



THE NOE VALLEY VOICE

• Mercilee Jenkins •

Meditation with Cat in Your Lap

Call the cat gently
or better yet
wait
until she comes to you.

As she settles in your lap
notice your breathing
as you stroke her fur
caress her softness,
listen to her purring.
Join your breath with hers.
A cat does not need to be taught
to relax. Learn from her.

See how she half closes her eyes
gazing at nothing in particular,
noticing everything.
Do the same.
Remember your breathing.

Do thoughts of mice come to her?
Does she bat them away
when she blinks?
Do the same.
Regard all the ideas and
familiar concerns that float
through your head
as nothing you need
to chase after right now.

Later you can decide.
You can choose
which ones to keep
and let go.

Like a cat with her prey,
when she grows tired of it
she walks away
licking herself unconcerned.

You can always go back
for those troubles
on your doorstep.

But for now, just stretch out
your paws and yawn.
Curl up with your cat
like a long-lost litter mate.

Everything else can wait
while you breathe.

Mercilee Jenkins is a poet, performance artist and playwright. Her poem "Meditation with Cat in Your Lap" appears in her new poetry chapbook *Words You Can't Eat in Public*, available through Finishing Line Press.



Noe Valley Skies.

Photo by Misaki Torii

More Words to Read

While regular contributors and editors have this month off, your neighbors and those nearby have some poetry, stories and images to present.

Each August and January, we bring you more than the usual hometown journalism.

Advertising deadline for the September edition is August 28th. contact patrose@noevalleyvoice.com

Editorial submissions should be received by August 21st. Email us at editor at noevalleyvoice.com

Until then, we'll see you at the Town Square or a coffee emporium close by.

Cheers and happy reading.
Jack Tipple, Editor and Co-Publisher

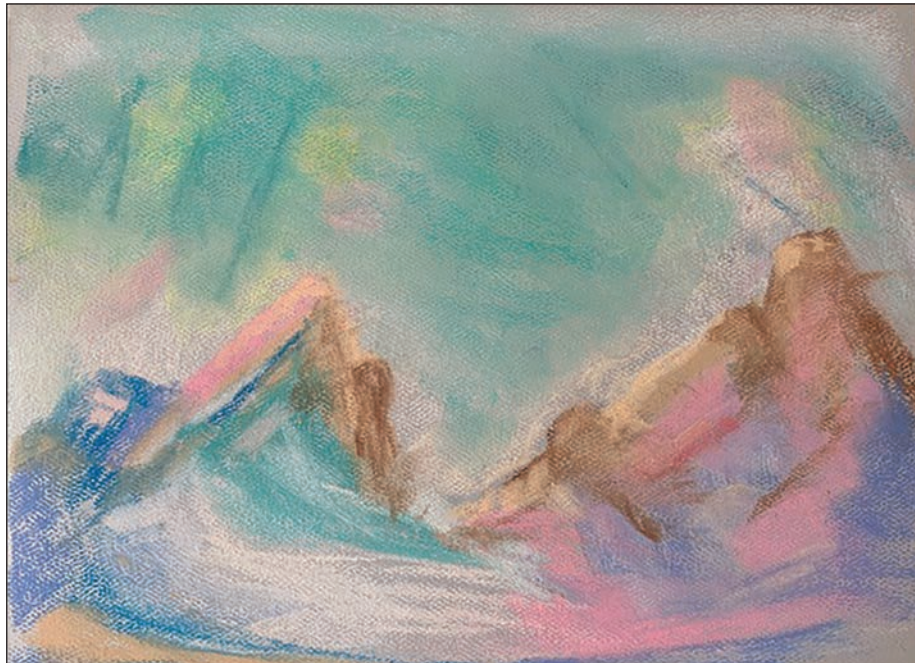


Illustration by Alaish Wren

• Alaish Wren •

Let Me Let You

It buckled up inside and tasted strange
Like a mistake the day I left.
You looked for me; you would yourself
exchange,
When I would steal my life, a theft
I thought was right to make —
It was my soul at stake.

You didn't ask why, just turned up your
wrists;
Betrayed yourself for me, a drifter.
Your mind was sharp, again mine in old
mists,
But for me, you would storm hell, swifter
Than lies that lure and start
To stir my rebel heart.

I'm looking free, but these nights I don't
sleep;
Mornings, like straight gut shots, come
worse.
If you would come now, offering your deep
Pursuit in blood. You broke the curse;
You offer life, like balm —
There, in your open palm.

Peter and Wendy

He brushed by like a thought,
He came in like a bet,
He brought them back their youthful days
To help them both forget.

They teased on misty shores,
And took the late night line,
They played some songs in empty bars
And laughed like all was fine.

They roamed around the streets,
And heard the foghorn blow,
They climbed the lighthouse, old and locked
And said, we know, we know.
Up he went, one still day,
Just as he always did,
He'd meet her by the graveyard cold
Out where the dead had hid.

He waited by the stones
Not guessing he should know;
Forever, Peter, we can't stay —
She'd gone where he'd not go.

She'd left; she'd said she would
She'd took the late night line
Far out, away to face the truth —
It never all was fine

Jack in the Box®, 3 am

The witching hour meets fast food lies
But right now I need curly fries.

Alaish Wren loves beauty and art, figs, chocolate, elementary-school-level biographies, and the fog. Don't call it Karl. She is originally from San Francisco and takes long walks while considering her situation on a daily basis.

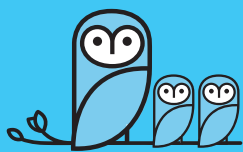


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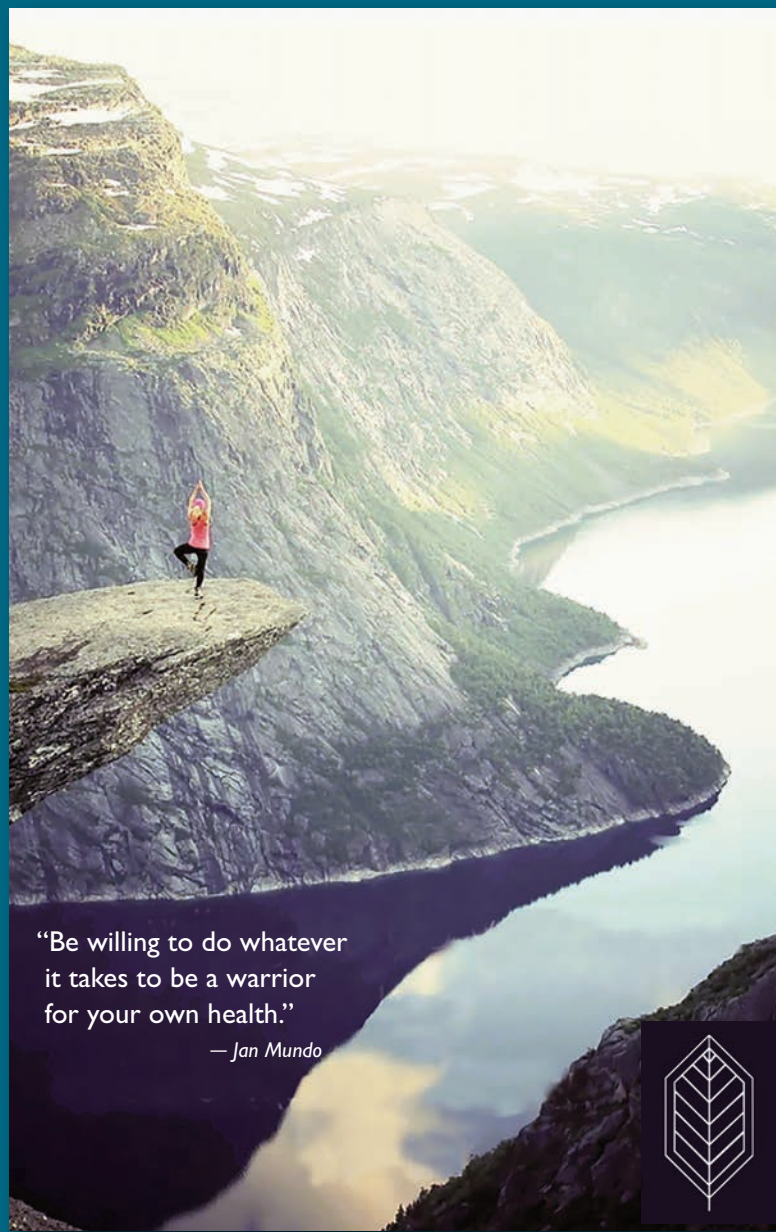
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• Cynthia Vazquez •

The King of Sweets

All roads lead to Re delle Caramelle. It is my favorite corner in Trapani. Housed between the stunning Baroque façades of the Centro Stórico and situated at the juncture of five converging pedestrian streets, one can approach it from almost any angle. It is easy to find and hard to resist.

The open door tempts me inside where the triangular floorplan magically makes the small space bigger. It feels like a portal to a fantasy world but it's real. Upon entering, the aging process is reversed, and I become a five-year-old again. Rainbows and happiness explode around and inside me. Hand wrapped sweets with myriad flavors are for sale by the kilo. Fico d'india, vaniglia, zenzero, cilegia, (prickly pear, vanilla, ginger, cherry) are cut into little hard chunks, the wax paper twisted closed at the top. Bomboloni, torroni artigianali and cioccolato (no need to translate) also line the shelves.

An excitable gaggle of actual children arrive, filling the shop that has been in existence for over sixty



Photo by Jack Tipple

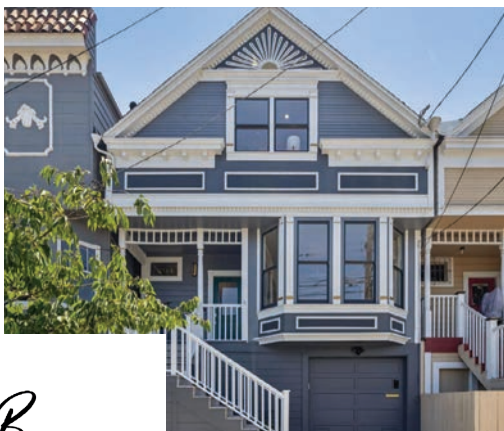
anni. They point and touch and make much noise. The proprietor, Salvatore de Giovanni, son of the

previous proprietor Salvatore de Giovanni, keeps a timid but watchful eye on all that come by to mar-

vel at this sugary universe.

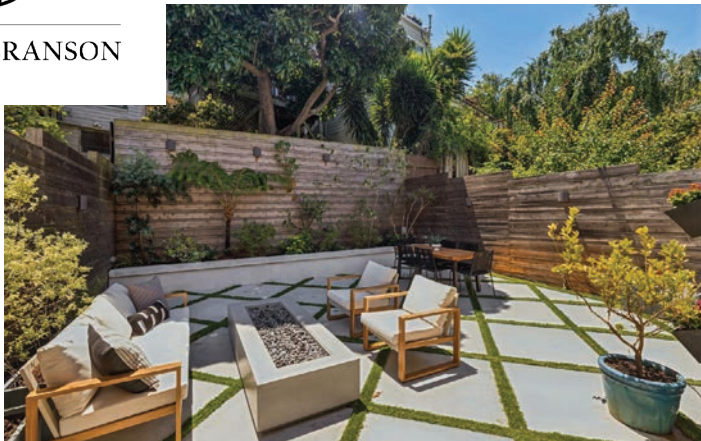
He beams with pride as I share my enthusiasm for his legacy and smiles ever so slightly. Just enough for me to see the crooked profile of his teeth. I wonder if he was weaned on lecca-lecca (lollipops) and the like. But that doesn't stop me from walking out with my quarter kilo bag of caramelle.

Cynthia Vazquez was born and raised in San Francisco. She holds a BA in Spanish, a CA Bilingual Teaching Credential, and a Masters in Creativity in Education. She directed Wicca Wimin, a dance-theater troupe, sang acapella with JouJou, and has composed and created music videos for the television program San Francisco Loves Learning. She relished a long career as a Spanish Immersion Educator in the SFUSD and is now jubilantly retired. At present she is enjoying time to travel, wonder and write finding inspiration both at home and abroad.



JB

JESSICA BRANSON



In June alone, 44 San Francisco homes sold for more than **\$1 million over the asking price**. The highest concentration of aggressive overbidding is happening in Noe Valley, but exceptional homes in the right neighborhoods continue to command extraordinary results. The Queen Anne Victorian pictured above was certainly a special property, and we prepared it meticulously for the market this June. Even so, neither the sellers nor I expected it to sell for **\$1.35 million over asking!** Summer has brought the usual seasonal slowdown as many buyers travel and sellers prepare for the traditionally busy fall market before activity tapers in November and December. Will September and October be just as competitive? All signs point to yes. While many agents focus on building larger teams, I remain personally involved in every aspect of every listing. Before real estate, I was a technology executive managing large teams and P&L's to success. Over the past **20 years**, I've **built my business from the ground up to nearly \$1 billion in sales** by combining data driven strategy, thoughtful marketing, meticulous preparation, and relentless negotiation. If you're wondering what today's market could mean for your home, I'd love the opportunity to show you what it's like to work with San Francisco's top performing independent listing agent.

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• Daniel C. Murphy •

A Mirage or a Miracle?

As the father of four bilingual children and the husband of a language- accomplished wife, I grew increasingly uneasy with the fact that I was the lone family member who could speak only the English language.

So, when I retired as an attorney, I decided learn at least a second language to keep up with my family. I chose Italian.

I had four remarkable Italian teachers during my learning effort: all worked in San Francisco schools: Giorgio at S.F. City College, Francesca at the Museo ItaloAmericano, Diletta and Mattia at the Istituto Italiano Scuola. All fine teachers.

After my beginner’s Italian study at City College, I was able to enroll in a more advanced class taught by Giorgio who impressed me with his recitation of Italian stories, memories and fables.

A few years later, it was Francesca who guided our small class at the Museo through the circles of the Inferno, on to Purgatorio, finally to reach Dante’s vision of Paradiso.

Next, it was Diletta at the Istituto who helped me with practical, business-like corrections of my Italian. Finally, it was Mattia at the Istituto, who guided me through contemporary Italian literature, novels, and poetry.

But of all these Italian teachers, it is Giorgio and Diletta who made this story possible. Since then, Giorgio has left America and Diletta has moved to New York. I



Illustration by Katie Murphy

miss them both.

Here is how it all began. At a City College class, many years before I met Diletta at the Istituto, Giorgio gave a lecture that involved Sicilian views and mirages. I listened carefully, but now realize that my comprehension of Italian created my own personal mirage.

What I had mistakenly concluded was that on rare atmospheric days a viewer in Sicily might see a mirage occurring in the sky above the coastline of Africa, 87 miles distant: visions of plantation workers and docking ships floating high above the African coastline.

When I told Diletta that it was my understanding that mirages floating above the African coastline could be viewed from Sicily, she said immediately, “Non e’ vero. Un’ idea pazzesca!” (It’s not true. A crazy idea!)

I was taken back by her negative reaction. I trusted implicitly the

opinion of both teachers which now seemed in my mind to be in stark conflict. So, who was wrong, and who was right?

Yes, Solomon had offered to split a baby in two to determine who was its real mother. That could not be the solution here. I liked and respected both my teachers. But how could they both be right? Something was wrong.

It turned out to be my Italian.

I decided to do some further research in English.

I learned that under rare atmospheric occasions, from a few high points in Sicily, a person may actually see the vague coastline of Africa, 87 miles distant. That visual image is not a mirage, but an actual sighting of the African coastline under ideal weather conditions.

No surprise, when I thought about it. On a clear day I can see Mount Diablo in Contra Costa

County from my deck in Noe Valley, although Mount Diablo is 26 miles away.

And from Mt. Diablo on a rare day, one can see Mt. Shasta, 127 miles away in Siskiyou County. It’s not a mirage, but the actual sight aided by the extreme height of those two mountains, plus clear weather.

After further research, I believe the vision which Giorgio was describing and that confused me was a phenomenon called the Fata Morgana. During rare atmospheric conditions a viewer from Italy’s Reggio Calabria coast can view a mirage in the sky above Sicily, three miles away to see “buildings, cars and even unaware passers-by on the streets of Messina,” (see Fata Morgana on-line: “The optical illusion on the Strait of Messina, by Melania R.)

So, what is my final opinion about this confusion between actual sightings and mirages? Perhaps, an Italian proverb will provide the answer:

“Di notte, tutti I gatti sono neri.” (At night, all the cats are black.)

Dan Murphy is a longtime contributor to the Voice. He is a retired administrative law judge, trial attorney, and former head of the San Francisco Legal Office, California Department of Transportation. He lives on Church Street. Dan’s wife, Lloyd, was the family’s reading specialist both in English and Spanish. She died last year. She is dearly missed by Dan and her family.

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The GOOD LIFE GROCERY

• E. Turner •

Heated Seats in Summer

When Helen and I entered the water at Aquatic Park, we moved slowly, as if we were making our way through molasses. When the water reached our waists, we stopped. The hardest part of getting into cold water was submerging the chest. There was no way around it, though. We took one wide, outstretched pose with our arms, counted to three, and plunged our fronts all the way in, gasping. Keeping our heads above the water, as if we were balancing baskets of fruit on our heads, we delayed the second worst part, submerging our faces, as long as possible. Even if we had done it three hundred times before, getting in was always hard. Even in August, when water temperatures in the high fifties were considered warm.

Inching our way forward in a free-style that wasn't natural yet, we made it as far as the Grace Quan, a replica of a 21st century Chinese fishing boat anchored 200 meters from shore. It was single-masted, simple, and majestic. Its dark wood made the small white characters stand out from its starboard side. Whenever I passed it, I felt I was swimming in a historical museum. I was part of something bigger, I thought. My tiny existence was just a speck in a long important past. We circled the boat in the middle of the cove, and every worry, annoyance, and slight from earlier in the day began to fade.

Helen's face reflected the light of the summer sun beginning to set. In one silent stroke, the sky was flooded with vibrant splashes of color. I wanted the moment to last forever, at least in my memory. I moved through the water mesmerized by its mystery. How was it possible?

I frog-kicked my way towards the opening to the bay, and Helen followed. When I looked back at her, only part of her head surfaced, eyes just above the top of the water, as if she was in pursuit. She always swam with her head like this, dragging her arms out wide by her sides as if she was slowly hunting her prey.

On our way back, other swimmers in their wetsuits, Go Pros, and waterproof gadgets swam back and forth between the four buoys, nearly clobbering us



Photo by Jack Tipple

more than once. They seemed so focused on their distance and speed they didn't even pause to pay attention to what was happening around them.

We were the opposite. Like swirl-

ing spoons in hot cups of tea, we were in no particular hurry. We bobbed around, treading water, discussing everything as it popped into our heads. Helen shared important things, like how to find the best 3rd generation San Fran-

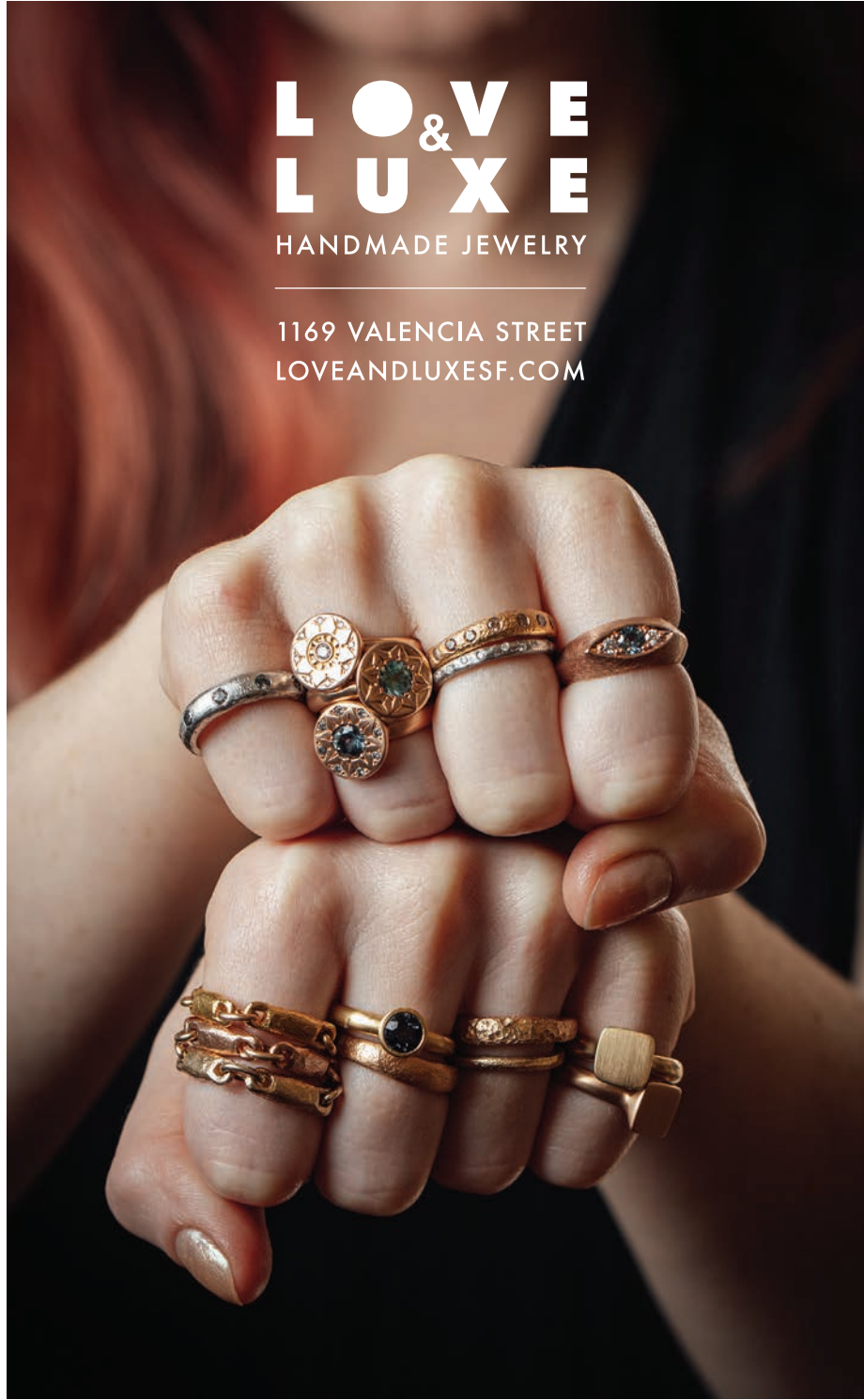
ciscan restaurants, or how to ration your olive oil when cohabitating. She could simplify the etiquette for standing in line at the grocery store into a single phrase, articulate with impeccable rationality how many wears you could get out of your jeans before washing them, and could outline the precise circumstances when not to engage a stranger in conversation.

The next time I looked up, the sky had turned from taupe orange into crimson purple. We floated on our backs, staring at the tops of the trees, trying to listen for the parrots and their sudden bursts of yapping that could pierce through the city sounds at any moment.

When we got out of the water, we made our way to Helen's old Volvo in the parking lot. The passenger door squealed open and then clunked closed, its heaviness a sign of antiquated car parts. I sank into the passenger seat. The scent of old vinyl, dry pine from an air freshener, and too much sun on cassette tapes baking in her center console was so comforting it made me remember the first time I had ever been in a Volvo, when I was lucky enough to find a ride to high school and didn't need to take the bus.

Helen pushed a button and the seat warmers started to come on. Whenever my body thawed from beneath, my defense mechanisms did too. Helen and I laughed about the fonts on remodeled apartment buildings, recent documentaries we had seen, our addiction to reading fortunes from fortune cookies, and that Atlantic article. We still felt the unbearable urge we always had to get up and leave the city, but for now, we were still there, so we'd keep swimming. I let out a long sigh of relief, my body wrapped in warmth, recovery taking hold.

E. Turner has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area for twenty years. Her writing has appeared in *Swimming World* and *The San Franciscan*.





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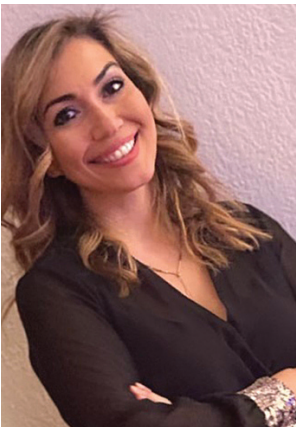
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homage to Twiggy, Jean Shrimpton
so envious of those eyes
foam curlers, brutal brush rollers
orange juice cans for that Jackie
look
cake mascara with the little brush
rouge, smell of nail polish remover.
The empty wine bottle collection
on the ledge over the wooden
steps
my mother refinished, gleaming
dusty smell of things she saved
in the antique chest of drawers
from her grandpa's house
in New Prague. How hot the attic
was
summers, brutally cold in winters.
My dolls still saved in the attic
Prince Charming
Alice in Wonderland
stolen one frigid morning
robbers climbed up onto the eaves
so strange, anyone could see
mom and dad gone to the doctor
so many keys and locks
not enough.
Early to jazz, late to Prince
everyone loved Joan Baez
Miriam Makeba sang the click song
Bob Dylan at the U
not quite famous then, played
sideways to the audience.
Early to jazz late to Prince
first loves Dave Brubeck
Ramsey Lewis, no dance
just smoke, drink
talk about ideas
flirt.
Everyone loved
the Beatles. Not me
only Lucy in The Sky With Dia-
monds
no clue what it meant
toked dope for a minute
til it made me paranoid
til I had the sense to pass it up
everyone loved the Beatles
I loved the Impressions
Martha and The Vandellas
Miles.
Early to jazz
late to Prince
I missed him
only him, a piano
and a microphone
playing in Oakland.
just before he died.



Photo by Sally Smith

What The Heck Does heja
Mean

I confess
I just ate
a yogurt cone
a hot dog
and a sticky bun
in rotating order
like you'd eat
pork chops, peas and salad.
I would have swigged the coffee
between bites
but it was lethal hot.
I was at IKEA
and those sticky buns are good as
ever.
It seems to be a destination
for teens on Saturday afternoons
and middle-aged women
doing lunch with their mothers
after shopping for whatnots
and meatballs.
I was tempted to look for sheets
but worried I'd be marooned
in the jungle of it, fearing being
left there alone in the dark.
And what the heck does heja
mean
on the back of those blue vests
to separate destinies.

Sun-glassed and Perusing

Sun glassed
perusing my phone
sitting on the bench seat
on the I4 Mission bus
undetected, I believe
I study the older man
next to me as he reaches
across the aisle
to stop the walker
of the young man
opposite me
from smashing
into my knee
as the bus wheezes
block to block.

That young man
is so beautiful
I can hardly look at him.
And he is so stoned
he folds onto his lap.

I wonder if they are together
both have stuffed canvas bags.
The older man looks at me
and says *I'm sorry*
I say *I'm worried he will fall.*

He and I exit
at the same stop.
We nod at each other
as he fetches his bike off the rack
and we three
follow our fates
to separate destinies.

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Grace D'Anca's poetry has
been featured in the *Noe Valley
Voice*, *Raquet Journal*, forum,
Community Living Campaign,
Elder Litquake, and OWL
(Older Writers Lab) anthol-
ogies. Her writing has been fea-
tured in Deborah Slater Dance
Theater's *In The Presence of Ab-
sence*, and RAWdance's
STEP/STORY/SONG. She is also a
member of Cosmic Elders,
Drama With Friends, and
Aquatic Park Players theater en-
sembles, and Dance Generators
inter-age workshop.



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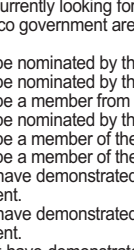
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Remember Rain? This was the scene in Noe Valley in February.

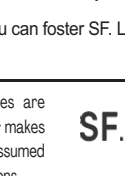
Photo by Lois Green



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 Lithium-Ion Batteries: Power Your Devices Safely
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CNSB#4062484

• Helen Dannenberg •

Denying Tears

water would have poured down
the avenue
making a big lake from avenue to
boulevard and to avenue
water would have risen from the
back yard
with the white picket fence on
three sides
up to the sky and the moon
and the star constellations

water would pour down the
parkway
past the Museum and the Botanic
Gardens
and the plaza, then across the
bridge

water would fill all the thimbles
the father used
water would fill the worn lop-
sided frying pans
used to make pancakes

water would fill the recesses and
crannies
of the daughter's piano
water would fill the bookcase
water would fill her heart and
stomach
and organs and brain and eyes
water would carry her away past
her
strength to swim back to life
if she had allowed herself to cry
at your funeral

The Visit

She would ring the bell
explain she grew up in this house
from the third grade until she was
twenty years old.
She would say

“I'll spend tonight here. I'm
very quiet
and well behaved.
I'll sleep wherever you want
me to. I'm hoping
when I sleep the spirits of
my grandfather
mother, father, the dog, cats,
goldfish will come
spend time with me, bring
memories I have
forgotten.”

She would accept a good night
hot chocolate
and breakfast, if offered
then she'll take her experience
and be gone
you'll hardly remember she was
here.
You'll say to each other
“Did that old lady really come
stay in our house?
Did we really let her in?
Or maybe we dreamt it all?”

Helen Dannenberg is a
dancer and choreographer.
And she is a retired long-term
care social services coordi-
nator. Her written work has
been published in *Forum*, *Noe
Valley Voice*, and *Community Liv-
ing Campaign Journals*. Her as-
semblages have been shown at
Spike's Café, FOG Gallery, and
the Drawing Room Annex. She
performs with The Cosmic
Elders, and she is a devoted
participant in the Noe Walks.

• Mark Thoma •

Seeing Stars

Look
up
see stars
starlight takes
a long, long, time to reach your
eyes
the ones you hold open longing
into the heavens, blue votives
someone lit for you
traveling prayers
of light
for
you
At
night
we look
to the stars
for companionship
because nighttime can be scary
and those steadfast blue sentinels
stationed in the sky
speak to us
there, there
all's
well.

The Fireplace

Fireplaces sit lonely in the
summer empty of flames, cold
without embers, no glow to
throw on walls, on curtains,
conversations escape through the
chimney leaving only hollow si-
lence. There's no cure for
such emptiness but the sureness
of winter dragging its gray mood
behind while we plan our spring
garden next to the fire, seed cata-
logs scattered on the coffee table,
and your worn slippers too com-
fortable to pitch, maybe a raised
bed this year maybe wild flowers
this year summer dreams, yes
one more please,
at least one more.

The Promise of Green

Let's shake off this gray and step
hand-in-hand outside to green. To-
gether
we'll live the promise
of you and me, this ripe world,
the whole lot of us singing
green songs.

Mark Thoma's poetry, short
fiction, and flash memoir, have
appeared in journals and an-
thologies such as the
Marin Poetry Center Anthology,
Front Range Review, *The Raven-
sPerch*, *Vistas & Byways*, and *The
Noe Valley Voice*. His work as a
medical socialworker and na-
ture lover informs much
of his writing. Mark is working
on a chapbook. He lives in the
Castro.



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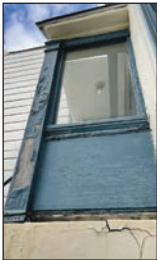
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Photo by Art Bodner



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Crossword guy Michael Blake entering the highlight of his Civic Center tour





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CNSB#4062484

• Nancy Ware •

Faith

A twist of fate that happened more than 50 years ago, still haunts me today. My dear friend, Faith, was not convinced that she'd be a good mother and wasn't sure she wanted children. But she and her husband fell in love with my first-born, Michael. When Michael was about three, they asked if they could borrow him for a weekend to take him to Martha's Vineyard. I think it was a kind of a test to see how they'd cope with a young being. This could have gone really badly, but Michael was on his best behavior and when they returned, they were exhilarated. It was a turning point for them, as their first child, Alex, was conceived soon after.

Three years later, Faith was again pregnant...with twins! For the first three months she was in and out of the hospital, she couldn't keep anything down; she was dehydrated; she was miserable. When she was home, she was bed-ridden, and I'd go over every-day and read to her, try to raise her spirits, telling her it would soon pass.

Faith was a beautiful woman, but as I entered her bedroom on this April morning, she looked exhausted. I could tell she'd been crying.

"I can't do this anymore." Her voiced cracked. "I'm going to end the pregnancy."

"Faith... I gasped.

Her eyes filled with tears, and in a whisper she said, "I just don't think I can survive it."

But she had to survive it. I had always believed in a woman's right to choose; I still do. But there was something personal to me about these little twins.

Faith was a religious person. She passionately believed in a higher power. Looking back on it, it's inconceivable to me to think that I proposed this deal.

Throughout our conversation, I'd been looking out the window, watching two small sparrows sitting on a tree branch. Taking a deep breath, "Faith," I said, "See that lone bird sitting on that branch? There were two of them. But just as you



Photo by Jack Tipple

said you wanted to end this pregnancy, one bird flew away. What if we put the decision into God's hands? If the bird returns, you keep both babies. If the bird on the branch leaves, you do what you feel you need to do."

Faith stared at me then turned back to the window. After a long silence, her head nodded slowly. And so we waited...and waited... neither of us taking our eyes off of the branch.

The single bird remained, motionless. Minutes passed and still the branch remained half empty. What had I done? I began to panic. "Please, God," I found myself praying, "please let the bird return."

And we waited... We waited so long; I think we'd both stopped breathing.

And then, just as suddenly as it had left, the other bird returned and sat down on the branch. Faith inhaled from deep within her throat. I exhaled, a startled laugh escaping. Our eyes met in wonder and astonishment, and we hugged, tears spilling down our

faces.

"It's not up to us anymore," Faith murmured.

"No it's not" I replied, and for the first time in weeks, I watched as a smile spread across her face.

Months later, Faith delivered two beautiful baby boys, but I have been haunted by this experience. Did I do the right thing? Was it stupidity? Arrogance? Desperation? What if the bird hadn't returned? Was the fate of those two babies on me?

I know something shifted in me that day. Was there something greater at work that April morning? Are there signs right in front of our eyes directing us to a new path? None of us can go through life without plot twists and turns. They are a necessary part of the journey. It's the left hooks, and the U-Turns that color our maps and make our trips interesting. I have come to realize that we are not tested by the stories that we plan in our lives.

Rather, it's the unexpected signs

that pop into our vision- like a branch of a tree with two birds that impel us to do something totally out of character that change us.

We have the courage and we have the wisdom to act on those signs and realize that it was the road we were meant to be on all along. And that, to me, is the miracle of life.

October

Youth sprints up the mountain-side

Nikes trampling on bleeding hearts and columbine Shouting, "Just Do It!"

The acme glistens like a golden prize

Awaiting the conquest.

Lift up thine eyes, oh youth
Your help comes from without.
Hormones of nature propel you onward.

The adventure is knowing you're on the way up.

It is high noon, and the mid-day sun beckons.

Ah, but there is more radiance in the setting sun Casting shadows on the slopes.

What a gift to descend the mountain

Barefooted; stopping to smell the wild heather

Or listen to the whippoorwill sing to the evening star.

Eyes focus on the turn of a fern
The glittering mica in the riverbed
A solitary red leaf.

Joy is knowing the mountaintop was never the goal. I meander down and wonder

What lies around the next bend?

Nancy Ware is an 82 year old retired English teacher. She has lived on Clipper Street for 36 years. She has always loved writing, especially poetry, but has always kept it to herself. Recently she has been eager to share her writing and enjoy the writing of others.

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• Mike Underhill •

AN ALASKA MEMOIR: SURVIVING THE MOST DANGEROUS PREDATOR

In the Spring of 1974, I moved to Southeast Alaska, leaving San Francisco and Bud's Noe Valley Ice Cream behind. My first job was at Yes Bay Lodge, fifty miles by boat or seaplane northeast of Ketchikan, to work as an assistant cook for the guides and wealthy clientele who came from around the world to sport fish for giant salmon. I was befriended by one of the older and locally famous guides, Bruce Johnstone, a professional hunting guide, prospector, trapper, and logger. He was a true Mountain Man, a real Jeremiah Johnson. Bruce was a grand storyteller. One of his spellbinders involved a bear attack he survived by "Old Groaner," a giant Alaska Brown Bear, what we would call Grizzlies, which mauled him while he was fishing near the Unuk River. Bruce never went into the woods without a gun, and he scoffed at any fool who relied on bear spray for protection. "All it'll do is make 'em madder."

In an unlikely pairing of hippie and redneck southerner, I became friends with another guide. George left Tupelo, Mississippi, Elvis' hometown, as a middle-aged guy going through midlife crisis. Instead of simply buying a red Corvette convertible and letting it carry him over the hump of his mid years, he left his wife and family, moved to Colorado to become a hunting guide in the Rockies, and then to Southeast Alaska to be a fishing guide.

A Ketchikan-based bush pilot was looking for someone to build a log cabin for him next summer on a small tributary of the Unuk, the same river where Bruce faced off with Old Groaner. "Unuk" is the Anglicized name of a Native American Tlingit word which translates as "revealed through a dream," which does better to describe the river than its present name. It is a beautiful and wild river, rich in salmon and migratory birds, starting in glacial waters in British Columbia, then flowing west through the rainforest mountains of Alaska to Burroughs Bay and what is now Misty Fjords National Monument, once hiked by John Muir himself.



Mike Underhill— near Unuk River, Alaska. 1975

George and I agreed to partner up and build the cabin, and in the Spring of '75 we met up on the Unuk. We were political and personal opposites, but men who nevertheless struck a common chord sufficient for collaboration and work. We lived and worked around moose, brown and black bears, lynx, and wolves, the latter two never seen, except for their scat. We fished for salmon and hunted duck and practically lived off the salmon we smoked in our hand-built, alderwood-fired smokehouse. We sometimes would look up from our work and see a bear a hundred yards down river or across the river, and on some evenings near sunset we would take my skiff up to the riffles and first falls, then drift down with the current. If the wind was in our favor and hid our scent until the last seconds, we could pass silently by moose, bear, and small animals drinking or eat-

ing at the water's edge.

George was a hunter who really liked shooting things. He was a gun man, through and through, who'd skipped over anything resembling the hippie life. Because the bears we lived around didn't share my Haight-Ashbury ethos, and mindful of Bruce's advice, I too had guns and kept them close at hand or on the hip when we were working or hiking. Between us, there was a lot of blued steel and gunpowder in our camp.

One night we went where we usually didn't venture: politics and the Vietnam war. We got into an argument that began at slow heat, then got hot enough to light kindling, and finally enough to burst into searing flame. At some point, I saw George look over to the corner where we had our guns stacked. With any other person, I wouldn't have thought much

about it, except for something George once had said about wanting to go to Africa to hunt – not on safari to hunt game, but as a mercenary to hunt other humans. We both looked back at each other and went silent. After a beat, we each spoke and agreed that we, and me especially, would be better off if we avoided politics. We held to that deal. I'll never know if George really considered going for one of the guns. He didn't offer, and I didn't ask, but if I had to rank encounters with dangerous predators, I can better understand and abide the bears who kill solely to eat and survive in harmony with their nature.

After we finished our work on the cabin that summer, George went north to guide for mountain goat in the Wrangel Mountains. I learned he then became a mercenary in the civil war in Angola. We never spoke after that summer on the river and therefore never talked of what he did after he crossed the Atlantic to Africa. I hoped I was wrong, but was fairly certain, based on a quick side-glance he'd made during an argument one night in a river camp in Alaska, that he'd gone to a dark and unholy place at the center of his own soul.

After spending more years in Alaska as a fisherman, logger, fishing guide, and eventually a merchant seaman, I came back to the Lower 48 and entered law school. As a lawyer, I often heard criticism of the law and the profession. My usual response, "It's better than guns across the table or dueling at ten paces," was tempered in steel by a life-changing night in the wilderness with a fellow human being and too many guns

Mike Underhill has lived in Noe Valley since 1983 and was featured in the March 2011 *Noe Valley Voice*, "Our Legal Eagle in the Gulf Oil Case." He was lead counsel for the United States in the New Orleans-based liability trial of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. No guns were used in the handling of the case. He retired in 2022 after forty years of federal maritime and environmental litigation practice.



Rainbow over Noe Valley.

Photo by Najib Joe Hakim



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• Susan Broxon •

Soulful Sauntering

Every trip to San Francisco blends old memories with new discoveries. On a recent late-spring visit, I realized that despite my 40-plus-year connection to the city—as a former resident and loyal tourist—I had never been to Baker Beach. Driven by curiosity, I set out from my Union Square Hotel down an uncharted path.

The day was bright and crisp as I legged it through the Fillmore and Richmond Districts, passing Mountain Lake Park before entering the Presidio Landmark. After an unplanned detour through the historic military housing, I finally reached the cliff overlooking the beach. A hazy veil hovered over the Golden Gate Bridge as I ambled down the sandy path, the scene evoking a timeless aura that recalled my parents’ stories of 1950s San Francisco. Even the name Baker holds personal significance.

In 1955, my mom, Patsy Baker, moved from Portland, Oregon, to Mill Valley. After a brief stay with relatives, she followed her heart into the city, finding a home at Bakers Acres, a coed rooming house on Baker Street, where fate introduced her to my dad, Robert Broxon. Once a vibrant social hub where friendships formed and romances began, the residence closed in 2002 after an Ellis Act eviction, ending an era.

Six months later, their whirlwind romance led to marriage, and they moved into a tiny apartment in Hunters Point, where my dad was stationed as a Navy legal officer. Soon after, my mom’s best friend and former Baker Acres roommate, Hilla, married my dad’s brother Paul, further intertwining our families.

Eventually, Mom and Dad relocated to Newport Beach, but they frequently returned to San Francisco, making their final trip in 2015 to celebrate their 60th anniversary. Dad passed away in 2018, just shy of their 63rd. Today, Mom is the sole surviving member of “the fun-loving foursome.”

We loved hearing their enchanting stories of simpler times—easy romances, double dates at the iconic Zim’s Hamburger, and bike rides through Golden Gate Park—capturing the thriving yet



Friendship and romance on the steps of Bakers Acres: From bottom to top: Dad, Mom, Aunt Hilla and Uncle Paul.

gentle essence of San Francisco and, in part, inspiring my sister Janet and me to move there as young adults. I arrived in 1984, initially living in the upper Tenderloin. My sister, Janet, followed in 1985, landing in Noe Valley.

At the water’s edge, varied versions of San Francisco converged: my parents’ city, my own, and this long-awaited excursion. Waves crashed around me as I stood in my light dress, relishing the warmth mixing with an inviting breeze—a sensation that others appeared to share. In that moment, a completely unclothed man sauntered by, a vivid reminder of the city’s free-spirited soul.

The journey to Baker Beach pulled me toward my parents’ San Francisco, and the next day’s adventure brought me back into my own.

I made my usual trek to Noe Valley, winding through the Tenderloin, an edgy yet often misunderstood area to which I’ve formed a unique connection. Over the years, I’ve seen its struggles, from chaotic street scenes to

the eerie emptiness I encountered last December. Though traces of disorder had resurfaced, I sensed a renewed camaraderie reminiscent of my first unassuming stroll through this gritty stretch decades ago. Laughter rose from clustered groups, and a livelier energy softened the zombie-like despair of recent years. Yet, I must have looked serious when a man cheerfully called out, “Smile, young lady, it’s not that bad.” I chuckled at being labeled “young,” and we shared a light-hearted moment.

On 24th Street, I savored a blueberry-banana smoothie from Martha’s as sunlight warmed the Square. In 2000, I became more involved in the community after my twin nephews, Aidan and Finn, were born, even though I had already relocated to the East Bay from the Marina.

Noe Valley has a way of collapsing time for me. A storefront, a patch of sun, an ordinary corner—each can carry me back to the period when Janet’s family lived there, and the boys were small.

This time, a treasured memory

from the summer of 2003 re-emerged. My parents (Popo and Momo) flew in from Southern California to look after my two-year-old nephews while Janet and my brother-in-law, Tom, searched for a new home in Maine after his job offer at L.L. Bean. Though I stepped in to help, I admired their adaptability in sharing a bedroom with the boys, even establishing a seamless bath-and-nap routine for them.

However, it wasn’t all smooth sailing. One late morning, Dad was enjoying a cup of coffee when Finn, wearing a scrunched look of disapproval, shook his head at the mug his Popo held and declared, “That Mommy cup.”

Inside, Finn was in charge. Outside, Aidan tested the limits. During one outing, he bolted down the street, sending Popo sprinting after him while Momo stayed behind with Finn.

Later that summer, Janet and her family bid farewell to their neighborhood and embarked on a new chapter in Brunswick, Maine. My transition came in 2006, when I sold my condo and returned to my hometown, Newport Beach. That afternoon, I departed Noe Valley once again, taking with me the many layers of myself and my family that San Francisco still holds.

I wrapped up my brief visit the next day by wandering through the Financial District, where I worked for over a decade. Although I anticipated the usual travel day gloom, the morning felt unexpectedly refreshing.

At 343 Sansome Street, I rode the elevator to the 15th floor and stepped into the Roof Garden, where the skyline unfolded under a blue sky. I embraced the soft hum of traffic blending with the stillness, allowing the city to have the last word—until next time.

Susan Broxon is a former resident of San Francisco now living in Newport Beach. Her debut piece, “Farewell for Now” was featured in the *Noe Valley Voice* November 2003 edition. After rediscovering the community in 2022, she continues to contribute following each visit.



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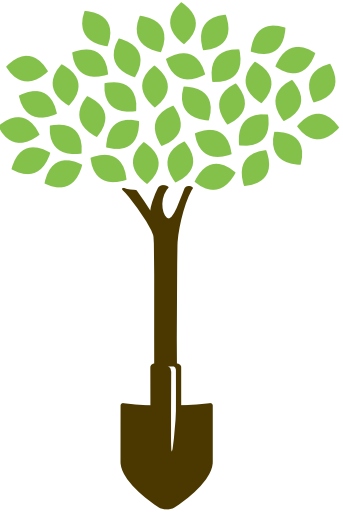


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