

THE *Lathrop Nor'Easter*

A Quarterly Publication by the Residents of The Lathrop Communities
at Northampton and Easthampton, Massachusetts

Series II: Vol. 1-4

A Community Converses

Summer 2016

ART AND ARTISTS AT LATHROP



A Gentle Pause (c.1955)

by Nancy First

On the Cover: The Artist

For Nancy First there is a spiritual connection between her love of painting and her love of gardening, "a pulsing in the silence," a fascination with how the air moves and the light changes what she sees in front of her. For her, the earth is sacred. There is a sense of lushness both inside and outside of her home on Hawthorn, paintings everywhere on walls and chairs inside and a wild profusion of flowers and greenery outside — color and texture, birds and butterflies. Nancy began taking art classes in high school and continued in college, majoring in art at Wheaton for two years, focusing on "life" classes, and then at Cornell. From then on she attended art classes wherever she lived and painted wherever she and her husband Bob, a retired chemical engineer, traveled.



Blind Fisherman (1965)

by Nancy First

Nancy favors oil painting, although she also enjoys pastels and drawing. She has never worked in watercolor or acrylic. She is a member of the Monday morning Lathrop Northampton painting group.

Nancy may be spied at times abandoning her paint brush and using her fingers to "soften," giving the painting a different texture. Sometimes she works from photographs she has taken or finds, other times from nature as in "The View from my Doorway." Currently she is working on a painting of three plovers. Nancy has shown and sold her work at many different locations and, beginning on July 18, her work will be on view for four weeks at the Art Space in Greenfield. See you there!

Interview by Joan Laird

Yes, It Really Is About You

Contributing to The Nor'Easter

It's about the poems you write, about the vignettes you've related for years but have never recorded, about the foul ball you caught with your *other* hand (or maybe dropped with the favored one), about a chance elevator ride with a celebrity du jour, about that epiphanic moment when it all became clear, about the first sight of the phantom of delight who changed your life, about that time in the Great Depression or in the War of Your Choice, about your genealogy searches, about your travels, about your work or profession—in short, about what interests you to write, and you know better than we do what that is.

Send your contributions and questions to:

Noreaster@lathrop.kendal.org

We prefer contributions written in Word, PDF, or RTF format, but if you have sagely avoided computers and email, get in touch with the Editorial Committee's Coordinator. As a Lathrop resident, you will know how.

The Lathrop Nor'Easter

Noreaster@lathrop.kendal.org

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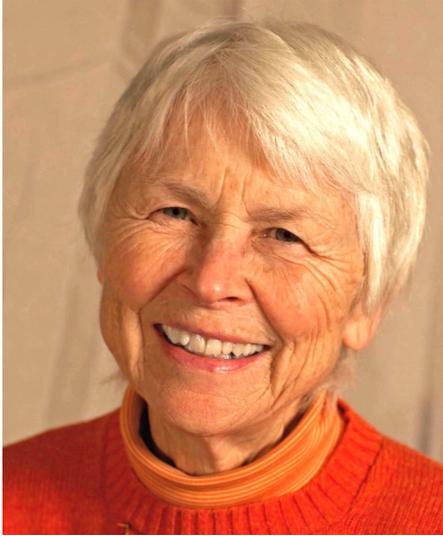
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Casting Off

Judy Hyde



Leaving my home of 25 years to move into a little house with no cellar or attic required serious shedding of stuff and self. The process took nine months of letting go, kind of a reverse pregnancy deal. In order to accomplish this, I had to assess what meaning something still carried for me, apart from its intrinsic value or possible sale price. Further winnowing questions – Would my heirs care the least bit about it? Who would I be without it?

Into the trash went the diplomas from boarding school, Vassar, Yale and UConn. Along with them went a carton of awards, citations, plaques, and articles about my work in child advocacy and child protection. Elegant framed kudos from AAUW (American Association of University Women), The Connecticut Law Tribune and others that I've already forgotten. Also the trophy with a faux marble base for a second place win in a tennis tournament in which there had only been two teams. Those markers buoyed me up while I was still engaged in my life's work, made me feel less of a fraud. Now they seemed unrelated to whatever my future in a retirement community would bring. So just

like that, without fanfare or a grieving ceremony, into the black plastic bag and out of my life.

It was harder disposing of the files and artwork of children and adults who had come to me for help with the mayhem caused by abuse or neglect. I burned the drawing by my child client of the man who chased her with a knife and the graphic depictions of molesters by other children. One case record of sexually abused sisters who were three and four when I saw them over twenty years ago I kept aside to give to the mother of the one who had recently died in a suspicious car crash.

Three shelves of music scores, hymn books, folk songs, sheet music, not played or even looked at for a long time went into a box for a music auction. So did the tenor recorder given to me by a boyfriend in grad school, along with a kazoo and three boxes of CDs. The piano went too. I kept the stack of blue and green folders of songs and copies of "Rise Up Singing," on the chance that group singing was not to be a thing of the past. Also I kept the Christoph Wolff biography of Bach. Not that I'll ever read it again. But Bach still belongs to me, will see me through, I expect, to the end of my days.

Speaking of books, out went the lot in my bedroom and office. I felt traitorous, consigning to the netherworld where excess books go these friends whose spines I had regarded with affection for so long. Books about treating trauma, resolving anger, diagnosing mental illness, getting the love you want, child slavery, the entire Maeve Binchy and John Updike collections, Dr. Seuss, Jane Austen, Italian 101, and even all the books inscribed by authors I know. The books that survived the deep cut, besides the Bach, include Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Life of Montaigne*, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, *A History of Dogs in the Early*

Americas (by my sister), *The Crash Course* (by my son), and *Mothering Jon* (by me). Sitting on my new bookshelf is the entire collected works of Mary Oliver, as well as a few books important to my spiritual life and my continued quest for master points as a serious bridge player.

In these still early days of adjustment to my new streamlined life, the casting off sometimes feels like too harsh and drastic a cutting away of the identity constructed over 50 years. I am pared down now as a person, almost weightless without most of the markers of who I once was. Starting anew, I have moved from then to now.



The Beginning of an Infinite Catalog of Weeds

Ragweed

grows anywhere it chooses
ejecting its irritating hairy
pollen balls each autumn
without request or entreaty.

Plantain

arrived in the quick
footsteps of Europeans,
has roots like rocks in hard soil,
life screwed down, defiant.

Milkweed

offers downy, parachuting seeds,
tough, ropey stalks
and the sticky milk of life itself
for monarchs.

Nettles

sting to remind passers-by
that Old-World origin
means better breeding;
cooked, they are nutritious!

Poison ivy

touches the toes of children
who need to know
the excruciating pleasure
on inextinguishable itch.

Wil Hastings

Journal

By Patricia Van Pelt

APRIL

March came in like a lion and left like a lamb. A green haze washed across the lower branches of the woods. Daffodils nodded their bright heads along the pathway to the community garden. The birds sang and preened their feathers while the temperatures soared into the 70s. Not record-breaking but definitely spring . . . or so we thought! We were lulled into forgetting that this was April Fool's Day.

By the second of April, the temperatures had plunged. By the third there was snow on the ground and more forecast.

4 April

The snowstorm was firmly in place, inches accumulating. She even garnered a name. Christened "Ursula" after one of Hero's waiting women in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. In this case we could not claim that this was much ado about nothing. Ursula had earned her sobriquet.

Roads were not clear. Inches of snow covered every surface. The snow kept coming.

6 April

The sun rose to reveal a quintessential winter landscape. Crisp and white, six to eight inches of snow covered the green grass that the gardeners had just raked and rolled. A few brave daffodil blossoms surveyed the unusual landscape at their feet. But the temperatures remained in the deep freeze and were headed down, not up. This winter landscape arrived late and it was not going to leave in a hurry.

7 April

Though the night temperatures stayed above freezing the snow still stands in open sites. The slope of grass flowing down to the water is green. The pond is open water showing life as the wind draws ripples on the surface. The mallards are back. Rain is forecast.

9 April

We are wet and getting wetter! Spring showers bring forth spring flowers. So the

odd white hillocks that appear in our gardens take us aback. They are the snow hills left from the recent storm. A reminder that it is still early days yet, still only April, despite the nodding heads of daffodils and beds of blue scylla.

11 April

After a very windy weekend, with threat of more snow, the new week opened with grey skies, showers and moderate temperatures. More of the same promised for the rest of the week. Is this the coming of spring? We are hopeful, up to a point. Woodpeckers are heard and the mallards paid another visit to the pond. A bluebird has been seen checking out the birdhouses. Robins are finding worms but it all feels a little cautious. After all, it is still only April in New England.

16 April

With several days of sunshine, spring flowers are perking up. The bees are busy in the grape hyacinth flowering stalks lending hope to the early gardeners in the butterfly garden outside the Meeting House. The sun is strong enough to burn an uncovered head but the air is still very cool. Tax day has passed so perhaps everything is heaving a sigh of relief. Now we can get on with the job of growing.

18 April

The green haze in the lower story of the woods is deepening. The weather chart has changed from blue to beige. The week ahead promises mild temperatures and nights consistently above freezing. The tractor was heard digging up the community garden and many residents were seen outdoors clearing leaves, digging, pruning, and just looking at their gardens, witness to the rebirth of the land.

The mating call of the cardinal is loud and persistent. The hammering of the woodpeckers is not just to gather food but to beckon their mates. A frog leapt into the water when gardeners walked by. He had been out sunning himself, showing

off the bright fresh triangular markings on his back, to impress his current loved one.

23 April

After a week of sunshine and record-breaking warm temperatures, a cold front, moving east from the plains, collided with the stationary warm front. The skies opened with all the noise and fury of the upset weather gods, refreshing to body and soul. The pond became a lake with waterfalls. The frogs stepped out to sing their praises to the weather gods. The recently mowed grass drank deep.

Many small ornamental trees are in bloom including the May trees. Also known as the shad, they lay films of fine white petals beneath their feet. The full moon tonight is also known as the shad moon, both instances referring to the run of the shad. On such a night as this, locals will take buckets to a river inlet from a lake. There the shad will be gathered in their hundreds fighting to reach their breeding grounds. The stream will sparkle with the silver fish mirroring the star and moonlit sky.

Dipping for shad. Campfire ready. Greased pan at hand. Quickly fried and as quickly served. Nothing better. Blessed by the silver stars and the Shad moon.

28 April

This erratic individualistic month draws to a close. We are holding our breath. Glad to welcome the month of May. Visions of maidens dancing around the maypole or throwing their graduation caps into the sky. It is a celebration of both endings and beginnings. Congratulations one and all!

MAY

This month turned the tables on our expectations. Nothing but grey skies, frequent showers, cold temperatures to frustrate everyone.

From May Day to Mother's Day the sun was nowhere to be seen. Even the air was wet with incipient showers, some of which

were strong enough to make music on the roof.

May 8 - 10

The sun peeked through the showers to greet mothers on their day. Everyone welcomed the life-giving light and the warming air. Trees responded instantly with green leaves and colorful flowers.

The mallards paid a visit to the pond. The rabbits ran riot in the plenitude of fresh green leaves. Many workers were seen in the gardens and along the edges of the woods pulling up nasty invasive species. The community came alive.

May 12

Two summer days to tease us and to tease all the trees, bushes and plants into brilliant bloom. Mr. Mallard visited the pond this morning for a refreshing bath and a delicious breakfast. Incipient frogs', egg sacs, are plentiful and easy to catch. Hopefully Mrs. Mallard is sitting on incipient ducklings, eggs, somewhere nearby. Mr. Mallard spent the whole day at the pond!

With all the blossoms, butterflies are back! The cabbage white flits across the lawn like a lost bridesmaid. A copper mourning cloak sat as quiet as the petal of the flower it sat on, not even shaking its wings. Good camouflage.

May 13

Our patio has had a most unusual visitor. She arrived yesterday, out of the blue, to sit on our weathered wooden table. She is hardly visible as her mottled rough grey skin mirrors the table surface. Her head is short and broad, her eyes barely visible. She is a gray treefrog who has spent the winter deep under the leaf cover of our woods.

She is returning to our pond. She is dependent for breeding on our pond in particular. Our pond is a *temporary pond*, one that is subject to drying out in the summer. The source is run-off and rain water, therefore a more moderate temperature. Perhaps most significantly for the wood frogs, this some-time-pond has no minnows, sunfish or catfish, no predators except for the occasional visiting mallard or blue heron.

May 16

After an erratic graduation weekend, with temperatures ranging from the 70s in Boston to low 60s and showery in the Pioneer Valley, hundreds of students expressed relief that they had accomplished their goal. Family members and college staff cheered them all.

Winter returned on Monday morning! A cold front out of the north, where they had snow, blew in on a fierce wind. Perhaps the most erratic springtime that anyone here has experienced in many years. Possible frost tonight so gardeners are nervous, many of whom were lured to plant earlier than normal by the warm weather earlier in the month.

May 18

Have we turned the corner? We can hope! The forecasters are predicting pleasant temperatures in the low 70s and some sunshine. Asparagus farmers' stands are at every corner. All the flowers and bushes and hanging baskets and trees are bursting with color. The birds are singing. It must be SPRING! I will reserve judgment. Another graduation weekend approaches. Lines of white plastic chairs set up on the campus lawns court danger or demonstrate youthful confidence. We shall see.

May 21

Full moon again!! It comes around pretty regularly, which is a bit of comfort! This May one is called the Celtic Moon. There is a moon goddess worshipped by the Celts. Perhaps she is sending blessings to us this very night.

May 22

Mars, the 'red' planet, is at its brightest at this time of year. We had lots of cloud cover so we did not see it — but we did see an enormous rainbow over the Lathrop north campus. This rainbow was very wide so the entire color spectrum could be clearly identified. It stayed over us for a long time, seemingly deliberately, to bless us all and welcome in this colorful season.

May 26

It must have been Spring, because now it is Summer! Just like that! Ten to 15 degrees

above normal for this time of year. It is hard to make the transition. All my summer clothes are at the other end of the cupboard.

The pond has become a huge wet greenhouse, harboring rich nutrients to nurture the reeds, the wild flowers, sunny celandine and pink ragged robin, the frogs, the bugs, the bees and the butterflies. This greenhouse is alive. Birds and rabbits and chipmunks are busy taking advantage as long as they can. The pond should survive for a while longer. Though we have hot summer temperatures, we also have thunderstorms.

A deer stopped by the pond this morning on his way to check out the community garden. It was his scale that changed the way I was looking. It has been birds and bugs and small rodents filling my view. This was different. Even a bird called out a warning cry. If I have been visual predator, now I became prey. Was the warning cry of the bird for his feather friends or was it to warn the deer of my presence? Wildlife relationships are no less complex than our human relationships. We too must learn to listen and not jump to conclusions.

May 30

Memorial Day and as we give thanks for services rendered by soldiers of the Civil War and all those who followed in defense of freedom, we also give thanks for the steady rain. It falls on a parched and thirsty ground, scorched by the past two days of record-breaking temperatures.

June 2

The weather map for the United States is now all shades of brown. There are no blues or greens. Even the ocean temperatures have risen into the 50s to welcome the sailors and surfers to their shores.

Here at Lathrop everything is lush and green. Rhododendrons are laden with enormous blossoms. Tables and chairs and umbrellas have blossomed on hidden patios. Baskets of tempting flowers hang in the porches. Hummingbirds and bumblebees fill the air with busy sounds. Summer has truly come. Enjoy!

Carol Werba

When I was six, my mother taught me to knit. This handcraft is one of the touchstones of my life, especially as I enter this last phase of my life. More than my iPad or my iPhone, more than my television or my computer, creating with two needles and one ball of yarn sustains me, keeps me calm and centered.

The Second World War had just ended, my cousins Jack and Jim came home from the Pacific, and the miracle of black and white television was about to enter my world. I'm glad Uncle Willard took a photo of our family of four, hunkered around the large wooden box with its snowy picture of moving and talking people. We'd just moved to Berwick, Pennsylvania, a small town near the anthracite coal region of the north-east.

Now, after a life of motherhood, twenty-four years of teaching English to reluctant ninth-graders, and moving from my suburban New Jersey home, I'm still knitting, still creating wearable items from a simple ball of yarn and two needles.

Looking back, I see my mother gardening, reading, playing the piano, cooking — but most of all, knitting. My father, a commercial artist, walked in the door at 5:30 sharp, and woe to us

two kids if we were not on hand to feed our dog, wash our hands, set the table, and help our aging grandfather to his seat.

Writing a short story or even a piece of fiction has always eluded me. With my background in English language and literature, and my years of teaching elective creative writing to eager ninth-graders, writing should come easy to me. But all I can manage is a short essay, a heartfelt condolence note, this biographical sketch for the Nor'Easter.

I regard myself as largely self-taught. In the mid-fifties, Berwick High School was a poor excuse for an education; Bloomsburg State Teachers College was hardly any better. Working toward my M.A. in English propelled me into the world of Beowulf, Shakespeare, Victorian literature, and literary criticism.

Balancing my first baby and completing my degree at Fairleigh Dickinson University consumed my time as a young adult.

That first child, a son, flew to California's Bay Area in search of himself and has remained there, now the proud father of a high school senior, Lisette, and of a ninth-grade son, Stefan. My daughter, born three years later, lives here in Northampton with her partner and three-year-old daughter, Eliza Ruby Werba.

A miraculous family pattern emerged in 1991. After the Soviet government repeatedly stonewalled my immigrant husband, Stepan Klymovitch Werbowatyj, during his repeated efforts to find his lost Ukrainian family, he and my daughter finally traveled to his childhood village, Perekora. His mother, 93, welcomed her lost son amidst the joy of his three brothers and two sisters; all survived Hitler, Stalin, famine, collectivization, and communism.

During our subsequent trips to Ukraine, I shared knitted hats and scarves with Oksana, Hallya, Olenka,

Sofia and Irina, just a few of our large and growing family. When you visit my Crabapple Lane home, you will see a bowl of stunning pysanky, hand-painted eggs which I bought in a tiny shop in Lviv, as well as Ukrainian embroidery on shirts and table decorations.

Lathrop is a perfect landing place for me now. I'm grateful to all who have built this community and to those who sustain it. Friends often ask, "What do you like about Lathrop?" In a word, "Everything." Peace and quiet, warm and concerned neighbors, secure and trusting atmosphere, music and art, intelligence and inquiry, independence and security. And I'm still knitting, on buses, on trains, in the car and on airplanes. This handcraft is a long and simple thread that has knit together the pieces of my life.

**Ron and Bonnie Robbins**

Ron and Bonnie moved to Lathrop in January. They come to Easthampton from Easton, Pennsylvania, where they arrived in 1968 with plans to stay for only a few years before returning to their native Indiana. Ron and Bonnie both are originally from Connersville, Indiana, where they were high school classmates. They married while Ron was an

undergraduate at Indiana University studying history. After two degrees and two children (Anne, who now lives in nearby Westhampton, and Michelle, who lives in Maryland), Ron and Bonnie moved to Detroit, Michigan, where Ron taught for a short time in the Detroit public school system. They then returned to Bloomington while Ron earned a degree in library science. During Ron's studies, Bonnie worked as a secretary at IU, first in the Business Department and then in IU's famed Music Department.

After Ron obtained his library degree, he accepted a position at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania. Ron worked in the library for almost thirty years, rising to Head of Reference and Public Services. While working at the library, Ron collaborated with a colleague in the economics department to edit two compilations of economic readings and also contributed to several biographical dictionaries. After Ron's vision began to deteriorate due to early onset macular degeneration, he became an administrator in the Office of the Dean of the College. Among other things, he served as class dean, oversaw the academic support program, and coordinated support services for students with disabilities. Ron retired as an Associate Dean of the College.

In Easton, Bonnie initially worked for the public school district. She then joined Ron at Lafayette, where she was secretary to the Director of Admissions, the College Provost and, most gratifyingly, the Art and Music Departments, where she "grandmothered" many generations of Lafayette students.

Lafayette also gave Ron and Bonnie the opportunity to relate to students in a variety of non-official ways. Although not an athlete in high school, Ron became very active in Lafayette athletics. He participated on faculty teams in intramural cross-country, track and racquetball, and took immense pleasure in

defeating students many years younger than he. Ron's interest in running led to his involvement in the college's cross-country and track programs as an assistant coach, and he shepherded the women's programs from club to varsity status. Ever supportive, Bonnie served as a meet official for too many track and cross-country meets to count.

While at Lafayette, Ron and Bonnie also were active in the College's Newman Association (Catholic ministry for college students). Off campus, Ron served on the boards of the local Catholic elementary school and the Easton Area Historical and Genealogical Society, leaving both boards as president.

Those who live on the Easthampton campus may have seen Ron on his daily walk. With Bonnie's help, Ron also enjoys golf. Bonnie is a skilled needlepointer and also the curator of an extensive teddy bear collection. Both are passionate supporters of Indiana University athletics, the Red Sox and their two grandchildren, a granddaughter who is a sports writer for the Bend, Oregon newspaper and a grandson who is soon to enter his final year at West Point.

Helen Armstrong



It's a long way from Nairobi to Northampton, but Helen made it to Lathrop in November 2015 with her partner of 20 years, Judy Hyde. After graduating from Wellesley and studying for a year at Harvard, Helen spent two years in Kenya for USAID, teaching ESL and classroom skills to rural Africans.

After she returned, she married Jim Armstrong and both joined the Peace Corps, spending another two years in Kenya. The couple subsequently lived in Los Angeles and New Haven where Jim worked toward a degree in African history. Helen worked from home as an editor and cared for their first baby, Lina. When Jim took a job heading the African Studies library at Boston University, they moved to Cambridge. Lina

died from surgery for a serious heart defect, but they went on to have another son and daughter.

A final son was born in Kenya where Jim administered the Library of Congress office for 12 years. Helen used her support and editing skills to serve a sub-Saharan network of breastfeeding information groups. But when they returned to the US in 1990, Jim left her, and she found herself homeless and jobless for some months before finding a staff role at the Tufts University School of Nutrition. And that led in turn to her 10 years as a consultant on infant feeding to UNICEF headquarters in New York. When she retired in 2002, she spent another ten years for Free the Slaves in Washington DC as an unpaid staffer and Board member.

Her sons have caught the international bug: Jannie and his family live in Zambia, and Conrad in Czech Republic. Her daughter Elizabeth is a doctor living right here in Northampton with her partner and twin five-year-old boys.

Helen expends her considerable energies in gardening, exploring the outdoors, and supporting programs opposing climate change and stopping contemporary global slavery.

A Cannonball in my Closet

By Eleanor Johnson

One of my childhood memories has me standing in a low barrel-vaulted chamber in a Crusader castle, wondering if I had the nerve (of course I did) to take one of the stone cannonballs that were piled high in front of me.

I grew up in Lebanon where one can't help tripping over fragments of history. When I was little I didn't understand that history. But I lived in a place where there were ruins you could visit, and old things to look for, and I knew that many different kinds of very old people had left those things. And that I was somehow part of it all.

I was very fortunate to have a father who knew a lot about history (as it turned out), and who was an imaginative storyteller about things past and present. He also showed us how to look carefully at things: ants, hornets' nests, the purple cyclamen in the crevasses of stone walls — and yes, little bits of history. There was "The Flint Factory," so called in our family, which was on a rocky promontory of Beirut, the city where we lived. A favorite weekend outing might be to hunt for pieces of worked flint arrow heads on this (as it turned out) prehistoric site. Or to drive up the coast a little way to another prehistoric site, a wide cave, with markings on the back wall (from cave dwellers, or more modern shepherds?).

Or after a good winter storm, when the sea had stirred things up, to hope to find something of interest, perhaps a Roman coin, on the beaches south of the city. We might go out to play in the red sand dunes near the old airport, and stop to look for pieces of mosaic at the end of the runway. We knew that they came from the Roman villas that had been there . . . back when. Without understanding much more about the Romans, we took for granted that they were part of our landscape. I learned what a mosaic looked like before I'd heard about Rome.

We spent the summers in the mountains, in a village high above Beirut. When you

looked way down, from our balcony, you could see the city in the distance and tiny ant-like airplanes crawling down the airport runways. The sea spread out below us, stretching westward towards "America," where we came from.

Our family had been in Lebanon for a long time. When my father was a little boy my grandfather had bought our beautiful stone Arab house with the arched windows looking out to the sea. I learned later that he bought it during Ottoman times, and that since then the British and the French had somehow come around and taken charge, and that our country "Lebanon" had been independent for less than ten years!

In the meantime, my four siblings and I had the run of the stony, broom-covered mountainside behind our house. Aside from the "Turkish Trenches" at the top of the ridge (WW I, who knew?) a favorite spot for "hiding" games, we all collected, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, fossils and interesting stones. The sea had covered the mountains at one time very long ago, and had conveniently left small snail fossils and fish teeth by the handfuls. And there was the occasional scramble down below the village to the "fossil clam bake" which had an especially good horde of clams! The rule was that we could keep something "until you find another like it, but better." But still, there were special finds (crystal geodes!) that went back to my father's time.

One slightly mysterious thing was that there were two sarcophagi (burial places, we learned) cut into the rock on our property, and several others scattered across the mountainside. My grandfather (a doctor) had discovered ancient bones in one of them, and after examination, it turned out they belonged to a teen-aged girl. But though we never really knew whose sarcophagi they were, we enjoyed exploring them, and we had some lovely picnics while sitting in them!

I remember some of the trips we took,

sometimes together, sometimes with friends. There were the Crusader castles strung along the coast. Beirut's castle was puny, but the sea castle in Sidon was nice. And the most dramatic was Beaufort Castle in the south where you could look over the walls to a huge gorge and the tiny-looking river below. No one could capture that castle, we thought.

But the best Crusader castle of all was The Krak de Chevalier!! We only went there a few times that I remember, because it was in Syria and it took us most of a day to get there and back (with five children in the station wagon, stops for the border and other necessary stops, this was a lot to ask of our parents). The Krak was set on a hilltop guarding the valley that went inland to Damascus. It would get bigger and bigger as we closed in on it, finally looming over us as we arrived at the long cobbled entryway. The Krak was the one castle where we had to be really careful of open cisterns, and not to peer out of the arrow slits too far.

We had Roman temples scattered all over the mountains of Lebanon, and you would find random columns and parts of temples here and there in the most unexpected places. But they were always on hillsides, with long views looking out over the sea — the Romans knew how to pick their spots! Back down on the coast, in Byblos, there were all kinds of ruins, because Byblos is one of the places where people have lived for the longest time in the Middle East. In the old parts there were some funerary tombs, another Crusader castle, and lots of incomprehensible, but fun-to-climb-on bits of stone remains. There was also a perfect little Roman theatre overlooking the sea, where we liked to prance around looking "theatrical."

Occasionally we drove to Tyre, south of Beirut in the orange groves, to visit another Roman city, which had a site right on the sea with colored marble columns marching down to the ancient harbor now hidden in the water. We sometimes found Phoenici-

an glass there, or after a storm other interesting bits. It was a lovely place just to sit, look at the sea, and think about where we were. Tyre also had a huge hippodrome where horses and chariots once raced. Sometimes we'd find the boy scouts, or groups of school children, coming to enjoy the day there.

Sometimes we drove north to visit friends in Tripoli. We would pass the salt flats on the rocky sea coast, and see men raking the salt into bags for market — work that had been going on since who knows how long ago. And we would always stop (my father's favorite history lesson) at the Dog River when we were travelling north, to look at the old inscriptions carved into the pass there. There were rectangular plaques boasting of the conquests of Ramses II (all the way from Egypt!), Nebuchadnezzar (Babylonia!), and of the armies of the Assyrians, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Arabs. Not to be outdone, Napoleon III had left his mark, as had the various Allied armies, notably British and French, who came

through as conquerors after WW I. And finally, there was the inscription telling that Lebanon had achieved independence.

Well, now I think I'm rambling, and of course my childhood wasn't just a long history lesson. But one thing I have come away with: our past was always changing, and the past has forced changes on the present. And now, as before, there are dramatic changes at hand and conquering armies afoot in my piece of the Middle East. As my mother would say if she were here, "It was ever thus!"

And yes, I do have a stone cannonball in my closet, from the Crusader Castle of St. Gilles in Tripoli, Lebanon. I "acquired" (pinched) it when I was ten or eleven, and for a while it was a prized possession — a keeper, as I never found "a better one!" Later it became a door stop in my house, and then it somehow followed me (twice) across the Atlantic and now finds itself in a very strange place indeed, called Lathrop.



The Mustard Field (1962)

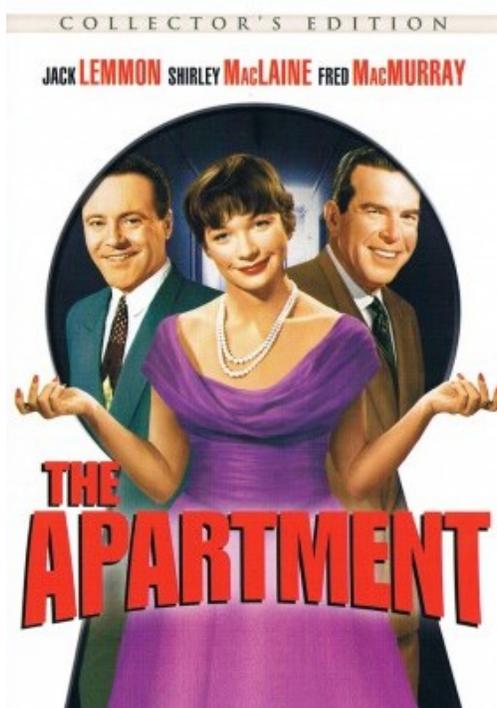
by Nancy First

Film Review:**Billy Wilder's *The Apartment***

Billy Wilder called "The Apartment" his film with the fewest mistakes. It is also one of his best. It is a clear-eyed, unflinching look at the corporate values of 1950s Organization Man America. Wilder peers directly at the reality of his subjects' lives but achieves a perfect balance between serious and comical. He understands that even the most reprehensible behavior contains elements of farce and the most farcical emanates from a core of loneliness and pain. In many ways "The Apartment" is analogous to that mythical distillation of 1950s America, the perfect martini. It's not too sweet or too astringent. It doesn't contain extraneous ingredients like fruit, umbrellas, bubbles or colored liqueurs ("The Apartment" would be the last b/w film to win best picture for the next 30 years). Instead, it is crystal clear in appearance, goes down with a bit of a jolt and then imparts a sense of clarity and pleasure.

The plot unfolds over the last ten days of 1959. C.C. "Bud" Baxter (Jack Lemmon in the second of his seven Wilder films) is a transplanted mid-westerner and one of 31,259 workers at the headquarters of Consolidated Life of New York. Success is defined as how far and how fast one is promoted up the corporate ladder. Love is nice if it happens but can't be allowed to distract or get in the way of the pursuit of the big prize, the executive suite. To accelerate the process Bud lends his one bedroom apartment that he rents for \$85/month (that's not a typo) to his superiors in return for the implied promise of future promotions. His motto is "We never close at Buddy-boys."

One of those superiors is the director of personnel, Jeff Sheldrake (Fred MacMurray again terrific playing against type as a cad), who wants to use the apart-



ment to bed the comely elevator operator, Miss Fran Kubelik (Shirley MacLaine). Fran thinks she's in love and even contemplates a possible future as Mrs Jeff Sheldrake. Sheldrake has a different take: "You know, you see a girl a couple of times a week, just for laughs, and right away, they think you gonna divorce your wife. Now I ask you - is that fair?" Bud also really likes Fran but knows if he says no to Sheldrake's request for the key he'll be stuck in the same job forever or more likely be fired.

It all falls apart on Christmas Eve when Sheldrake leaves Fran at Bud's apartment to catch the train home to his family. Left alone and feeling abandoned Fran is crushed. She takes an overdose of pills and passes out on the bed where Bud finds her later that night. With the help of his physician neighbor they prevent Fran from dying. Over the next two days Bud nurses her back to health. Playing numerous hands of gin rummy to pass the time they begin to like and maybe even more than like each other. That abruptly ends when Fran's brother-in-law shows up,

punches Bud on the nose and drags her home. Meanwhile, Sheldrake's wife has thrown him out after hearing of his serial infidelities. Returning to work he now promises Fran to get a divorce and marry her. She skeptically agrees to meet him on New Year's Eve.

This is the inflection point of the film. Will the events over Christmas make Bud and Fran question the trajectory of their lives and their definitions of success and happiness? A number of story threads are in play. Will Sheldrake actually divorce his wife and keep his promise to marry Fran? Will Fran accept if asked? Will Sheldrake keep his promise to Bud and promote him to the cherished executive suite (and washroom)? If he does, will Bud find it to worth the price especially if Sheldrake continues to meet Fran at his apartment? If not, can he summon the courage to say no and risk everything he's worked for? Not to give anything away but you know that Wilder won't let his characters and us the audience evade these questions or cling to Hayes Code and 1950s cliches of morality. We also know Wilder will have his characters work this out with wit and acerbic dialog but also with empathy for their predicaments, And one last thing we know after "Some Like it Hot" : "The Apartment" will close with an unexpected but memorable final line of dialog.

To see how Wilder pulls off this piece of cinematic alchemy, "The Apartment" will be shown at both Lathrop campuses in July and is available from the Northampton campus library. It is also available for rental from Amazon and Netflix.

DM



Janet Price

I grew up in a small town in Wisconsin and, after high school, went to UCLA. Although I initially studied sociology, I moved to mathematics, graduating with a BA in 1962. I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time and started programming computers around 1960 while still an undergraduate.

Subsequently I began doctoral work in psychology at Dartmouth, finishing my Ph.D. with a dissertation involving mathematical models in cognitive psychology. I taught psychology for several years, but feeling limited by having my interests confined to one department, I moved to computer support and began teaching computer science courses.

Over the years I moved from one small college to another, ending up managing computers and phones at a small college in the mid-west. In 2000, I took a job in computer support at Amherst College, working directly with faculty and students. I stayed there for several years, very much enjoying being a techie again, and then retired. After retiring, I joined Five Colleges Learning in Retirement where I reorganized their website and have co-moderated several seminars on botanical topics.

I have two sons, both living in MA. Gareth lives in Boston with his wife Lisa and two kids, Simon, age 11, and Rosie, age 5. My other son, Kai, lives with his partner Mary in Munson. I'm lucky to be close to both of them. My cat, Lucy, decided to move to Lathrop with me. She is used to being an outside cat, chasing mice and other varmints, so it is a big adjustment for her — and for me. I've never had an inside cat before.

I'm primarily interested in math and the sciences and in baking and handcrafts — bread, felted slippers, pies, knitted stuff, donuts, pizza, jam, and pottery. Along the way I've tried making wine, batiks, oil painting, basketry, creating web sites, and inkle weaving. I simply like working with my hands, learning new things and experi-

menting to see if something will work. I'm not much of a watcher and don't really enjoy TV or movies.

Gardening has always been a favorite hobby — particularly growing vegetables and fruits. I grow flowers too, but growing food I can eat — even if it's just parsley — is what I like best. I have to be careful gardening because I'm allergic to bees. Last summer I bought a couple of elevated garden beds, which I've brought along with me. I've also been raising orchids for about 20 years. I've replaced my old, conventional growing lights with LED lights. If you see purple-red lights coming from a house across the road from the Meeting House, that's me. The red LEDs promote blooming; the blue LEDs promote vegetative growth.



View from the Front Porch (2016)
by Nancy First

The Lathrop Nor'Easter
100 Basset Brook Drive
Easthampton, MA 01027



Birds' Eye View (2012) by Nancy First