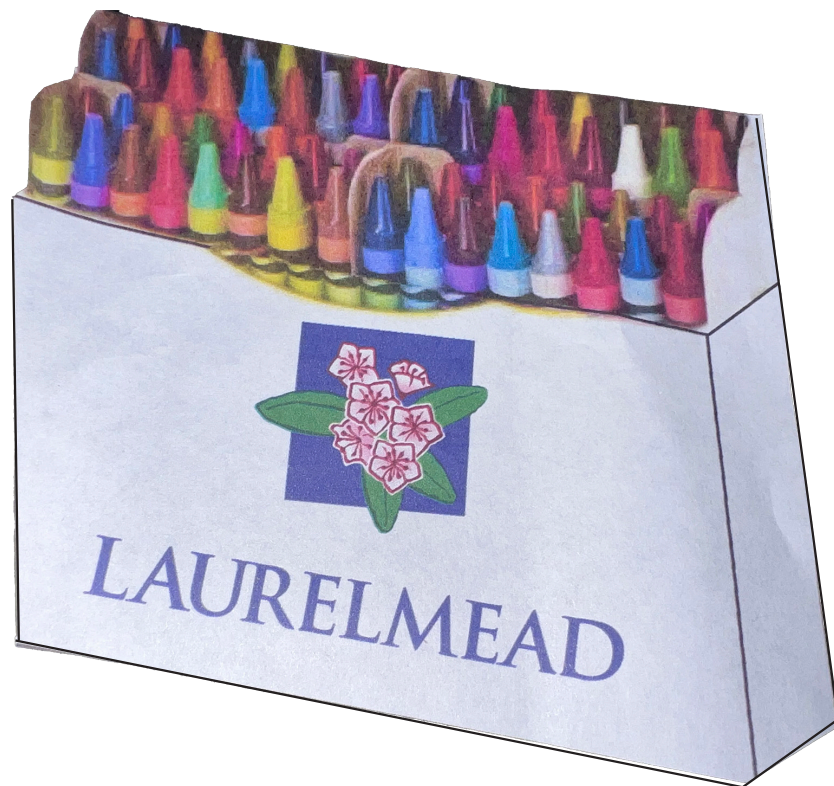




# LAURELMEAD JOURNAL

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***Prompt:  
Who Woulda Thought***

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Produced by Nicky Nichtern  
Proofreading (with sincere appreciation) Betsy Shea Taylor***



## *Hazel Hollmann*



Who woulda thought I would be Laurelmead's oldest resident. I'm writing this on April 12th. If all goes well, I will have reached 101 on the 18th. I can find no excuse for such longevity. A search of my family tree reveals a great grandfather who reached 97, certainly way above the norm for his time. The other branches were a mixture of young and old. I can only think I somehow inherited all the good genes of my ancestors and only hope there are some left for those who come after me.

When I consider the life I have lived, I realize I have paid little attention to advice about how to stay young, apparently an obsession with most. I smoked a little, drank a bit and ate what I liked.

Staying sane is difficult in this day when "unconstitutional" is the word of choice. When it seems that a rude word or crazy executive action erodes my idea of America, I remember the things the country and I have survived: the Great Depression, World War II and many other wars, political upheaval of one sort or another, natural disasters and more.

I'm thankful to Laurelmead for allowing me to age in place comfortably and securely for the past 20 years!

I'm grateful for my family who take my longevity in stride.

Supposedly age equates with wisdom, but I doubt it... so I'll just conclude this as I began... who woulda thought!



## *Patricia Becker*

Who would have thought that the lively Indian woman who moved into an apartment down the hall from me had a family vacation residence in the small hill station town in southern India where I attended school from second grade through high school. Our backgrounds couldn't be more different. She comes from a prominent Brahmin family, I come from a Congregational missionary family. Our families' paths never crossed, but we share a love of that hill station town, Kodaikanal, nestled in the Palni Hills near Chennai. I was there as a student in a school run by a consortium of American missionary churches, she was there on vacations with her family. Not only that, she was familiar with another missionary family whose daughter was in my class, and with the missionary hospital and women's college for which my father served as financial advisor. My Indian neighbor had attended that college for two years of her undergraduate studies.

One day she was walking around the Meadow and stopped to chat with two women from Wingate. The younger one said, "My mother loves India; she spent many years there." It turned out that some of those years had been spent in the town of Kodaikanal, and more specifically, as a student in the school that I had attended. Not only that, she had been in my brother's class. Who would have thought that coming from such very different backgrounds, different lives, different times, and different spaces, our life experiences can turn out to be so interconnected.

## *Rajee Krishnan*

That I would end up here in Rhode Island  
Spending so many years of my life here!

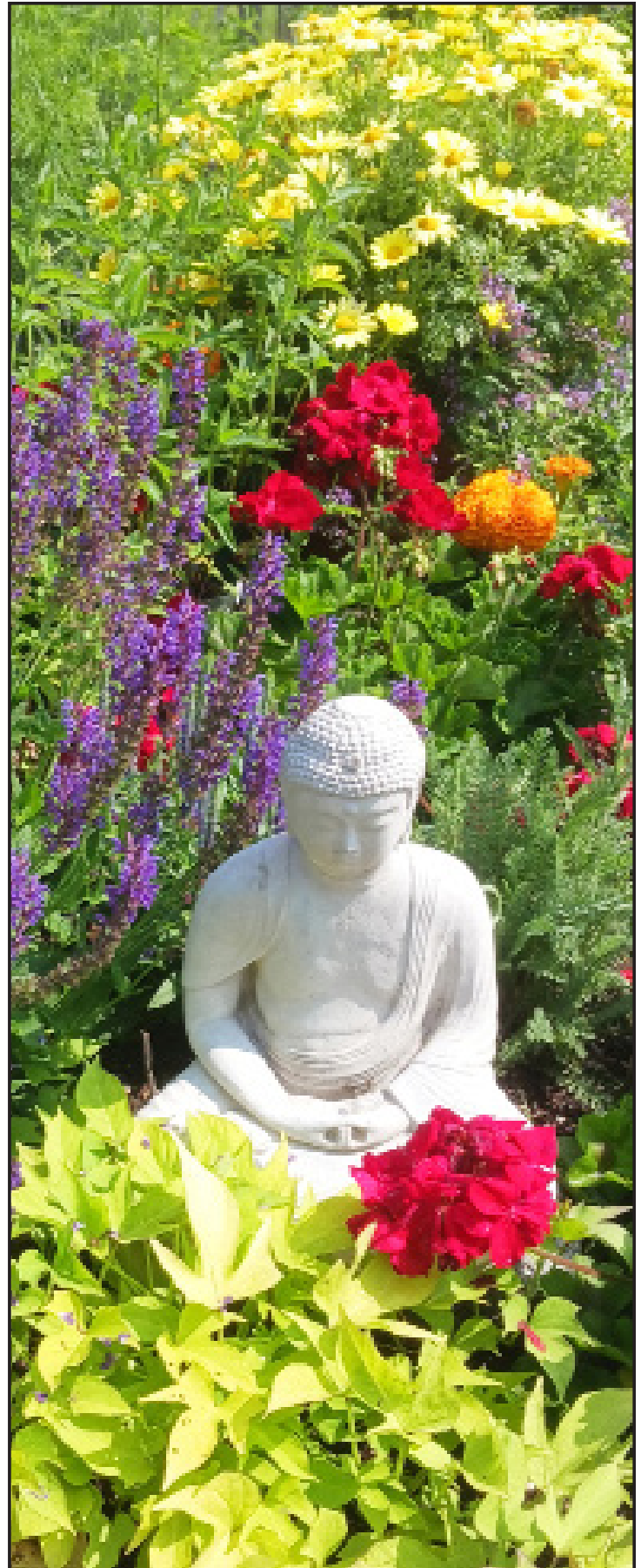
Nomad I was in my growing years in India  
Living in different states--college too likewise.  
Work took me from one coast to the other,  
After getting married, to merry olde England.

Then, fate proclaimed, cross the pond, I say!  
Back and forth for a while it transpired--then  
To settle here, not very far from the Big Apple.

Retirement brought us to Rose Island--where  
Growing roses isn't that easy as in the old realm  
Still, my garden blossomed and I bloomed.

How it suits me to have a tiny garden now!  
Amid plants green thumbs tend to with care!

Betsy's Buddha will be seen in the sun soon  
Bringing tranquility, a message of peace?  
And make my old heart beat in tune too?





## *Nicky Nichtern*

When I was sitting at the computer about an hour ago, I was faced with a problem that continues to escalate and infuriate. A program I was totally familiar with decided to sell out under the guise of “improving” their services. And now, faced with my own deadline, I don’t have a clue as to how to conform to the new guidelines. Yes, yes, there are instructions – all so nicely designed and filled with click here and click there – but I feel as if I’m lost in a maze and the clock is ticking.

Why does the world keep doing this? It can’t help but think about the many, many gadgets that worked fine, and then got “improved”. Going way back we had a radio when I was a kid. It sat atop a cabinet and was plugged into the electric socket.

And then someone decided we should be able to access music wherever we were – and yes, I did indeed love my “transistor” radio. I carried it around when I went out to the playground after school to hang out with my friends. And it was kinda cool to be able to be-bop-a-lo-la anywhere – not needing to be plugged in to access the magic of bringing the outside world into my world. And now that I’ve calmed down a bit from where I’ve begun, I stare at the trees outside my window, a fierce wind blowing, and push myself backwards in time to remember another blistery Saturday night. I was 15 years old and my best friend Janie was having a Sweet 16 party. It was to begin at 8:00 and for 2 hours we were going to dance, eat pizza, laugh, flirt, and at 10:00 all go home. Janie’s parents had rented a dance studio in the neighborhood. It was mid-January 1959, and a snowstorm was turning the streets of Manhattan into a “quiet zone”. One wall of the studio was all windows, facing First Avenue, which normally would be filled with cars on their way uptown, but now was devoid of any traffic.

Most of the girls had brought their small boxes that held their 45s – small records with our favorite hit song on the A side and not quite hit song on the B side. There was a little plastic doo-dad that fit in the big hole in the center so that we could play these records on a “grown-up” Victrola that had been designed originally for 33s.

But on this night not one adapter could be found! A sense of panic slowly began to spread from one girl to another. The boys in the room were still fixed on the pizza, and just hanging out together, but we girls wanted to dance! And so I grabbed my coat and asked Janie’s mother for a dime so I could go down to the corner telephone booth, call my dad, and ask him if he’d bring us the record adaptor that was sitting on our Victrola in the living room.

She did. I did. And he did!

OK. Back to trying to figure out how to “adapt” to this new computer program. First, I’m gonna click on Spotify, and find some good ole rock’n’roll to keep me in the zone!



## *Rosie Litchman*

Everyone who knows me knows that I am not shy and I never have been shy. It is one of the standout traits that I like about myself. Recently, I stepped up and out to join an improvisation group. Improv is a theatrical technique - actors create spontaneous comedy with the help of games - sort of like charades.

You might ask why, at 81, did I choose to challenge myself to the pressures of improv? The simple answer: I want to have FUN!

I spotted an ad for an improv group meeting in a small space at a Pawtucket mill. I showed up too early, too nervous and too old. I didn't fit into this crowd and everyone recognized it right off. I paid my entrance fee, and I got into line. The heavily tattooed emcee partnered me up with a guy who could have passed for my grandson. After a 5-minute tutorial, she labelled me "ready". Suddenly, I was being ordered to take on the role of a poodle suffering with mumps communicating by barking only! I got off my chair and pretended to fall on the floor like Jerry Lewis would have done. I took my socks off and stuffed them into my turtleneck shirt below my ears where the swollen mumps would have been. Everyone began laughing at my antics. Even my partner now considered himself lucky to have been matched to me. I began laughing too. I was hooked!

People who have studied improv have noted that the guiding principles of improv are useful, not just on stage, but in everyday life. Life without a script. Love it.

Who woulda thought?

## *Jay MacCubbin*

Organists are constantly called upon to play at Sunday morning worship services. Occasionally organists perform recitals for anyone who might be interested in hearing organ music. Often these recitals are organized by a professional organization called the American Guild of Organists (AGO for short.).

Once, several years ago, when I was living in New York City, I received a call from the president of our local AGO. The American Symphony Orchestra was preparing to perform a large choral piece, the “Te Deum,” by Anton Bruckner, at Carnegie Hall. This piece incorporates orchestra, chorus and organ. The organist who was scheduled to play had taken sick and would be unable to perform. They needed a substitute, fast. Would I be able to play? “Of course,” I responded. I would need a little time to try out the organ at Carnegie Hall. Arrangements were made and I was granted an hour of practice time at the hall on a weekday afternoon. I arrived at Carnegie Hall at the appointed time and was quickly taken to the organ console at center stage where I would sit for the performance. Practice and preparation took very little time. After about a half an hour, I looked around. There was no one about. So, I hopped off the organ bench and strode confidently to the edge of the stage. I took a deep bow and said “Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. For my next piece I would like to play an improvisation on ‘Blue Suede Shoes’.” After this absurdity, I skipped back to the organ and continued practicing.

A few moments later, I became aware that I was being observed. “Excuse me,” someone said, “but I think I’m scheduled for the organ now.”

“Of course,” I said. “But pardon me. I think I know you.”

“Maybe so. My name is Phillip Glass.” It was then that I realized that I was in the presence of one of America’s premier composers. “I’m not really familiar with this organ.” Phillip Glass said.

“I’d be only too happy to help you.” I replied.

Who would have thought I’d spend the next few moments instructing Phillip Glass on how to navigate the Carnegie Hall organ?





## *Heidi Moon*

I was in the seventh grade in September 1950 when my older brother went to college and a month later sent me a book of Emily Dickinson's poetry for my birthday. A few years later, while taking me on a tour of the Mount Holyoke campus, he emphasized that Dickinson went there and Amherst guys like to marry Mount Holyoke girls.

However, when I entered Mount Holyoke with the Class of 1960 I learned that we were "Uncommon Women". Because I was elected class treasurer for the first and senior years and until our tenth reunion, I recognized the names of my classmates and could put a face to most names. I stayed active as an alum, attended my reunions, and chaired the 25th and 60th, the latter during Covid and therefore on Zoom with surprisingly awesome results.

Three years after marrying a Rhode Islander, we moved here. Of course I became active in the Alumnae Club. We were a team of women of all ages whose mission was to raise funds for the College and recruit candidates for admission. I treasure the friendships that resulted.

In 1990-- during Perestroika--my husband and I toured the Soviet Union. On a river cruise in St. Petersburg, another passenger and I caught each other's eye for a moment before she was the courageous one to reach out and say, "Heidi?" My response was, "You're Janet, Class of '60, but I can't remember your last name!" "It was Hall but I'm married now."

In 1993 I toured China with the Mount Holyoke Asian Studies professor who was fluent in Chinese. It was a small group--no classmates--but Valerie, Class of 1959, and I had been camp counselors the summer before I entered. Although we were on campus together for three years, we lost touch after she graduated. Now we were seeing China together!

In the 1990s I moved from Lincoln to our vacation condo at Bay View in Jamestown. I'd made new friends in the college Glee Club, so I knew that joining the Jamestown Community Chorus would be an enjoyable way to meet people. I was always on the hunt for "sisters" so when asked to introduce myself, I included Mount Holyoke in my remarks. After rehearsal two women came over to me: Margaret was Class of 1938 (the year I was born). Leona, also an alum, lived in Bay View. They helped me make connections to other people and organizations in town so that very soon I felt at home.

I spent many happy years in Jamestown and would have stayed forever. But life happens and I had an excellent alternative. In April 2024 I moved to Laurelmead. Who woulda thought that one of the first people I recognized would be Mimi Freeman, Class of 1955?

## *Lowell Rubin*

Who would have thought that coming to Laurelmead...  
I would meet....

...the granddaughter of my grandfather's lawyer back in  
Springfield Massachusetts... Debby Mulcare,

...a man who had been one year ahead of me in college,  
and lived only a few doors down from me, and who ate in the same dormitory dining room  
with me for three years, yet we had never met...Ned Gammons,

... someone who was on the cheerleader squad with my first cousin at Stamford University, and  
had then visited he and his wife in New Mexico many times, would have been here with his wife  
Nancy. . .Tony Thompson.

... my next-door neighbor, who had raised 24 million dollars for the small private school my older  
son had attended in New York City... Nicky Nichtern.

Who would have thought, so many coincidences!!



## *Barbara Uziel*

When I was a little girl, my father and brother were both immersed in baseball, specifically the  
Brooklyn Dodgers. I guess by osmosis, I too learned about them, especially since we occasionally  
went to the Dodgers' home games. During most of my early adult years, I lost interest in the  
game, especially since the Dodgers had deserted their east coast fans and moved west.

When my husband and I were in our 60s, my daughter invited us to go to  
a baseball game. My husband, who grew up in Turkey, had never been  
to a baseball game before and had expressed little interest in knowing  
about the sport. Little did I know that he also didn't know most of the  
rules of the game.

Who Woulda Thought that I'd be sitting at a baseball game at  
that age teaching my husband the rules of baseball!



## *Lester Shapiro*

My companion and I got the call sometime in the mid-or-late seventies. We were told to pack, and were flown to the west coast of Florida, and then driven to Boca Grande, a small, very upscale community bordering the Gulf of Mexico where my boss had a winter refuge.

Our assignment: accompany Ladybird Johnson on her morning walks along the beach. We assumed we got the job because we were younger and not usually hungover early in the morning. The Johnsons and my boss, Charles Engelhard and his wife, Jane, were close friends. In fact, when President Johnson made that wild, 1967 round-the-world flight vainly seeking peace in Viet Nam, they were on board for the whole four and a half days.



The next morning we met Ms. Johnson and set off. Not much was said during the walk. The second day my companion, who was an ardent gardener, told Ms. Johnson how much she admired her efforts to spruce up the country. This led to a discussion about flowers, and the walk went well.

So, the next day I told Ms. J that I had worked closely with a man named Marvin Watson, one of her fellow Texans when we were readying Atlantic City for the Democratic National Convention in 1964 that nominated her husband to run against Barry Goldwater. That broke the ice for me. I did not, of course, tell her that Watson and I were not very happy with each other, but that's a story for another issue of the Journal. (Watson, by the way, was named postmaster general by the President.)

There were only a few more walks. One morning Mrs. J just didn't show up, and we knew our assignment had come to an end.

Despite her reluctance to chat those mornings, she really enjoyed the nightly dinners under a tent in the Engelhard's backyard. She even laughed heartily at a couple of mildly off-color jokes on two consecutive nights. This left us wondering if we had some serious personality defects that made her react to us so guardedly.

## *Carolyn Roberts*

Who would have thought that at the age of 81, I, always a lover of independence and privacy, would decide to move into a retirement community?

Who would have thought that I would leave behind lives in Ireland and Arizona to settle in Providence? Was it to be closer to family? A return to familiar ground? Or simply one of those unexpected turns life seems to take when we least anticipate it?

Who would have thought that in this chapter of life, I would discover some of the best friendships I have ever known. There is something quite special about meeting people who bring with them full, rich lives—and who are still curious, engaged, and open to new connections. It is both comforting and energizing.

And then there is the unexpected gift of stimulation—intellectual, social, even physical. I am encouraged to stay active, to keep learning, and to remain engaged in ways I had not fully imagined. Who would have thought that I would feel healthier and more alive than I might have expected at this stage.

Returning to Providence has also brought a sense of quiet continuity. This is, after all, the city where I once attended college, studying to be a nurse. And in one of those small but remarkable coincidences, I later discovered that the man I would marry—45 years later—had completed his administrative residency at Rhode Island Hospital just a few years before I arrived. Our paths nearly crossed long before we ever met.

My career eventually took me far from bedside nursing into hospital leadership and national healthcare work, always with a focus on quality and patient-centered care. I once told a friend that I hoped, someday, to be part of a hospital where patients truly came first and quality guided every decision. I spent my career pursuing that goal. And who would have thought that, after all those years, I would return to Providence and find myself serving on the board that meets my ideal criteria?

Even now, life continues to weave unexpected connections. A new friend here has a nephew who was once a close colleague of mine in Vermont—and, as it turns out, a student of my husband's years ago in Iowa. And who would have thought that another new acquaintance and I shared the same obstetrician in North Carolina—and even lived in the same apartment complex at different times?

It is a small world in the most delightful and unexpected ways.

So I find myself wondering:

Do these moments happen by chance?

Or is there some quiet thread connecting them all?

## *Carolyn Needleman*

When my husband and I first started thinking about moving to an independent living senior residence about 6 years ago, we were looking for the same kinds of things that brought many of us here: freedom from the maintenance chores of keeping up a large house, numerous supports and services, proximity to the resources of a large and interesting city, and a beautiful natural setting. We loved our home in Bristol and were in good health, but we didn't have family members to rely on and we knew we would eventually do better in a more supported (but still independent) environment as we aged. So, we figured, why not simplify our lives by making the move sooner rather than later?

When we learned about Laurelmead, we felt we had found exactly what we wanted. It sounded lively, with interesting activities and events, and was ideally located. We were especially attracted by the fact that it had a cooperative governance structure that offered many opportunities to contribute and participate. At that time there were quite a few vacancies here, and we were able to choose an apartment that seemed exactly right for us. Sadly, my husband didn't make it here; completely unexpectedly, he died suddenly of a heart attack just as we were starting the move. That was a tough summer. I managed to keep things going, and a few months later I was settling in here.

Laurelmead turned out to be just what I had hoped for. Then something unexpected began to happen. As I got to know more other residents and our staff here and found ways to get connected and involved with the life of Laurelmead and the Providence area, I discovered that I had found much more than just a nice place to live. The people here at Laurelmead are extraordinary, and I started to feel part of an interesting, intelligent, caring community made up of both residents and staff. Most unexpected of all, many of the friends I was making here began to feel more like family -- genuinely caring about each other and ready to hang out together, share adventures and information, and offer practical help if that should ever be needed.

In recent months, as I've been going through some difficult medical treatments, I've been so grateful for this community support and especially for my Laurelmead family. You've all helped keep me positive, and hopefully on the road to recovery. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you so much. If our positions are ever reversed, I'll be there for you as you have been there for me.

So -- I came here originally to find a nice place to live, which it is. But surprise! I also found a warm and wonderful community, and even a family!

Who woulda thought?



## *Sue R. Morin*

I've been listening to music all morning. Just before writing this, I was reading Beethoven Opus 10, no.1 and listening to a lesson. I was remembering how I used to play. You know I came to Laurelmead with a serious hope to spend at least a couple of hours a day resurrecting some piano skills. But things change a lot, right? A) my little half piano was in a box somewhere, and I didn't get it out for quite a time because I was really tired from the move and from having had to set aside – well, set aside a number of things because suddenly I couldn't imagine where to place things in my new abode. Eventually I set up the keyboard, but not until last week, and I've already been here a year. B) during the winter I developed arthritis in my hands. Maybe all is not lost; I will download Simple Piano onto my Mac.

I want to tell you about my early piano days. I very clearly remember practicing for my first recital. Mrs. Fellbaum had assured me that my hands were just the right size to play “The Organ Grinder,” and that I must practice just enough to be sure I could play it all the way through. The audience will want to hear it all! We didn't have Suzuki in those days; I wish we had! Still, I liked my teacher and my lessons. She chose for me a small composition in C, and I'd already memorized it. I felt very proud as I sat up straight and at my last lesson before the recital, I anxiously awaited as she stood and bundled her books into her big leather bag. She asked me to come down from the piano bench and walk to the door. She introduced me to our make-believe audience, and with her own body motioned me to curtsy. I felt proud and strong as I walked to the bench, settled, and played with fortitude. As always, I paid special attention to the single note, the last, which was an octave lower, the last note a deeper C which I crossed my right arm over to play. I loved it.

The evening came; I felt good in my blue and white dress and patent leather shoes. My turn to perform came soon enough as I was a little one. Funny, though, I didn't feel little.

Who would have thought that tiny kid, so ready, so practiced, so proud... what could have caused her to come to the finale – and so strongly play -- an F.

I wondered what to do. Play the C? no. Maybe they didn't notice? yes, they did. No matter what I'd do, it was ruined. I got down at the left side of the bench and walked to the wings.



## *Betsy Shea Taylor*

Thirty-seven years ago, I knocked on the door of a charming East Side house to ask if owners would be willing to sell.

I was living in a three-decker in Massachusetts, working at a newspaper, had other responsibilities and that Sunday afternoon foray was simply an exercise in trying to manifest a wish.

The owners didn't want to sell; I could not buy. But I believe in seeking out what you want no matter what.

I loved the house, a craftsman bungalow.

A decade passed. My circumstances changed. I engaged a Providence Realtor, and we spent months looking at lofts, condos, houses. More, more. Nothing was quite right.

Exhaustion lacing her voice she called one day and said, "A place just came on. I don't know if you'll like it, but do you want to look?" Who woulda thought...

There it was - the craftsman bungalow with its 10-foot front porch and bouffant Rose of Sharon and loaded banks of lilacs.

"Do you want to see it?" asked my weary Realtor, stating the price.

"I will buy it," I replied.

"But you haven't seen it, she said. But I knew.

The owners had moved on. I walked in and that house hugged me. "You're here!"

Twenty-five years later, including pandemic, I made a tough decision and tearfully said goodbye to every room, and reviewed hundreds of memories.

The holidays with family and friends, red wine spill on the good carpet, meditation groups, dozing by the fireplace, neighbors crowded in for Super Bowls, cats, dogs. And that kiss... best one ever. I sat on the porch a last time, then moved to Laurelmead.

Sometimes the greatest love affairs must end, while the love itself endures forever.