Mixed blessings

Alzheimer’s severely exacerbated Mom’s latent frustration and impatience. However, the disease also unveiled the tender, loving, sweet nature that compelled her to caress and kiss the hand of an attending nurse or caregiver.

The stroke, on the other hand, might have robbed part of her field of vision. But, it also awakened a sense of humor that had been hibernating for nearly 90 years.

One quick example:

It was early August. We’d been waiting since my father’s passing in May for a room to open up at a memory care center, with staff trained to deal with Alzheimer’s and where Mom would be prevented from wandering off. There was one final legal formality to clear. The facility’s administrator had to interview Mom to “confirm” her Alzheimer’s diagnosis.

As the cheerful gentleman took a seat, he laid eyes on Mom for the first time.

Obviously struck by her loveliness he said, “Jean, you look like an angel.”

Mom’s eyes squinted with sudden suspicion. “What did you say?” she demanded.

Somewhat taken aback by the stridency of her response, he forced his smile wider.

Nervously, he repeated the compliment. “I said, you look like an angel.”

“Oh,” she remarked, allowing the subtlest of grins, “I’m not ready for *that*.”

The poor fellow hadn’t the first clue why I found this quip so hilarious.

Six months and three days after moving into the memory care center, my mother was finally “ready for that.” She’d been refusing to eat and had lost 30-some pounds. She no longer recognized me and was incapable of uttering more than a few breathy syllables. We decided it was time to transition her to palliative hospice care.

On the morning of February 13th, 2022, Jean Evelyn Bishop passed away peacefully in her sleep, two months shy of her 95th birthday.

In repose, she didn’t look the least bit cute. But, with her taut facial muscles now relaxed, she did appear angelic. And if any human being ever earned a pair of angel wings, that human being has to be my mother.

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Let’s Hope So

By *Dennis Moler*

