

Gloucester County Library System

Logan Township Branch

Writers Group

Selections

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Freeholder Director, Robert M. Damminger | Freeholder Library Liaison, Lyman Barnes



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CONNECTED

New toy, Oh Joy! Oh Joy!

How to start to create my art

Get connected get detected

Sounded simple enough but then it got tough

Routers and passwords, passwords and routers

Have to talk to each other, refuse to talk to each other

Extreme frustration due to this poor communication

New toy, Oh Boy! Oh Boy!

Wanted to throw it out into the snow, Oh No, Oh No!

Asked a friend for any suggestions, may thanks for answering my questions!

Am now connected and not rejected!

Now to enjoy the new toy, Oh Joy, Oh Joy!

By Marian Fay

REMEMBER ME Jane Harre

"A friend loves at all times..." is a proverb-- a repeatable phrase meant to pass on wisdom in the daily rub of life. Friends are some of the things that give us a reason to get up in the morning. One may be coming to visit, need a ride, be doing us a favor or may simply be in our thoughts; part of the fabric of life.

Thirty-some years ago Pat and her family settled in a nearby town, right next to family friends who introduced us. Though our backgrounds differed considerably, Pat and I had some common interests and grew close. She had the special gift of willingness to drop everything to go for coffee or run an errand together without pre-planning—a friend on tap.

Pat's husband was from nearby Philly; they had moved to New Jersey for his job. There came a day however, when his company's product was replaced by imported items—job gone. It's easy to see where this is going; after a job search and a house search, my handy friend moved several states away.

Fortunately, Pat's in-laws were still living in Philadelphia which brought her to visit me a few hours each summer.

Before the big move, Pat brought me a gift. Although journaling had not yet become common, she found a pretty, cloth bound wordless book and in it she pasted a magazine clipping:

GOOD THINGS BOOK

Whenever something positive happens in my life, I enter it in a book I keep for just such events. When my oldest son graduated from college with honors, I entered that. When my husband got a raise, that went in. An unusually nice dinner party, an outing in the country, etc. are included.

Above all, when I receive a compliment from friends and family, I jot it down. Thus on one page: "You are the bestest mother in the world," from my four-year-old, and on another a tender comment from my husband.

It's a lovely book, full of the good things in my life. Whenever I feel down, I flip it open and read about some happy event it has recorded.

I haven't written in my book or tucked in sweet notes I've received for quite a while. The original one inch thickness has been stretched to six or seven inches stuffed full of only encouraging words. I don't open it often, but it is lying in view and simply seeing it is a blessing. It could be called a "friendship album". Pat is a person who thinks carefully when choosing a gift and she chose well.

Fast forward over many years of correspondence, lunch or coffee dates and other kindnesses and losses, to the abundant richness of friendships (some of them blood relatives) in my life today. Some of those have arisen through a writing group in which I have participated for several years. Some folks come a time or two and then disappear, just a few have been active longer or the same as I, and some have joined us more recently and stuck with it. We are pleased to come together twice a month, share our writings, do editing for one another and chat a bit.

In the meantime, we "old timers" have had time to grow close and become more part of each others' lives. There is the mutual love of caring friendship.

The down side of friendship is the hole left in one's life when, as Pat did, someone moves far away, or as some have done, leaves through death's final door. My tale has a happy/sad ending. Our long-time writer-friend is moving far away. We will not see her now, and I will lose my willing lunch cocucinotta@rowan.edumpanion and patient listener.

I am happy for Pam and Rob as they pursue their dream, moving to Missouri, clearing their land, building a house and making a new life there. Rob will leave a steady but grinding job for the out-of-doors and self-employment.

Pam and I have had a great time, growing close over these several years. "A friend loves at all times." There is a note or two from her in my special friendship book I may need to make a duplicate—room for her to send a word or two occasionally.

(I wrote all as a gift for Pam and presented it with an empty journal.)

Use this book to make a record of your happiest moments. None of the new technology and quick access can match the warm and lasting pleasure of re-reading a handwritten note from a dear friend.

The Watergate Burglar and the Goats

By Brenda Sabol

My husband and I had settled into a routine of watching the late news before going to bed. One fall evening the news started with a breaking story, "Watergate burglar Frank Sturgis has just been arrested on the Upper East Side." The next morning we had the television on while getting ready for work. The previous night's story continued with an on-scene reporter, who proceeded to tell the viewers that Mr. Sturgis had been arrested for threatening a woman in her home. The reporter was standing in front of the woman's apartment building.

"That's our building!" we both shouted out in amazement. Marita, it had to be Marita, who else in the building would be visited by an alleged CIA operative and former confidante of Fidel Castro.

Marita had been Castro's mistress and it was Frank Sturgis who provided her with the poison pill she was supposed to give to the dictator. The assassination attempt was unsuccessful and Sturgis went on to infamy as one of the Watergate Burglars who, in 1972, broke into the National Democratic Party headquarters in Washington DC. Two years later, the ensuing scandal resulted in Richard Nixon's resignation as President of the United States.

After getting out of prison, Sturgis had apparently rekindled his acquaintance with Marita. We could only guess at what he had threatened her about; we would soon find out.

The following day, on my way home from work, I passed by a newsstand and there on the cover of the 'New York Post' was Marita; holding a handgun, straight out, the barrel pointed at the readers. The headline screamed 'I Have To Protect Myself'. Did she really need protection or was this all a stunt to garner publicity for the book she was writing?

I had stopped reading the Post after Rupert Murdoch bought it and turned Alexander Hamilton's venerable newspaper into a gossip rag, suitable only for lining the litter box. This day, however, I couldn't resist and bought a copy; I had to know what tale my neighbor was spinning.

The article described how the previous evening, Marita's teenage daughter, fathered by a deposed Venezuelan dictator, had been picked up for underage drinking. The girl had a gun (the same one in the photo) and the cops had taken her home to her mother. Never one to pass up an opportunity for drama, Marita took advantage of the police presence in her home to accuse the visiting Frank Sturgis of threatening her life. New York's finest had, of course, arrested the man and he spent several days in jail until the charges were dropped. The article went on to tell of Marita's alleged connection to Lee Harvey Oswald and President Kennedy's assassination, it seemed she had information that would implicate Sturgis in the whole affair. How much of this

is true, God only knows for sure. A later article in the 'Village Voice' described both Marita and Sturgis as *"two of the most notoriously unreliable sources in America"*.

Marita's son, by the way, was also fathered by a deposed South American dictator; this one I think was from Chile. She obviously had bad taste in men.

Several weeks later my friend and neighbor Yolanda stopped by to visit. I had a load of laundry in the washing machine and asked my husband if he would go to the basement and put the clothes in the dryer. He came back upstairs a few minutes later, "I put the clothes in the dryer and by the way, there's a tarantula on top of it."

Yolanda and I went running downstairs to see for ourselves. Sure enough, there in a clear plastic box, sitting on top of the dryer was a black, hairy spider; as big as my hand and it was moving around in the box; the lid of which did not appear to be secured. We went back upstairs and tried to figure out what to do. It was decided we should contact the ASPCA, located just a few blocks north; I made the call.

"There's a tarantula in our laundry room." I said to the man on the other end of the line. "What should we do about it?"

"Contrary to popular belief" he said, "they won't kill you; just make you very sick. It would take two or three of them biting you at the same time to kill you." Comforting to know, I thought.

He continued, "They can be fixed so as not to be venomous; do you know who owns it?"

"I'm pretty sure I know who owns it." I replied.

"Maybe you could ask them if it's been fixed."

"The woman tried to kill Fidel Castro and you want me to ask her if her spider's been fixed!"

"Oh, oh" the man replied "I read about her in the paper! Mary, Maggie, something like that. I don't blame you lady, I wouldn't ask her either! Tarantulas are illegal in New York; tomorrow we'll send someone out to get it. Let me get your address."

When I arrived home from work the following evening, Helen the Super's wife was sitting out in front of the building. In her Irish brogue she told me; "Well they took the spider but they didn't get the snake."

My jaw dropped, "What snake? Marita has a snake?"

"The boa constrictor" Helen replied. "What did you think all them hamsters in the basement are for?"

“I thought they were for her son’s science project?”

“No” Helen continued “they’re food for the snake. It’s a big one too, maybe four to five feet long.”

Wonderful, we get rid of the poisonous spider and are left with a snake that travels through pipes and can strangle you to death. For the rest of the time we lived in the building, my husband and I always checked the toilet before sitting down, just to make there was no snake in the bowl. We also kept the bathroom door closed at all times. Better safe than sorry.

Every block in New York City seems to have a resident crazy lady and for us it was the wife, also named Helen, of the Super in the building next door. On a Saturday afternoon, seven months after the incident with Frank Sturgis, I was sitting in the living room reading a book. It was a beautiful spring day and I had the window wide open, airing out the apartment and enjoying the gentle breeze.

“Baa” I’m going to ignore that I said to myself. “Baa, baa.” Yeah, this is the Upper East Side of Manhattan, the Mayor lives at the end of the block; I definitely didn’t hear that. “Baa”

“Its ok babies” I heard crazy Helen say “Your mama will be home soon.” “Baa, baa.”

Finally I couldn’t ignore it any longer and went over to look out the window. Helen was leaning over the fence into Marita’s garden and there much to my surprise, or maybe not, were three goats. With the advance from her book about life with Fidel, Marita had bought a weekend home in Connecticut. Doesn’t everyone with a country home need a small herd of goats? Was Marita planning to make cheese or were the goats supposed to ‘mow’ the lawn? She had grown up on the cruise ship her father captained so I knew it wasn’t nostalgia for her childhood spent on a farm in Germany.

I wasn’t sure how she was transporting the goats until I had the misfortune of arriving home one Friday evening just in time to find out.

Marita’s large; two-door sedan was parked in front of the building. There was a goat tied to the tree next to the curb and another goat in the back seat of the car. The third goat was half in and half out of the car and obviously did not want to go for a ride to the country. Marita had both hands on the goat’s rump and was trying to push it into the back seat, with no luck. I tried to get into the building without being seen but it was too late.

‘Brenda, thank goodness you’re home.’ Marita said. “Could you try pulling the goat into the car from the driver’s side while I push?”

“I don’t think so, I’m allergic to goats.” I lied. “Sorry, but good luck with that!” I said as I ran into the building.

I'll never know how long it took her to get all of the goats and her two children into the car and I don't want to know. A few weeks later Marita took the goats for a walk around the block just as someone from the ASPCA happened to drive by. Like the spider before them, the goats were history. I like to think they spent their remaining years happily living on a farm, far away from burglars and would be assassins.

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SUPERMAN HAS LEFT HOME

There once was a superman child
He lived in his costume when not in school
When Halloween came he collected candy a plenty
Pictures were taken of superman and his candy pile
So happy he was to be with mom and dad, so happy

Through the years there were other Halloweens
There were other costumes and piles of candy
And there were pictures
But superman remained his favorite costume
And still so happy he was to be with mom and dad, so happy

More Halloweens came and went
The child grew up and became a big kid
Still trick-or-treating but not with mom and dad
No more pictures of candy stashes
He became more happy hanging out with friends, so happy

Still later in life no more superman child or man
Son, mom, and dad not so happy
Hard times came and went
Superman child gone for good
Mom and dad not so happy, not so happy

Superman has left home these many years past
Though living a continent away, still close to their hearts
Proud of his sobriety and steps toward independence
Continually prayed for, God is close at hand
Maybe superman can live again and be happy, so happy

By Marian Fay

Swedesboro Native Commands USS *Monitor*: Commodore William N. Jeffers of the United States Navy

By Ben Carlton

When 37-year-old Lieutenant William Nicholson Jeffers first took the helm of the *Monitor*, the Union Navy's first ironclad warship, soon after her historic duel with the CSS *Virginia* (aka, the *Merrimac*), he seemed like the right choice. The *Monitor's* former captain, John L. Worden, had been the only serious casualty in the world's first battle between ironclads fought 9 March 1862 at Hampton Roads, Virginia. Worden was blinded as he peered through the eye slit just as a shell fired from the *Virginia* detonated against the pilothouse. He would eventually recover sight in one eye, but the upper half of his face would remain permanently blackened by miniscule grains of powder driven deep into his flesh by the force of the explosion. Command of the vessel had immediately devolved upon Lieutenant S. Dana Greene, who adroitly handled the *Monitor* in Worden's stead. The three- and-a-half hour battle ended in stalemate with the *Virginia* breaking off the action to withdraw on the ebbing tide. Lieutenant Thomas O. Selfridge, formerly the skipper of the USS *Cumberland*, a wooden warship sent to the bottom by the *Virginia*, was given temporary command of the *Monitor* until an officer with more experience was chosen to occupy the captain's cabin of the Union's most valuable warship. That officer, entrusted with the revolutionary little vessel, was the seasoned Lieutenant Jeffers, with a 22-year career with the Navy and a stellar record of service.

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Jeffers was born in Swedesboro, New Jersey, on 16 October 1824, but spent most of his childhood in nearby Bridgeton, NJ. Jeffers' father was a lawyer, a distinguished member of the West Jersey bar, but his family was said to have had a strong maritime tradition. A local newspaper proclaimed Jeffers' eagerness to join the Navy even from his youth, "which no persuasion to the contrary could overcome." Jeffers entered the service as a midshipman in September 1840, sailing around Cape Horn on the venerable frigate, USS *United States*. He was graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1846 and subsequently served aboard the steamer *Vixen* during the Mexican-American War. After hostilities ended, Jeffers was appointed as an instructor at the Naval Academy. He became an expert on naval ordnance, publishing a manual upon the subject entitled, *Theory and Practice of Naval Gunnery*.

Lieutenant Jeffers took part in scientific expeditions to Central and South America, surveying the rivers of Paraguay, Argentina, and Uruguay. In 1855 he was involved in an incident fraught with

international implications. As the US Steamer *Water Witch*, under Jeffers' command, operated on the Rio de la Plata, a Paraguayan fort fired on the vessel, killing one crewmember and wounding several others. The *Water Witch* returned fire before heading for home. The United States government demanded and received an official apology from the government of Paraguay. The family of the slain sailor received a satisfactory indemnity, and after US warships paid a visit to the Paraguayan capital during the summer of 1858, a trade agreement between the two countries was hammered out, highly favorable to the United States' interests. Also, that same year, by joint resolution of Congress, Jeffers was authorized to receive a sword of honor from the Queen of Spain for his role in rescuing the Spanish schooner, *Catagenera*, in the waters off Panama.

Immediately following the commencement of the Civil War, Jeffers was detailed to ordnance duty at Gosport Navy Yard near Norfolk, Virginia, but after its abandonment to the Confederates, he was transferred to the USS *Philadelphia*, a former Potomac River steamer. Thereafter, Jeffers captained the sidewheeler, *Underwriter*, in operations off the North Carolina coast in January and February 1862, taking part in a combined army/navy expedition led by General Ambrose Burnside and Commodore Louis Goldsborough that opened North Carolina's tidal waterways for the Union. The *Bridgeton Chronicle* reported that Jeffers evinced "great gallantry and seamanship" in leading nine gunboats past the pilings and sunken hulks up Croatan Sound as the army advanced on Roanoke Island. Burnside's forces defeated the Confederates on land as Goldsborough's gunboats scattered the rebel "Mosquito Fleet" by sea.

Lieutenant Jeffers' part in the Union victory had brought him such acclaim that he was chosen by the Navy to succeed the wounded Captain Worden. On 12 March 1862 Jeffers arrived at Hampton Roads to take command of the *Monitor*. As Jeffers was piped aboard his new ship, the *Monitor's* pilothouse was still undergoing repairs from the damages received from the guns of the *Virginia*.

Although the world's first great contest between ironclads resulted in a tactical draw, the *Monitor* could claim a strategic victory for preventing the *Virginia* from completing the devastation she had wrought on 8 March upon the Union's fleet of wooden warships. The *Monitor* was the only deterrent standing in the *Virginia's* way of finishing the job; therefore, only a highly capable and experienced naval officer could be entrusted to command her. Lieutenant Jeffers was eminently qualified to take the helm. The press lauded Jeffers' "energy, enterprise, ambition, experience, prudence, skill, and a heart that is ever in his work." The reporter predicted that with Jeffers in command, "the future career of the *Monitor* will be as brilliant as its introduction in those waters." Citing Jeffers' fitness for his new assignment, "In everything that related to ordnance and gunnery [Jeffers] ranks very high, while in the leading qualities of his profession [there] are

few in the service that stand so deservedly high." Unfortunately, Jeffers would fall short of the newspapers' expectations during his brief tenure as skipper of the now fabled *Monitor*.

[To be continued in the next edition of *Just Write*]

Just Write

Meetings Held 2nd & 4th Wednesdays @

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