

The Berries Belonged to Everyone

an anthology of writing by Hamilton Arms Center residents

2019-2020

Published by Tyler Barton (May, 2020)
First Edition (80 copies)
Cover image by Michelle Johnsen Photography

Thanks to the Berks Arts Council for making this project possible.

Thanks also to Hamilton Arms Center and staff, especially Kim Sangrey, Director Of Therapeutic Recreation, Dementia Practitioner, Behavioral Health Specialist.

This project (a free, twelve-week workshop at Hamilton Arms Center) was supported in part by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.



This book is dedicated to

Jim Diem

Jean Lewis

&

Herbert "Cubby" Speise

who passed away due to COVID-19
in the early spring of 2020.

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Part One | 8 |
| The workers would talk slang | 9 |
| 1942 | 10 |
| I Didn't Like, but I Love | 11 |
| In 1944 | 12 |
| Where I'm From | 13 |
| Help & Thanks | 15 |
| Blue Lagoon | 16 |
| Photograph | 17 |
| Part Two | 19 |
| Photograph | 20 |
| Marriage | 21 |
| Marriage | 22 |
| If I was not at my neighbor's house | 24 |
| Photograph | 25 |
| A Small Moment that Could Have Changed My Life | 26 |
| Paul | 27 |
| Part Three | 28 |
| On "The Scream" by Edvard Munch | 29 |
| On "The Scream" by Edvard Munch | 30 |
| On "The Scream" by Edvard Munch | 31 |
| On "The Scream" by Edvard Munch | 32 |
| On "The Scream" by Edvard Munch | 33 |
| Part 4 | 34 |
| Where I'm From | 35 |
| 1958 | 36 |
| Where I'm From | 37 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 1944 | 38 |
| People Who Have Helped Me, and People I Have Helped | 39 |
| Cubby | 41 |
| “John” | 42 |
| Hacienda (a shade of red) | 43 |
| Childhood Home (New Holland) | 44 |
| 1958 | 45 |
| I Don’t Like, but I Love | 47 |
| Photograph | 48 |
| Where I’m From | 49 |

Introduction

by Tyler Barton

This will have to be a sad book.

Many of the stories, poems, and essays here are joyous, humorous, and pleasant—but many of the writers are gone.

One of the central beliefs that drives me to do this work is that people near the end of their lives have much to offer in terms of creativity, imagination, and intelligence, and these offerings are not, by-default, related to the end of life. I know I still believe that, but the pandemic has made it hard not to look at this collection of writing as, now, about death. I would encourage you not to see it that way. The life in this work is strong. The words are still loud and clear.

We began this project in October of 2019. I visited these nine writers every Tuesday until the final workshop took place on February 4th. In the hour I was there each week, we looked at a poem, essay, or story by another author, and then I provided a prompt. We would all write for about 15 minutes, and then we would share our work and talk. It was very simple. It was the best hour of my week. I left filled with anecdotes, jokes, phrases, and images of a Lancaster County I have never known—from the blueberries on the side of River Road in Columbia, to a school in a church in Strasburg. I wrote the grant as if this project were an act of

service—bringing a writing program to long-term care facility—but I knew it was, at its core, truly an exercise in self-enrichment.

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has, in the two months since I last saw these writers, wreaked havoc on Hamilton Arms Center. As I write this, there have been 36 deaths there due to the virus, and many more residents and staff are infected. Three of the nine writers in this anthology have passed due to the virus, and all of them have tested positive. My liaison at Hamilton Arms, Kim Sangrey (without whom this project would not have happened) has been on the ground with these people since long before this virus made them victims. She has been their friend, their nurse, their entertainer, their confidant. She's seen firsthand the damage this pandemic has done, and the experience has changed her profoundly. "This will be a long, sad journey," she told me recently, already months into the pandemic. I asked her if she would like to try writing from that place of frustration, grief, and fear. You can find her poem on the last page of this book. Her words are nakedly honest and visceral, and very necessary for future healing.

This anthology is dedicated to the nine writers who wrote it, their families, and the heroic staff at Hamilton Arms Center. The world has created a context in which this must be a sad book, but I hope you will find that it is so much more.

— Tyler Barton, April 2020

Part One

The workers would talk slang

by Jim Diem

Sometimes so fast you couldn't understand.

I have a big gut.

I went to the Army. Most of my friends went to the Marine Corps.

I was not frivolous with the others in the military.

I learned more in the Army than I did in school.

My wife and I were both virgins when we got married.

This was not typical of military guys.

I had no tattoos, but a lot of military people did.

My father passed away when I was thirteen. My mother was a big influence for
me.

She read me the bible and taught me right from wrong.

I got paid \$1/hour washing dishes.

I am thankful for the VA.

Some people do not have any support.

1942

by Jean Lewis

Women couldn't buy nylons because they needed material for parachutes. I remember the air raids—they always scared me when the whistle went off. Mom always comforted me. I had two uncles in the war. We used to go to Quarryville theater to see the war news. Once, on the screen, we were sure we saw one of our uncles. My mom made a cake using honey instead of sugar, which was hard to get. We spent a lot of time at church praying for our servicemen. We used to go to the base Bainbridge, Maryland to see the navy men. I'm glad my brother wasn't old enough to go. We sent Christmas cards to the servicemen. That was a school project. We didn't travel much because of the gas shortage, and my parents needed gas for work.

I remember the day the war was over. It was 1944, and I was in the hospital with Polio. I was so happy when my two uncles came to visit me. I was so in love, and proud of them.

I Didn't Like, but I Love

by Lenora Wallace

I didn't like the brothers—
they always drowned me out,
but I loved them all.

I didn't like to wear skirts—
they looked like old ladies clothes,
hand me downs,
but I loved to wear my brothers clothes.

I didn't like girly things—
no dolls or makeup or high heels shoes,
but I loved guns, trucks, and marbles.

I didn't like being the youngest of seven—
I always came in last,
but I loved being babied by my six brothers & sisters.

I didn't like my scooter being stolen,
but I loved my brother Herbie,
who hand made me another one out of boards,
an orange crate, and roller skate wheels.

In 1944

by Edith Reimold

I was ten. My brother-in-law was in the army; my niece was born. At Christmastime our school burned down. It was very sad for some, and happy for others. We all had to attend school in our church in Strasburg. I have a bump on my second finger because of my penmanship teacher in that school. It has never left me.

Where I'm From

by Herbert "Cubby" Speise

I'm from Columbia, near the railroad
where you couldn't hang your wash on the line,
due to the soot from passing steam engines—
and this is before they changed to diesel.

I'm from poor farmers pulling up potatoes,
a large family—7 brothers, 5 sisters, a family
that felt education was important.

From a large house, five bedrooms, a cement cellar, a little yard.
It was the house I was raised in, the same house I would later own.
So in all I lived in that house for 69.5 years.
A house built from the top down,
so the meter man had to run all the way up to the 3rd floor.

Where I'm from, we entertained ourselves
with baseball games and cut-out dolls,
and cookies baking in the oven.

My family was known for volunteering.
We built a playground in an empty lot,
because Columbia had none.
My brothers and I dug it out.
No water or bathrooms.

The playground, when it officially opened,
was named Upper Jansin playground.
It had a badminton court, jungle gym, seesaws.

My parents encouraged us.
My mother was on many, many organizations,
always having meetings.
Dad joined the Fox Harbor Archery club,
And Sports Illustrated said there was only one club better
on the whole east coast.

Where I'm from the family was always laughing, carrying on.
In Columbia everyone had an unusual nickname—
Snake, because you'd turn around and there he was.
Deadman. Brick. Meat Metzger.
Different parts of the town had different names:
Fishtown, North End, Tow Hill.

Columbia was hardwood lumber, fishing—
trout, smallmouth, carp.
Indians used a net to stretch across the river,
but the dams messed that up.

As kids we were taken to pick blueberries
in the country, out along the railroad.
The berries just belonged to everyone,
back before they started spraying for them.

Help & Thanks

by John Collier

I help people in the nursing home. I push their wheelchairs. It makes me feel good when they thank me. I always catch the devil from the staff because they think I'm going to fall when helping people.

My mother did not get the thanks she deserved. She died at an early age of 62 years old. I'm sure my twin brother and I helped her along to her death. The things that we did made her worry and such.

I'm sorry I left my father give you hell. I want to thank you for the way you raised me. I always help old people now.

Blue Lagoon

by Anna Rohrbach

It reminds me of the sky, the sky when it's really blue.

It makes me feel good when I see this color,
when I see a really blue sky.

I think of my mother—she liked the color blue.

She did go blind at an early age.

As a teenager I would have to go get things for her.

The brightest blue is the sky color, and blue eyes.

Photograph

by Judith Meyers

Here I am at home with my family of two dogs, Helga Helga and Freda Freda. Richard, my boyfriend, took the picture. He was always taking pictures of me. I was simply sitting and loving my dogs. I'd just come back from walking them in Central Park. You cannot see Richard taking the photo, nor the front on the piano.

The view from the 8th floor. It reminds me of what I missed in life. I didn't take advantage of what I had, or could have had. You cannot see all the soda bottles which Richard drank. I drank liquor, which is in the photo.

There's a stereo speaker on the floor, because I always listened to music. Bob Dylan, I dated him. My dog Freda Freda who is in the picture was totally fascinated with Bob, would just sit on the floor staring at him. He left and never came back. He said he couldn't wait for me.

I have all the pictures that I currently want of my family. I do not feel a loss of any single photo because my life was captured in multiple photos.

Richard was my #1 friend, though he was very sick. He lived with me. I ensured his well being, though he was very self-sufficient with the right medicine. He never had the chance to say thank you. He passed away quickly. But his sister said he was very grateful for my care of him.

Marisol got me back on my feet. I was very ill and couldn't walk. I was fifty years old. She would come every day, my nanny. She fed me, bathed me, and dressed me. She became my best friend. I gave her a diamond band ring as thanks. Thirty years later she returned the ring. She felt I deserved it back.

Part Two

Photograph

by Jean Lewis

It was my senior year at Solanco, and I went to a photographer in Quarryville to have my picture taken for our yearbook. I was 17 years old and wore a blue sweater and pearls. I had a big smile on my face because I was so happy to be graduating. A neighbor lady did my hair for me. Mom took me to the photographer.

One thing you can't see in the photo is my parents and how proud they were of me.

I was also happy because I was in love with Eddie, who I married when I was 19. He was always the best thing that ever happened to me. I was glad to be out of school so I could get a job and start saving money for our life together.

I wish I had a picture of my grandparents when Eddie and I were Married. They were there, but a picture wasn't taken. I always was sad that we didn't get a picture because they were very special to me. They set a good example of a good marriage and helped Eddie and I throughout our sixty years together.

Marriage

by Herbert "Cubby" Speise

I did come close to being married one time. It was maybe a six week relationship. I was a young man. I wasn't brave enough because I was scared to meet the person she might become after marriage. You think you know a person, but you don't.

Ross Perot said it best: "Be not the first to toss the old aside, nor yet the last to try the new." But I did. I was the last to try the new. It is truly a regret some days.

You see elderly couples walking, and people say, "Aw, isn't that sweet? They're holding hands." But what they don't realize is that they're only holding hands so the other one doesn't run away.

Marriage

by Judith Meyers

I had different feelings regarding what “marriage” was supposed to be about.

When I was young, my father escorted me on a plane from New York City where we lived back to Curacao where I was born and raised. On the plane ride he told me that he had found a husband for me and arranged my marriage. I did marry the man due to my father's wishes, but it ended within a few years.

Years later, I had the pleasure of meeting another gentleman who fell deeply in love with me, though I did not truly love him. He asked to marry me, and I said, “Yes,” but it was not based on love. It was truly based on a feeling of “What the Hell? Why Not?”

After my marriage to this second gentleman, my sister, who was my best friend, stopped talking to me. I tried on several occasions to reach out to her but she refused to contact me, wouldn't speak to me at all. Later I found out that she was in love with my 2nd husband before I married him, and it crushed her. I had no idea she loved him. That marriage ended shortly as well.

I never really did fall deeply in love, and I don't think I ever understood what marriage was about, nor did I grasp the reasoning behind it, nor did my relationship with my sister ever fully repair.

If I was not at my neighbor's house

by Anna Rohrbach

I was invited to my neighbor's house for a big meal. We all sat down and prayed before we ate. We broke bread and shared food family-style. This man I had never seen before was there. He sat at a distance, yet I side-glanced and noticed how handsome he was. He was tall, with dark hair and blue eyes. I was embarrassed and shy. Luckily he was shy too. We did not approach each other at first, but eventually he introduced himself by name—Raymond Paul. We talked about our lives for over two hours, and then he left one week later.

He came back, and the rest is history.

If I did not go to the meal I do not know where I would be. Raymond gave me a new life. That night at dinner, I couldn't imagine the beautiful life I would live with him, but I knew there was something special.

Photograph

by Jim Diem

It's a photo of myself and a crew member. We were in St. Thomas. The whole crew was dressed like pirates. I was on a cruise, on a liner called The Explorer of the Seas. In the background there are palm trees. The photo was taken by a professional photographer. I bought a vest with a lot of pockets so I could put my diabetes medication in. People were asking me if I was fishing. The cruise lasted about a week. We got off the ship and went to the beach. My wife was not in this picture with me, but she did come along on the cruise. She was in a wheelchair.

You can see my bulging belly—I must have had enough lunch. I had to have a passport to go on the cruise. I flew to Miami, Florida to get on the ship. My wife never flew before, and she was grabbing the knee of the guy beside her, not mine. The employees of the ship were from all over the world. They made me comfortable on the ship. I wish I had photos from Vietnam, the boats and ships that I saw. Big ships—flat tops and destroyers.

A Small Moment that Could Have Changed My Life

by John Collier

I was working in a small college town. They had all kinds of girls there, and I picked one up.

That is what ruined my marriage of 50 years. I made a bad, bad decision.

I lost everything.

If I didn't pick that girl up, I'd still be in a happy marriage, and my kids wouldn't be disappointed in me, and my wife would come visit me here.

Paul

by Lenora Wallace

I went roller skating and was introduced to Paul. He tried to hold my hand, but he wasn't very good at skating, so he left the rink. I thought of him day and night, remembering his light brown hair and warm palm. I did not know how to get a hold of him.

Out of nowhere one week later he appeared again at the skating rink and asked me to be his girlfriend. Four weeks after that we were married before he was shipped to Vietnam.

If I did not go skating that night I know I would have met him in another place—we were destined to be together. We were soulmates. We were to be always together. I would have waited a lifetime for him, and him for me.

Part Three

On “The Scream” by Edvard Munch

by Judith Meyers

She is stuck and does not know which way to go.

She can go into the water or this lovely path.

She lost her wig in the water and is covering her ears
because she can't stand the sound.

On “The Scream” by Edvard Munch

by Jean Lewis

She screams to her family on shore who are hard of hearing. She wants them to come out on the bridge and view the beautiful sky and the bridge reaching out into the water that resembles a hand. She is not screaming from fear. She only wants her family to see what a beautiful sight she has seen.

On “The Scream” by Edvard Munch

by Jim Diem

Despair
with the volcano
in Hawaii

On “The Scream” by Edvard Munch

by Linda Cooper

He is screaming
because of the helicopter crash.

We can't get any closer
because of the heat wave.

We should move away.

On “The Scream” by Edvard Munch

by Herbert “Cubby” Speise

She’s screaming because she sees a wreck at the end of the bridge. A car wreck. It could be almost anything. At the edge or end of the bridge. It could be a man or a woman.

It reminds me of Columbia, and the skinny bridge along the railroad track. You could walk along the side of track over the bridge, getting very close to the track. One day I was walking over that bridge and I heard the whistle and I thought it was far off, but the wind was blowing so hard against the train, blowing the sound backward. So it turned out the train was closer than it was. Much closer. A freight train. As it passed me it was ten inches from my shoulder. If the box cars had had a wire or anything sticking out, it would have caught me. It would have drug me along.

I believe there was a guardian angel above us, or on the train, or twenty feet off from the bridge.

Part 4

Where I'm From

by Linda Cooper

I am from the old country in Germany,
a place my parents took us out of in hope
of finding better living. I was very young

and hopeful to find a better life. As I grew up
I enjoyed this different country.

I am from Love.

I often talk to my sons about
the beauty of different countries.

1958

by Jim Diem

I had three sisters and one brother. We had a dog named Ginger. I remember waiting for my brother to get off the bus. We always ate meals as a family—we had to clean our plates. We could not leave the table until we ate all our food. I went to a one-room school where all grades were taught in one room. My mom saved plastic bags from the bread. Father was a stonemason, and he had his own business. My brother John was my best friend. We played at the playground with balls. We played in the sandbox. The family car was a Rambler. We lived in New Holland, out in the Country, where we shared a phone with four other families. You knew the phone call was for you by the amount of times it would ring.

Where I'm From

by Judith Meyers

I am from the concrete jungle
and the islands of oceans.

I am from the glistening light
of Broadway to the freon in the air.

The grey stillness within my heart
to the warmth within my soul.

I am from: *Do it or screw it,*
just don't hand me no more jive.

1944

by Lenora Wallace

I got a red scooter. My mother told me to not leave it outside, but I did anyway and someone stole it. We did not have much money to buy a new one, so my brother made me one out of an orange, wooden crate and attached metal roller skates to the bottom. He would wheel me around since I was heartbroken about my scooter. I still miss my little red scooter.

People Who Have Helped Me, and People I Have Helped

by Jean Lewis

First we lived in a rented house, but then we bought a home. The house we had rented was sold to a man and his wife and son. We became friends. In time, the husband passed away. The daughter came and made her mother meals and took care of her.

The daughter was coming to the house one day when she ran into a truck and was instantly killed. For three years I prepared an extra meal for the mother, and Eddie took it to her every day when he came home from work. She was very thankful, and I miss doing that for her.

*

I feel that having polio at age eleven made me different from my friends. I couldn't walk, so that kept me from doing a lot of things that I wanted to do. I had family who supported me. I began to exercise and took swimming lessons which helped me to learn to walk again. Eventually I could overcome some of the feelings I had about myself. I became a stronger person in every way and learned to be thankful for everything I accomplished.

When I graduated from school, I had a hard time finding a job because I still didn't walk well from having polio. One of my teachers called a relative of hers, and he helped me get a job at Education Insurance. I was very thankful for this teacher, who was also my Sunday school teacher. We remained friends for life.

*

My mother was my angel. She took such good care of my brother and me. When I had polio, she came every day except for one in the entire three months that I was in the hospital. She was a wonderful mother and grandmother. She worked hard to take care of us.

I was so devastated when she died at the age of 65. She'd taken my three daughters to New York City to see a Christmas show. She fell over dead on the street.

We lost a wonderful lady. Not only my mother but also my best friend. I miss her every day.

Cubby

by Herbert “Cubby” Speise

My name means baby bear. My father had me on his lap as a baby and my mom said, “His ears stick out like a bear cub!” that would be my nickname for 81 years.

I like long names. I would like to be named: Alowishes O’Malley and His Baby Whale Named Harry. My Dad thought of all these nicknames. That was one. Nathan would be Nickodemus, which is biblical.

My given name is Herbert, which I’m told means “Bright Army”, and that sounds alright to me. Though, I’m thinking it should be Bright Navy, as I was a sailor.

“John”

by John Collier

The dictionary says it means *gift from God*
Or *gift to God*, or *humble man*.

My name means coal-cracker,
an old German name, strong.

I was named John
after my uncle.

I like my name.
It is a common name.
My nickname is “Chicken”.

I believe I’m a gift to God
because I enjoy helping others.

I’m not holier than thou,
so don’t get me wrong.

He doesn’t ask for much,
so just behave yourself.

Hacienda (a shade of red)

by Lenora Wallace

This color is like red,
with some other colors stuck in.

My favorite color is red,
which makes me feel good.

It's a relaxing color,
makes me feel calm.

Red umbrella, red scooter.
My birthstone is ruby. Ruby shoes.

My husband refused to let me have a red car,
which made me sad.

He said red fades
with the elements of the weather.

Childhood Home (New Holland)

by Jim Diem

No Christmas tree after father passed.

In a block stucco house, with a garage.

Big, round, steel pot kettle,

and bunk beds.

Decorate the outside of the house at Christmas.

And a big backyard

I had to keep mowed.

1958

by John Collier

I remember playing with my friends and going to the movies to see *Flash Gordon*. Everyday the Grinnell Clock would strike ten, and we would wait for that. During the wintertime, the kids from the school up the street would throw snowballs at us, and we were not allowed to throw them back. We had to stop and say a prayer.

I am a twin—younger by an hour and fifty minutes. My twin brother and I would mess with the teachers in school and switch seats. We looked alike, though I dressed very nice, and my twin brother Jim did not care how he looked or dressed. I would take my brother's girlfriend out and make out with her. She didn't know it was me at first, until she looked out the bedroom window and saw my car.

My brother was a drinker which ended up killing him young, at age 56.

My habit is biting my nails.

One summer afternoon, I went to the Farm and Home center. There were lots of people there. It turns out I was to be awarded for not missing an election in 50 years. My wife had been invited to the event because she also never missed an

election in 50 years, but she did not show up. There I was being awarded, wearing khaki pants and a blue Tommy Bahama button-up shirt and sunglasses. The governor sent me a certificate and an iron-on. It goes to show that your vote does count.

I wonder if my brother voted. I doubt it.

I wish I had a photograph of my twin brother. My brother was my best friend. I have a lot of memories. Being a twin, it really hurt. We were very close.

I Don't Like, but I Love

by Judith Meyers

I don't like being put on the spot
because a poet I am not.
But I love that I try
to work with what I've got.

I don't like bullshit,
but just tell the truth and you will make me happy.

I don't like raw meat. I find it no treat,
but I like to eat meat cooked through
and through with hollandaise sauce,
good enough for me.

I don't like trashy clothes,
but I like to see hookers
dressed to be lookers
with 6-inch Jimmy Choos,
which I wish I could wear
and be wooed.

I don't like to see Lenora with pain in her eyes
but I'm so glad I got to see her today anyway.

Photograph

by Herbert “Cubby” Speise

This is a picture of me registering my employment with Armstrong Flooring. It was the first thing you had to do after being hired. Your first job on the job.

It was the only time I’ve ever seen someone take an instant photo. They had the new fancy camera set up on a tri-pod. This was fifty years ago. They snapped the photo of me in a small office. Dozens of others sitting around waiting for their turn. And wouldn’t you know, the photo got stuck in the camera. Normally they used oil to get the photos dislodged when this happened. But they were out of oil. So I said, “Well I have some mayonnaise on a sandwich in my lunch pail!” And we used it. It worked right away. The photo came free and here it is. It’s me. Me with my older style glasses, smiling in my green overcoat.

They put the photo on this card, and I used this card to enter the building every day. Retired Employee Identification—Herbert D. Spiese. Inspection Ops. Labels Inspector.

The office was on Liberty street in Lancaster. I enjoyed working there a lot. Was only laid off twice, for a couple weeks at a time. Then after working there ten years they weren’t allowed to lay you off anymore. They knocked Armstrong down and sold the property to Lancaster General Hospital and F&M so that the rah-rah boys could play soccer.

Where I'm From

by Jean Meyers

I am from Fairfield, a village full
of special people,
a general store full
of all the good things kids like to eat.

I'm from Estella and Paul.

I'm from a house over my father's garage,
the smell of gas and oil.

From a locust tree full of white flowers—
it looked like snow on the ground.

From a church on the hill that called my name.

Eddie got his toes cut off in a lawn mower,
and I drove him illegally to my parents.

Ruth, my best friend,
still is.

Poem

by Kim Sangrey

Director Of Therapeutic Recreation, Dementia Practitioner, Behavioral Health Specialist at Hamilton Arms Center

Sunny skies, light winds, puffy clouds, cool breeze

Breathe in... breathe out... breath in... breath out...

Unaware of the beast that lingers on to claim your soul

Cannot see, cannot touch, cannot taste, the beast

Breathe in... breathe out... breath in... breath out...

100, 102, 103, 104, 105

You wait in fear because you know it's near, waiting for you too

Breathe in... breathe out... breath in... breath out...

DON'T TOUCH

DON'T SMELL

DON'T BREATHE

Cough, pain, delusions

Quarantine, quarantine, quarantine

Fourteen.

No contest, loneliness, isolation, the mind wonders

Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock

Silence

Muffled voices, covered faces,

goggles, masks, gloves, gowns...

Do I know you? Who are you? Why can't I see you?

Breathe in... breathe out... breath in... breath out...

2-14

Fast, furious, angry

Cat sucking milk from a baby's breath

No touch, no comfort, no one

Darkness, silence

The beast...death.