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WELCOME TO THE CREATIVE JOURNAL

Ombuds work, as we who engage in it understand, is stimulating, challenging, and rewarding. It can also be exhausting. In developing this first JIOA “Creative Edition,” we wanted to provide a way for members to share what – outside of their work – helps them find meaning and renews their energy to keep engaging in it. This issue serves as a tribute to those endeavors and to the creative side of all of us.

We invited colleagues to share parts of themselves that rarely show up in conversations among or between colleagues at conferences or in listserv discussions. Not surprisingly, many of our colleagues have talents and interests that go far beyond the boundaries of their ombuds work. Ours is a profession that is made up of a richly diverse talent pool. Especially for the benefit of those attending the Miami 2013 conference, we wanted “readers” of this edition to be able to view photographs and biographical statements from each contributor. To that end, we asked all contributors to submit a “Contributor Statement” which explains the meaning of these contributions to them.

We hope this edition of the JIOA will help our readers feel a brand new connection to each of the colleagues who generously contributed to it. Conversations about work are important, precious and educational. Conversations about quilting, music, comic books, woodworking, photography, poetry, what makes us laugh, what catches our eye in a work of art, what dancing offers the dancer, the social importance of Motown and our love of sheep and the natural world – these conversations also have the ability to delight us, broaden our perceptions, and strengthen community.

Finally, receiving this number of terrific contributions left us with a question: “Might there be other colleagues out there who, should we decide to do another JIOA Creative Edition, would like to submit passions of their own?” We sincerely hope so …

TOM SEBOK AND LAURIE PATTERSON, EDITORS
ABOUT

Sean Banks is the Director of Ombuds Services and Corporate Ombuds for the Shell Oil Company. He joined Shell in September 2005 and has been an Ombuds for 14 years. Under his leadership Shell’s Ombuds Services program serves as a confidential, independent, informal and neutral resource for the entire Shell Community in the US; providing dispute and conflict resolution services, communication facilitation, and recommendations and feedback on equity and fairness issues related to company policy, procedures and practices.

Sean’s Ombuds experience before coming to Shell includes serving as Director of Ombuds Services and Campus Ombudsperson for UCLA, and University Ombudsman for California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly). Prior to becoming an Ombuds he served in a variety of administrative roles in Student and Academic Affairs at UCSD, Capital University School of Law, and Cal Poly. Sean has extensive experience in mediation and facilitation, counseling and coaching, developing and implementing organizational diversity and inclusiveness enhancing programs and services, and analyzing and interpreting governmental and organizational policies, procedures and regulations.

Sean is proud to have been involved in many IOA professional activities. He has served on IOA’s Professional Development Committee, Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee and Certification Task-Force. He has been a member of the panel of Ombudsman 101 instructors since 2003. He had the privilege to serve as IOA’s lead representative during the lobbying activity and committee hearings of the 2007 effort to pass Ombuds privilege legislation in Texas. In addition, he has been a frequent presenter at IOA conferences and specialized course offerings.
Sean was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA and is a product of the Los Angeles public school system. He has a BA in Political Science from UCSD. He began his graduate education in counseling at the University of Virginia, Curry School of Education and completed his M.Ed. in Counseling at the University of San Diego, School of Education. In addition, he has a Juris Doctorate from the University of San Diego, School of Law.

CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT
Did you know that reading comic books could help you be a better Ombuds practitioner? Well I didn’t either until someone pointed out how my love of comic books may have had a significant influence on my professional passion and personal approach to Ombuds practice. Reading comic books even helps me with my active listening conflict resolution skills! Come along on a super power fuelled “Pecha Kucha” journey of crime fighting and righting wrongs that leads to the world of Ombuds practice.

CLICK ON THE COMICS TO WATCH THE VIDEO NOW
ABOUT

Dianne Bouvier lives and works in Athens, OH, loves being part of an organic, eco-friendly, locally-supportive community. Employed at Ohio University for over 23 years, she currently serves as the University Ombudsman. She is in the final stages of completing her dissertation, which explores the intersection of gender, critical mass and discipline for faculty in higher education. She looks forward to a future of getting dirt under her fingernails, using her passport, hiking through more hills, singing harmonies with Calliope Feminist Choir, reconnecting with friends and family, and pulling out her camera.

CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT

Photography serves as both a medium to shape a vision of the world and captures an experience in time, to put a “pause” on life, and record it for future reflection.
AMARYLLIS

Watching an amaryllis evolve from a pot of dirt to a stalk with fine posture to a mysteriously enfolded bud to full color glory to translucent limpness is an awe-inspiring process. “Amaryllis” is a reminder to slow down enough to see the beauty before us, at every stage of life.
Walking along a forested path energizes and soothes me. I often take photos of paths, enjoying the idea that we as individuals, and society as a whole, have choices on which paths we take.

“Cradle” appeared on a path the day after attending one of the most loving ceremonies I’ve ever witnessed, a legally-sanctioned gay marriage in Provincetown, Massachusetts. The image is a reminder for me that while light and darkness are transient, the earth is timeless and serves as a foundation to support us through our evolution.
Travel is another joy, a way of leaving the stresses of everyday happenings. For years I wanted to see the sandhill crane migration in Nebraska. During my eventual visit there, I stopped at a local Sierra Club fundraiser and asked one of the volunteers if I could photograph his incredible hands. “Open” was a surprise — there was no hiding in his gesture, but a simple openness to what was before him. The image reminds me to be open in my interactions with others, and to remember to interact with people I do not know, as many times our paths are meant to cross.
POETRY: LINDA MARIE BROTHERS

ABOUT

Linda Marie Brothers is an associate ombudsman at the NIH Center for Cooperative Resolution, Office of the Ombudsman. Prior to coming to NIH, she was Director of Equal Opportunity and Ombudsperson at Wellesley College, where she established the college’s first ombuds office and served as the co-director of MERI (the Multicultural Education Research Initiative). A conflict analyst and ADR practitioner, her areas of special focus include perceived difference and racial/intercultural conflict, systems change, and role boundary conflation.

In her “other” life, Brothers has received modest recognition for her creative writing. On the strength of her writing, she became one of three Yale undergraduates allowed to pursue playwriting coursework at the Yale Drama School. Her work has been performed at the Actors’ Studio in New York where she was a member of their Playwrights’ Unit. Her work was presented at the now-defunct, off-Broadway, Negro Ensemble Company, and one of her plays is in collection of the NY Public Library’s Schomburg Center for Research on Black Culture. More recently Brothers has had a staged reading of a short play at the Bethesda Writers’ Center. She is currently working on a collection of short stories and poetry.
CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT

I wrote my first play when I was five years old. The play was awful, but as my fledgling effort demonstrates, from a very young age I’ve felt driven to comment upon the complex, and sometimes shifting, realities I see around me. My non-literary “day” job of ombudsman allows me to continue this process. I’m given the opportunity as ombudsman to listen to other people’s truths — and to note, in real time, how these individual truths, starkly contrasted and sometimes conflicting with other individual truths, shape lives and workplaces and refine our sense of self. Both as a writer and an ombudsman, I’ve come to understand that most problems are revealed in layers; what appears to be self-evident can sometime morph into layered, and fluid, truths. In my creative work I attempt to explore these shifting perceptions regarding what is real and what is false. The two poems I’ve included deal with the schism between individual and objective realities, as well as the emotional consequences of that schism.
INSURRECTION

When last we stood side to side —
He and I,
He looked down.
I looked up,
our fates congealed.
And his hand took mine —
in friendship perhaps.
I cannot say.
And fingers parried fingers for a time.

But his eyes narrowed,
As I knew they would
The cadence of his booming voice filled the
universe
And he asked me
Without words
To bow.

I’d have him for a friend
But he would be a master —

What choice had I?

When friends become masters
And masters become large
And distant —
demanding —
all masters are —
What choice had I?

Yes, I could have laughed
slapped him on the back
pretending
Set my teeth, but curled my lips
Into a Cheshire smile.
I could — many would —
Have nodded at the end of his sentences
Eyes wide, surprised.
I could have praised him.

That was my choice.
I could have said “yes” when I meant no.

Understand. I waited.
Waited for him to toss his head the way he
did when we were children.
For him to shrug his shoulders,
ask my opinion.
Waited for him to smile.

If he had smiled at that instant
I might have known mercy
and saluted in kind.
But for a smile I might have known love.
but instead —
his eyes were slits
I could not find my way into —
And I had no mercy to give.

I learned to cry on that day,
(All my life I have cried for that day.)
The day our friendship became phantom
And our souls muddy and weighted,
melanic flesh meant to separate and remove.
The day our future was born.

Where there was a crack now became a gulf,
and on either side we stood.

But if he had smiled,
Smiled with his eyes as he did when we were
equals
I could have learned to smile in turn.
(I believe I could have learned.)
And constellations already in place would
have altered their course,
Caught in that miracle of reciprocal under-
standing.
The world would have changed.

But this is conjecture.

The fault was his —
He took it on faith that he would lead.
He took it on faith that I would follow.
THE LAST LITTLE PIG
(The Wolf Speaks)

Don't close your door to me,
sweet morsel —
Safe — you think —
behind mortared walls —

How foolish you do seem.
Do you think I can not
blow your door down with
great puffs and lies
Great lies to puff you while I huff you
huff and puff and blow your bricks down
Do you think I can not tear the flesh from
your soul
with the whip of my tongue and the
blade of my smile
if I so choose?

Do you think I can not have you
as I had your brothers?
Fat and sloppy, slippery fools,
who danced in merry measure
while I stood before their doors
Until — until —
I gaped my mouth and blew
apart their universe of straw and wood.

And —
I tell you this in passing —
as I bit into their tender folds, and the grass
grew red about me,
one cried out,
then the other,
“if only, if only, our houses had been brick” —

Deluding themselves until the end
that a box fashioned of slab
would be safer than a box molded of chaff,
or dreams — or good intentions —
any box
where pigs shut away
thinking to escape
wicked wolves like me.

Your brick box will not save you.
You cower, hesitating in your vault
Embalmed already, crypt-like,
dead before death
While I — dangerous — beautiful —
wait at your portal.
I mourn you, little pig.
You decline the brilliance of my sun
so that you can spend one more moonless
night in purgatory
When we both know what you fear is not my
scissored teeth
but your own reflection in the black of my eye.
ABOUT

Nicholas Diehl is the Deputy Ombudsman for the American Red Cross in Washington, DC, serving more than 30,000 employees, 650,000 volunteers and members of the general public throughout the United States. Prior to joining the Red Cross in 2010, Nick served as an Associate Ombudsman for the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, MD. Previously he served as an ombuds for Princeton University and also worked in the Pace University Ombudsman Office. Nick began his work in the alternative dispute resolution field as a mediator for the New York City Unified Court System and the Brooklyn Safe Horizon Mediation Center.

Nick is currently the President of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA), the largest association focusing on organizational ombudsman practice with members from more than 30 countries. He has served as co-chair of IOA’s Communication Committee and is on IOA’s professional development faculty.

Nick holds a Master’s Degree in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from the University of North Carolina and a Master’s Degree in Organization Development from American University/NTL. He trained as a mediator through the Brooklyn Law School Mediation Clinic and apprenticeship program.
CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT

I was introduced to the Pecha Kucha presentation style a couple of years ago and really enjoy the opportunity to see concepts presented succinctly in a compressed time frame. With 20 slides and 20 seconds per slide, you have to be quick! I was very pleased to introduce this format at the IOA Conference in 2012 and the session attendees seemed to enjoy it.

I chose the topic of my musical background for this presentation since I had been thinking recently about how that area of my life is closely connected to my ombuds work. Of course, there is much more to say about this, but I chose just a few highlights to put into this presentation. The exercise of putting this together was also interesting and I enjoyed becoming more aware of how music continues to impact me personally. My experience certainly shapes my ability to work well with people in my current role.

CLICK ON THE PHOTO TO WATCH THE VIDEO NOW
ABOUT

David Flood has been a life-long resident of the Philadelphia area, including both college and graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania. Although at the outset of his career he interviewed for jobs as far away as Japan and pre-revolution Iran, Philadelphia was again to be his destiny—not just Philadelphia but Drexel University, which is next to the University of Pennsylvania. Although he considered law at one time, upon graduating college he entered Penn’s PhD program in English literature. While he was completing his dissertation, he began teaching at Hahnemann Medical College, also in Philadelphia, and eventually secured a full time faculty position there. Over the years, while at Hahnemann, he has survived two mergers, and in the late 1990s under the Allegheny University of the Health Sciences name, a corporate bankruptcy, which led to the most recent merger with Drexel University.

Teaching in a medical institution, working with a variety of healthcare professionals and students, slowly but inevitably changed his career focus from traditional English literature to what was then a new field, medical humanities. While other colleagues in similar situations kept to their English literature roots, he became increasingly interested in the culture of medicine and began to seek out stories about medicine and then stories in medicine. What intrigued him most was the way the humanities can contribute to the general public’s as well as the healthcare professional’s understanding of the medical encounter and medical topics ranging from the experience of illness to physician burn out, about which he coauthored a published play, The Seventh Chair, with his physician colleague of many years. To this interest he has recently added medical and healthcare ethics, which now has become one of his chief teaching areas. This diverse academic background was also instrumental in his being appointed to the position of University Ombuds at Drexel.

David resides across the Delaware River from Philadelphia among the pines in New Jersey with his wife and daughter, who is now in graduate school, with an eye on also becoming an academic.
CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT

My first clear recollection of writing poetry goes back to my sophomore year of high school. We were given an assignment to write a poem—I wrote one about a raindrop—and I felt tremendously encouraged when mine was selected as an example for the class. I still remember the basic idea: a raindrop forms from a mass of swirling clouds and falls separately even though with countless others, coming to be absorbed in an endless sea. My starting point then as well as in most subsequent poems is an image that resonates with me as a metaphor. Although usually a visual one, such as the raindrop or a night of shooting stars, the image can also come from the other senses as the accompanying poem illustrates or even be more conceptual such as continental drift. It can come from nature or even something like the angry look in the eyes of a person I pass in the street. Whatever the triggering image, writing poetry makes me pay greater attention to the world around me in more than the functional way in which we too often go through the day (raindrops—do I have my umbrella; angry man—walk briskly and avoid eye contact). As such, it is a refreshing respite from my day-to-day existence. Additionally, it ties in with interests such as photography, where the primacy of image makes me see more fully; music (both listening and playing), which sharpens my appreciation of the subtle psychology of sound; and woodworking, which challenges me to imagine the form that would best suit the character of a piece of wood upon which I am bestowing an afterlife. Poetry also is a form of the self-reflective narrative (described in the accompanying essay), which has become a way of monitoring the health of my personal and professional selves.

How do I tell if I have been successful? There is, of course, the immediate instinct of connection with the subject in a way that is revelatory yet not contrived, forced. I often think on how “express” means literally to press or push out, and when done right, this creative act of “pushing out” a poem from the chaotic mass of thoughts and emotions held within is therapeutic in itself. But the best test comes much later when I come back to a poem to see if it still has the power to engage me even though I may be a different person by then. If mind and heart still linger over it, I have done my job. Poetry is both process and product, means and end, and needs to be assessed from both perspectives.

I often wonder what would have happened had I not back in high school received encouragement to explore the poetic path and it remained the road not taken; fortunately, I did not have to find out.
SELF-REFLECTIVE NARRATIVES, POETRY, AND THE OMBUDSMAN:

INTEGRATING THE TWO SELVES

It all began a few years ago when, spurred on by a narrative medicine colleague, I began rereading some of my earlier poems. I quickly realized that somehow, along the way, I had become disconnected from that self who had composed them and that he had valuable things to say—things that I should heed. As happens to many of us, I had become caught up in “the job.” It was not my first recognition of the problem, but earlier, I had always managed to push it aside. Shortly after this discovery, I was offered the position of academic ombuds, which I would be adding to my role as faculty member, still teaching, researching, and performing the usual service activities that went with a faculty position. If I accepted the new post, how was I going to avoid making that disconnect between these personal and professional selves grow even greater?

On the one hand, the ombuds role would enable me to enlist abilities acquired over a lifetime and deploy them in ways that my previous faculty role could not, both to benefit others and to further humanistic goals that I valued in my university. On the other hand, with yet another layer of commitment, how could I prevent that personal self, with which I had recently become reacquainted, from slipping away, possibly not to be found again? I also began to realize that if I could bring to my ombuds role a person who integrated more fully the personal and professional selves, I would probably be able to do a better, more satisfying job; conversely, if I could not listen to myself, would not this impact my ability to listen effectively to others?

Around the same time, in my teaching and research roles, I became interested in the use of narrative in revealing and monitoring the psychic health of one’s self and began detailing a useful method for doing so: composing a professional narrative about where one is and wants to be in one’s professional life, followed by a narrative expressing the same about one’s personal life, and then examining the “fit” between the two. (I use the term “compose” instead of “write” as one might employ different art forms in this endeavor. “Narrative” is also used loosely.) Often, as one can imagine, the result is cognitive dissonance, especially in initial stages. Basically, upon first inspection, the two parts frequently don’t fit that well, with the deficit for the groups I deal with usually falling on the personal side. (Try it. It can be a sobering experience.) Cognitive dissonance, however, can also offer a significant learning opportunity. Through examining the two narratives and noting any discontinuities, one can then work towards achieving a greater integration and balance of these two selves.

And now to return to the point where we started in this self-reflective narrative—poetry. So different from my usual writing tasks, it has proved a valuable means to nourish that personal self and give it a clearly distinctive voice. I will finish with one of those earlier poems that inspired me to embark upon this never-ending journey. I chose this one as in many ways it expresses a problem that both this academic ombud’s personal and professional selves continually face: what to hold on to, what to let go of, why—and when.
I TRIED TO KEEP THE STARS

I tried to keep the stars from falling

Until I saw the splendor of a shooting star

I tried to keep the clouds from crying

Until I tasted the sweet tears of the storm

I tried to keep the music from ending

Until I echoed with the fullness of a dying refrain

I tried to keep the wind from changing

Until I thrilled to the cool caress of a virgin breeze

I tried to keep the flower from fading

Until I floated in the dry-petaled fragrance of a rose

And memory made it live again.
ABOUT

Howard Gadlin has been Ombudsman and Director of the Center for Cooperative Resolution at the National Institutes of Health since the beginning of 1999. From 1992 through 1998 he was University Ombudsperson at UCLA. He was also director of the UCLA Conflict Mediation Program and co-director of the Center for the Study and Resolution of Interethnic/Interracial Conflict. While in Los Angeles, Dr. Gadlin served as consulting Ombudsman to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Prior to coming to UCLA, Dr. Gadlin was Ombudsperson and Professor of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

At present Dr. Gadlin is studying the dynamics of scientific teams and collaborations and developing new approaches to addressing conflicts among scientists. An experienced mediator, trainer, and consultant, Dr. Gadlin has years of experience working with conflicts related to race, ethnicity and gender, including sexual harassment. Currently he is developing new approaches to addressing conflicts among scientists. He is often called in as a consultant/mediator in “intractable” disputes. Dr. Gadlin has designed and conducted training programs internationally in dispute resolution, sexual harassment and multicultural conflict.

Dr. Gadlin is past President of the University and College Ombuds Association (UCOA) and of The Ombudsman Association (TOA). For three years, he was chair of the Ethics Committee of the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution. He also served 5 years as Chair of the Coalition of Federal Ombudsmen and as chairperson of the Federal Inter-Agency Alternative Dispute Resolution Working Group steering committee.

Dr. Gadlin is the author of, among other writings, “Bargaining in the Shadow of Management: Integrated Conflict Management Systems,” “Conflict, Cultural Differences, and the Culture of Racism,” and “Mediating Sexual Harassment.” He is the co-author of “Neutrality: What an organizational ombudsperson might want to know” and “Conflict Resolution and Systemic Change.” Most recently he has co-authored “Collaboration & Team Science: A Field Guide.”
CLICK ON THE VIDEO TO WATCH NOW

The Art of an Ombudsman

Howard Gadlin
ABOUT

After a bicoastal existence and many past work lives (medical research assistant, corporate trainer, management consultant, non-profit manager, mediator, diversity trainer), I have landed in the Midwest and made my home in Iowa City. I have been an ombudsperson at The University of Iowa for seven years and, with a faculty colleague, serve the entire campus community of over 50,000 students, staff and faculty. I am married and have a son, a daughter and new son-in-law, a dog, two cats, and an elderly house.

I have been an avid reader since childhood. I love words; one of my prized possessions is a library-sized dictionary. Taking the step from consumer to producer was logical. I find the process of writing challenging, engrossing, and deeply satisfying, even when it involves reports, grants, and articles. Creative writing opens up a universe of possibilities, and I have written poetry off and on since high school. Currently, I’m playing with ideas for a novel and have become intrigued by song writing.

I came up with the phrase “seven-spoked weeks” years ago and have been thinking about what it meant to me and in what setting I’d like to use it ever since. The poem speaks about the struggle in my own life to take joy (as in “Joy-ce”) in the moment instead of whipsawing between planning for the future and remembering the past.
SEVEN-SPOKED WEEKS

I get caught
in
the whir of seven-spoked weeks,
faster and faster,
the landscape
a blur.

Sometimes,
I remember to slow down,
breathe,
watch the wind ripple through the grass
and the new moon appear in the sky.

But then I get caught again,
head down,
pedaling harder and harder.

You know how it is.

I forget
again and again
that all we have is this moment,
this silhouette of bare trees against the dusk,
this scent of wood smoke,
this sound of faint music in the distance.

And then I’m caught again.

Maybe
one day
I’ll get caught in the wheels
spun out
out of control
out of time.
Originally born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Nick moved to the Tidewater, Virginia area in 1959 and has called it home ever since. Nick is an Honor’s Graduate of the NASA Engineering Technician Apprentice Program, Thomas Nelson Community College and Christopher Newport University. Before joining NASA, Nick was a contractor for Wyle Laboratories as a Technical Writer. Prior to that Nick served in the military (USAF) as an Airborne Avionics Specialist. Nick has acquired a broad range of experience and knowledge throughout his tenure at NASA/Langley Research Center. Nick has worked in Wind Tunnels, Structures & Materials, Laboratories, Atmospheric Science, Management, Safety, Contract Management and Resource Management. Nick’s current assignment for the Center Operations Directorate is to support Langley’s growing GIS (Global Information System). Nick is married with three grown children and four grandchildren. As an Ombudsman, Nick finds working with people to be both “challenging and rewarding”.
LISTEN:

**SONG FOR SUZIE**

Song for Suzie is a sultry 16 bar blues ballad I wrote for my wife. Performed as a duo with me on guitar and then bass, Blake Wallace lays down some really tasty trumpet work; the jazziest, prettiest tune of the bunch.

**KOMODO REQUIEM**

Poachers still exploit Komodo Dragons in order to sell them as pets or to use their body parts; their skin is often used much like alligator or snake skin for handbags and other fashion items. These hard-to-love creatures deserve to exist just as much as anything else. If we humans ever do drive them to extinction, maybe this song can serve as their requiem.

**LOVESICK COWBOY**

It’s 1869 and after months on the trail, a young cowboy finishes his first cattle drive from Mexico to Abilene. Looking for a bath and a good time, he heads for town with a pocket full of money. Once cleaned up, he visits a saloon where a young but seasoned harlot quickly enchants and lures him upstairs. Losing his virginity overwhelms him and he professes his undying love, proposing marriage. She laughs in his face, takes his money and goes downstairs telling everyone. Mortified, he slinks past loud jeers and ridicule, mounts his horse and heads for the lonely open prairie. He makes camp, lies down and stares up at the stars, alone with his thoughts.
ABOUT

Adam Barak Kleinberger is the Assistant Ombudsman at Cornell University and a Certified Organizational Ombudsman PractitionerSM. His research has focused on improving mediation skills through improvisation and clowning. He holds a BA from Brandeis University, an MA in conflict resolution from the University of Massachusetts Boston and a diploma from Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College.

Adam has been learning, teaching and performing improv for twenty years in groups such as False Advertising, Theater Fun Nite, Mêlée, the Underkröft, and currently ComedyFLOPs. Adam has worked at the Consensus Building Institute in Cambridge, MA, mediated in Massachusetts’ district courts and trained students, staff and faculty at City University of New York.
IMPROV TROUPE REHEARSAL: BEING IN THE MOMENT

A family goes on a scenic drive in a car made of marshmallow. Two long-lost sisters reunite when they bump into each other in free fall while skydiving. A doctor cures a man’s addiction to television by having him become an Olympic hurdler.

Improv is the ultimate spontaneous exercise. The stories told by the performers have never existed before and the moments they generate can never be repeated. Scenes like the ones above are only possible when partners listen to each other, use their creativity and trust their impulses.

Nothing is more fun than rehearsing with my troupe. Being spontaneous, creating something together and laughing to tears is immensely rewarding and helps me in my professional life. Performance is where the applause is. But, rehearsal is free expression, bonding and sharing a unique collaborative space that is authentic. It’s where I teach and learn, sing and shout, where I can be master and student and embody any role I can imagine. When I am lost in a created world with my troupe, it is impossible to think of anything else and I am always in the moment.

Adam Kleinberger performs weekly in Ithaca, NY with ComedyFLOPs.

VIMEO LINK: HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/57984019

PASSWORD: COMFLOPS
Samantha Levine-Finley has been an associate ombudsman at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) since 2008. She earned a Masters Degree in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University. She co-authored the NIH publication “Collaboration & Team Science: A Field Guide,” which won an NIH Plain Language Award, and an article on the history of the organizational ombudsman profession for Conflict Resolution Quarterly. She has co-chaired the International Ombudsman Association’s Communications Committee for more than three years and is a reviewer for the Journal of the International Ombudsman Association. Before becoming an ombudsman, Samantha was a print journalist for more than 10 years in the Washington, D.C., area covering national issues, politics, and breaking news for several leading publications. To see more of Samantha’s photographs, please go to www.wednesdaylens.com.

CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT: FROM WHERE I STAND

Creativity and caution. Open-mindedness and realism. Nimble, quick thinking and careful deliberation. Noting the obvious and exploring what is obscured. The work of an organizational ombudsman spans these ways of analyzing situations and determining how to proceed. In trying to assist people as they work through conflicts or other issues, the ombuds must continually consider whether to tread lightly, move boldly, or refrain from any movement. The ombudsman must also try to see things differently than those involved in the matter and offer narratives and possibilities that may be new or challenging to them. The ombudsman is always thinking — about what the parties are trying to communicate; options for how they could address their situation; the limitations and flexibilities of the organization in which they are operating; and maintaining the balance and independence demanded of the ombuds role.
This complexity, while endlessly fascinating for me as an ombudsman, can also lead to an acute craving for a bit of breezy impulsivity. The psychic salve for all that thinking is the kind of creative leisure in which one is unconcerned with how something may sound or look and can do, well, anything he or she pleases. Photography does not encourage me to stop thinking, but rather it allows me the freedom to pounce on an image or a perception in the moment as it strikes me. My mind and my vision are let loose without rules, standards or expectations, and certainly without the need for impartiality. And, in the era of digital photography, I can take as many pictures as I choose without any consideration for the cost of film or development. The cord that runs from my camera to my laptop constitutes my own private film lab, which conveniently operates anytime and for free.

As a photographer, I find myself drawn to patterns, details, unusual combinations or juxtapositions of objects, and the play of light and shadow. I try to look up and down — not just straight ahead — and find myself taking many pictures into the sky and of what’s on the ground. In these affinities lay a thread that connects my approach to pictures to my work as an ombudsman. I attempt to find a way “into” the picture that presents a more unexpected way of considering the image in the frame. When I am effective as an ombudsman, I have helped people see, reflect on or reconceive of their situations in a way that expands their analyses and offers them more choice in how to move forward. While artifice and manipulation have no place in the efforts of an ombudsman, manipulating digital photos through the use of various programs can result in more compelling images. However, I rarely choose to fuss with my photos, save for some minimal cropping. This is less about piety than it is about wanting to freeze the split-second I have captured and avoid the revision and rumination that can accompany ombudsman work and the more substantive of life’s decisions. Plus, to me there are simply too many options available online for such enterprises — and sometimes options are just not what I want.
Growing up in Bangor, Maine in the 1950s and early 60s was a time when Communists were perceived as a bigger threat than minorities living in the community. Boys could be crossing guards but not girls. The National Basketball Association recently signed their first black player. While Bangor was a relatively tolerant and comfortable community, it also was a time when barriers to full participation for minorities remained in place. I was part of the fairly large and vibrant Jewish community. Life was OK. I could play basketball at the YMCA, Jewish doctors had been granted hospital privileges, and neighborhoods were becoming more diverse. Reminding us of earlier times when Jews could not be buried within many city limits, we still had to play golf out of town. Burial and golfing…the last barriers? I do recall a few religious taunts and on more than one Good Friday I was targeted for a punch or two. As a ten year old, I remember thinking, “this won’t hurt for long, but Tim will always have his bad teeth.”

I was fortunate that my parents modeled and I was taught tolerance. Table talk often turned to the dangers of intolerance and the role of the individual in social remedies. The Holocaust was a recent and traumatic memory and survivors had been resettled in town. Bangor had some people of color and I rarely saw open hostility. I also noticed early on, that minorities with special talents and skills could cross boundaries. Athletes, restaurant owners, and musicians received better treatment than others in their group.
After graduation, I headed out to East Lansing and Michigan State University. Because I said things like “Don’t drop the chowdah crackahs undah the table, children in Cuber and Afriker are hungry,” I was placed in a language and speech workshop populated by international students, Black students from the south, and folks from Maine. Most of these Black students were male athletes who either could not or would not attend major Southern universities. We shared a common stigma, we were less than or not good enough. I also found that we shared a common interest in music other than The Beatles and The Beach Boys. Sharing and enjoying Motown music provided a non-threatening opportunity to talk not just about sports and classes, but also more openly about race, color, life in the South, and blocked opportunities. The dialog in “The Suit” draws from those dorm room discussions — a long way from Maine!

As an ombuds and social scientist I still notice barriers, the frustrations they cause, and how people attempt to maneuver through these barriers and boundaries. Humor helps, but music — soul and rock — have played an important role in breaking down some professional and social barriers. “The Suit” is not just a fantasy piece of a would-be soul artist struggling for acceptance, but a reminder of how music has and will continue to bring people together. Hope you enjoy.
THE SUIT

What’s ringing? It’s four-thirty in the morning! “Hello, hello …who is this?”

“Hey, Snowflake. It’s me, Merald. Close your mouth, open your eyes and listen to me. Okay?”

“Merald? Oh yeah, yeah, Bubba, Gladys Knight’s manager. You said you’d stop calling me Snowflake. Hey, how ya doin?”

“Sorry man, old habits are hard to break. Do you still have the suit?” Bubba asked.

That woke me up like yesterday’s coffee! “The suit? The shiny blue one?

Yeah, of course I do.” I said.

“Good, then get your butt to Cleveland, now. One of the Pips is down! Twisted his knee. God knows, you’re the last person I want after what happened at the Fisher in Detroit, but you have the suit and you know the moves.”

“Why Cleveland? What’s going on?”

“Never mind Whitebread…uhh sorry. Just listen to me. There’s a ticket waiting for you at Logan for the Delta 10:20 to Cleveland. Be on it, bring the suit and don’t screw up this time.” Bubba pleaded.

“You know that wasn’t my fault.” I replied.

“Yeah, it was.”

“Hey Bubba, we looked good and Gladys sounded great, but the crowd had it in for me. You’d think they never saw a white backup singer. It’s not like I kicked your cousin on purpose. They could’ve used a little tolerance. You know, things have changed. The crowds are better now. I’ll be fine.”

“You talk too much. Yeah, you’re right, things are better now. This should be a good cross-over crowd. Just get to Cleveland. We’ll grab you at the airport. Show’s at 9:00 in the Majestic. Make it right!”
Helllooo Cleveland. Let’s hear it for the one and only ‘The Empress of Soul’ Gladys Knight and the Pips. I can almost hear Midnight Train *Mmm, mmm, bought a one way ticket to the life he once knew*. Man, these are real lyrics …tell a story.

Better check the suit. There it is… hanging all alone, untouched by ordinary clothes. Love this suit! Perfectly tailored, double stitched blue silk with silver buttons, just the right taper in the jacket. We look like human disco balls when we dip and spin. Time to get this baby out.

I open the closet door all the way. The draft lifts the lapels and the jacket comes alive… swear I can see a soft blue glow on the left side of the closet. OK, OK, breathe slowly, get control.

Most days I grab a button-down white oxford shirt and grey slacks and maybe sneak a glance at the suit. Anything more than a quick look floods my head with sound and motion; almost dizzy-ing. Not today. Today the suit is coming out! If I close my eyes, I can hear it, see the moves:

*“said, he’s goin’ back to a simpler place and time.”*  
(high step left, high step right, do it again, then spin slowly on one foot, dip to the left, straighten up, one arm pointed high)

*‘when he takes that ride’*  
(stay loose, swing the left arm to the side, now the right arm).

(Note to Reader: If you would like to see a clip of Gladys Knight and the original Pips, click here now: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=v78-ftcgNw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=v78-ftcgNw) or at any time.)

The jacket’s so smooth, the satin lining makes it move with me. Crisp lines, a real attention grab-ber. My granddaughter said it still has the soft, subtle smell of groovy. Move over Gladys, give me some space. Shiny white shoes, whiter than me, red silk shirt. Oh, won’t we look good! No stop-ping me now. Doing back-up for Gladys Knight!

No, no, it’s not right. I can’t button the pants...closet shrinkage! Look at me. My gut’s hanging out. I’m an oldie on a PBS reunion. I need the flare on the waist, not the cuffs. There’s no way these pants will fit. Hold my breath? Add a button extender? Not too cool, but I need room to move. I’ll worry about this later. Gotta pack and call a cab.

Only twenty more minutes by cab to Logan. Bubba calls again.

“You moving?” he asked.

“Yeah, on my way now, bags are in the back and I’ve got the suit on my lap, and thanks…”

“Don’t thank me. If I had my choice, it would be anybody but you. But Gladys thinks you’re cute and its good for community relations. No arguing with her when she makes up her mind. Sweet Lord, we’ll just put you next to Eddie. He’s always taking care of us. Follow him and don’t mess
with the routine. For God sakes, none of your own moves. Last time, you looked like you were kicking crap off your shoes when you did the glide steps. You in shape for this show?”

“Yeah, I’m in shape (I’m in shape to die on the stage). Hey, if I’m behind Eddie, no one will notice me. You know, with the lights low, I look kinda uh…uh, beige.”

“Beige! You’re white as teeth.” Bubba replied.

“Maybe linen white?” I asked.

“Unh, unh, tooth white, you loser. Not a problem; Cleveland should be a good crowd. I remember when we first started seeing white kids at the shows. Their mamas must have been on their knees praying until they all came home. It’s cool… progress and brotherly love through rock and roll. Hey, how’d a farm boy like you ever get into soul?”

I knew how. “Started with the Lansing show in ’63 with Little Stevie Wonder. It just felt right. And I’m telling you, what happened in DEEtroit wasn’t my fault,” I reminded him.

Bubba shot back, “Hey, you’re from Maine, you got lots of potatoes but you don’t have Soul. Don’t ever, ever say DEEtroit.”

“Man, that’s not fair. Bangor’s a city, no potatoes. We doin ’Midnight Train’?”

“Always, can’t get off the stage without it.” Bubba reassured me.

“Same moves?” ‘Leavin on the midnight train, Whoo, whoo’, (fist pump that train whistle)

“Yeah, the moves are classic.” Bubba reminded me as if I didn’t know.

“So’s the lyrics. Gladys changing ‘midnight plane’ to ‘midnight train’ was genius. Those words tell a real American story. ’LA proved too much for the man’ (turn and look left, turn and look right). Not like James Brown’s stuff ’Got ants in my pants! Boys I can’t dance, I got ants in my pants. They should’ve called him the Godfather of Annoying Lyrics. I’ll see you when I land.”

I need to forget about Bubba; focus, focus. ‘A super star but he didn’t get far’ (pivot left, point and smile, then pivot right, bigger smile).

My private concert was interrupted by the cabby.

“Last stop Logan. I’ll grab your bags.” He said.

“Thanks, here this is for you. Keep the change,” I said , smiling.

“Thanks,” he smiled back. “Have a safe trip and that’s a real special suit.”

“Yeah, it really is.”
ABOUT

Sana has been Ombudsman for Alliance Bernstein since 2011. She has a psychology degree from McGill University and a law degree from Fordham University. She practiced for several years as an employment attorney and a human resources manager.

CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT

I find my role as an Ombudsman to be the most rewarding profession I have ever had, it’s an opportunity to help people and have a role in contributing towards a better work environment, the place where we spend most of our lives. I have not pursued my singing for several years and found it was important now more than ever to find time to sing again. Singing and music has always been a form of relaxation for me and cathartic in many ways. I have been singing since I was four years old and was inspired by the classic singers, Barbara Streisand and Julie Andrews. Within my role as Ombudsman, I listen to people’s concerns, which can be emotionally challenging at times. When I sing, I am able to release all those emotions and remain positive. I chose “Funny Valentine” because it is another love song that just makes me happy. I chose to sing “Calling You” because it is not only a beautiful tune, but we are all faced with difficult times in our lives when we look to that special someone or something for hope. My recordings are only a success to me if you feel the same joy I felt in singing these two special songs.

LISTEN:

Español: "Funny Valentine"

Español: "Calling You"
ABOUT

David Michael is the Deputy Ombudsman at the Center for Cooperative Resolution/Office of the Ombudsman of the National Institutes of Health. In this role, David provides a range of ombuds services, including mediation, facilitation, training, and coaching, to scientists, fellows, managers, employees, and contractors of NIH. In collaboration with the Director in his role as deputy ombudsman, David also coordinates organizational management, budgeting and administrative issues.

Prior to joining NIH in 2011, David was a Commissioner with the Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution/International Services of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, where he specialized in organizational conflict practice and training within the federal government and abroad. As the principal consultant with Consensusworks, LLC from 2008 – 2010, David provided organizational consulting services to federal agencies and nonprofits, and technical assistance in judicial reform and governance initiatives abroad. David served as the Executive Director of the Northern Virginia Mediation Service from 2005 to 2008, and as the Director of the Multi-Door Dispute Resolution Division of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia (“Multi-Door”) from 1997 to 2004, an internationally recognized model for court-based alternative dispute resolution (ADR).
BUILDING THINGS

In my life beyond the workplace, I am drawn to interactions with people and things. I hope to leave these interactions with a greater awareness of myself and others, and with the sense that I’ve left these situations better than I found them. Over the years I have served on boards of directors and committees in my neighborhood, faith community, and profession. As inspiring as this work often is, I often find myself even more fulfilled by working with the physical world — lumber, drywall, hardware, paint, furniture and trim. I interact with these elements differently than I do in human interaction, yet there is a distinct communication between me and the physical world, and physical elements give feedback in their own way.

You must understand that my interest in building and maintaining things is simply an avocation — my focus on any given “builder-guy” project is but a few weeks, and so I am careful to choose my projects accordingly. One project I took on this fall was to refinish a bedroom set that I’ve had since I was a boy. I still recall well the day my parents bought this furniture for me, as I was to occupy my own bedroom for the first time in all of my seven years. The furniture is a well-crafted oak bedroom set consisting of a bureau, a bedframe, and a nightstand made by Williams Furniture Company out of Sumter, South Carolina, and purchased from Wayside Furniture in Milford, Connecticut. I kept this set all through my New England childhood, my undergraduate and graduate school years, and adulthood. It traveled with me to my first job in Washington, DC, has taken up residence with me in Northern Virginia, and has never left me, even as I married and had two daughters. It became the first bedroom set of each of my girls, and has developed some character over the years — some nicks, water stains, scratches, and darkening of the original finish. It now lulls my six-year-old to sleep each night, and likely tells her stories of her dad when he was her age.

Over the years, my old bedroom set seemed to have lost the beauty of its youth. I had often considered refinishing it, but was easily dissuaded by other projects, work, the amount of time it would take to restore it, and the possibility that I might not leave it better than I found it. Finally this past fall, I decided it was time to repaint my youngest daughter’s bedroom — a decision that would lead me to conclude that I first needed to refinish my old bedroom set. It would make no sense to repaint this bedroom, only to set up a contrast that would leave the bedroom set looking even more forlorn than it already did. I knew then that my first task was to finally face this project — to refinish this furniture.
I worked with my “old friend” over the course of a few fall weekends, first stripping the old finish and sanding each piece down, uncovering the fine and light-colored red oak grain of its youth. This was time-consuming, dusty, and sometimes daunting, as the curves and grooves of the wood did not let go easily of their old finish and stain. Yet it rewarded me with a flood of childhood memories and a sense of renewal — for me as well as the furniture pieces. After fine-sanding and wiping down each piece, my bedroom set was ready for a light pickled oak stain, which it soaked up eagerly. Three applications of polycrylic finish interleavened with a very fine sanding christened this furniture, preparing it for the possibility of one day embracing my grandchildren and their children, too. My final kindness was to attend to the hardware — metal drawer pulls that had a bronzed-burnished finish. Application of metal polish revealed bright solid copper hardware beneath the darkened finish, which I captured by treating with an acrylic spray. Once my friend rested and cured for a few days in my workshop downstairs, I carried each piece back to my daughter Olivia’s room. Its return reminded my daughter Olivia of the furniture’s absence as she remarked — “Daddy, why did you take my furniture and what did you do to it?” For her, there is no particular connection with this furniture, no sense of pride and identity, no flood of memories, and no hope for how it may serve her children one day. And that is as it should be right now in her life. Eventually, she may build her own relationship and meaning with these things, as they occupy a place in her life — as they have in mine.

In ways that I don’t fully understand, working with things allows me time to be alone with myself, to think, and to reflect upon my relationship with the world. The sense of accomplishing something tangible is satisfying, and shapes my own identity as I shape the furniture I have before me.
SHORT STORY: DAVID MILLER

ABOUT

David Miller is a New Zealander. He is the Editor of the JIOA and is Ombudsman for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, based in Geneva, Switzerland. He was formerly the Geneva-based Staff Ombudsman for the World Health Organisation, and UNAIDS. He is a member of the International Committee of the IOA, and of the IOA Uniform Reporting Categories Task Force. David has been a faculty trainer for the IOA in Europe and Africa, and a founder member of the JIOA Editorial Board. He is a specialist in the management of HIV/AIDS, and currently also works as an international public health consultant to governments and HIV/AIDS programmes in the African and Pacific regions. He is a practicing clinical psychologist with postgraduate qualifications from the University of Auckland and a PhD in Public Health Medicine and Epidemiology from the University of Nottingham. decanterbay@gmail.com

CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT

I live on a farm in rural New Zealand and, since 2010, have been commuting regularly to work in Geneva by plane, telephone and email. The farm is a wonderful counterpoint to organisational ombudsmanry — it is of a different pace and intensity, governed by seasons rather than the culture of immediacy, and I find it absorbingly, breathtakingly beautiful.
This short story is true — it actually happened as described just after a telephone meeting of the JIOA Editorial Board. Our sheep are not very smart but they are cunning. We have learned to respect them, their tenacity, their sang froid, their good mothering. And the farm has also revealed in my wife and I a hitherto latent love of nature and conservation. We feel privileged to be custodians of the land in all weathers and for all seasons. Finding our farm through our interactions with Doris and her sisters has helped us find ourselves.

DORIS AND THE DAM

It was a day of howling, gusty Southerly winds. The Poplar trees were swaying over twenty-five feet at their tips and the wind in the Macrocarpas sounded like a squadron fly-past. I put on a layer of thermal long-johns, dressed warmly, slipped into my thigh waders and trudged (for that is all one can do in thigh-length, hob-nailed waders) to Ki, our all-terrain vehicle. Chain saw, axe, crow bar, rakes, hard hat, chaps and visor were all on board and I drove to the stream behind our sheep yards, way back from the road. It is a neglected place where willows line the banks and efficiently drop their branches and leaves into the stream named after Duncan, the young Scottish solicitor and first European to settle a forest-covered Decanter Bay in 1850 after a desperate, romantic journey there fleeing from Glasgow with a young ward of court (an eternity later, long after the bush had all been cleared and old Duncan had died she said to a local historian, “I would do it all again for that man”).

My challenge was to extricate a large fallen willow from the stream. As it fell it had taken along a neighbouring willow and, in the past three years, a dam of branches, flotsam, vegetation and earth — all washed from near and far — had formed around, over and under it with such structural rigidity that the only way it would budge was with total bodily commitment. The kicker was the ewe, pregnant with triplets, that had found its way into the centre of this edifice, pleasingly bloated with the process of decomposition and, most likely, hosting varieties of marine life gorging on this unbidden feast. I smelled her before I saw her.

I had decided to name the ewe, Doris. This is because a named corpse is easier to manage than an anonymous carcase — it can be talked to, cajoled, sworn at and offered blessings and prayers in ways that both enable and emphasise personal meaning. Doris was lying with her head to the bank, as if looking with longing toward firmer ground. The constant cold swirl had kept her from rotting too fast — decomposition had been slowed by the icy waters. Reciting her name and wishing her an easeful journey into the world of wind, I pushed both hands into her thick wool (suggesting she had been dead at least three weeks, as shearing had taken place since then) and grasped firmly. The fleece came away in my hands, leaving shiny patches of alabaster skin.
— Doris was not easily going to surrender her corner of aquatic occupation. I found a rope in Ki’s survival box and, rolling Doris on her back, plunged my hand under her spine, reaching into God-knows-what as I passed the rope under her and brought it up the other side. On her back, Doris’ front legs had flopped back in unison, her posture appearing playful and coquettish as if to say, “Hey, big boy, you gonna lift me?” By now we smelled the same.

It was all so slidey and stinky that Doris seemed heavily effortless. She came up the bank in five heaves, head lolling, until she lay splayed behind Ki’s rear tray. Her harness untied and re-wound, the next task was to lift her the three feet up into the tray. Cooing sweetly to Doris, all her legs in my frozen hands, I started a swing to hoist her up. Almost immediately she slipped from my grasp and slopped a few feet distant, her head looking straight at me with what could arguably be described as a wry grin questioning “Is that all you’ve got?” This time, the grip was the same but I used the knee lift well-known to balers of hay. Doris arrived as intended, puddled in ooze and bits of drenched, detached fleece, smiling in her fug of lanolin rot. Pausing only to splash the reeking remnants from my waders, and the bits of ooze splashed over my arms and face (Note to the wise: NEVER recover dead sheep with your mouth open), I drove Doris to her final resting place.

We passed fields full of heavily pregnant ewes. As gestation evolves, there is a certain languid loucheness that can be hard to take from a sheep. There seems to be an unstated expectation that, somehow, they should perhaps be offered a cigarette and a Martini in a proper glass. When passing the maternity ward in a field and I receive nothing more than a backward glance, and barely a Gallic shrug of shuffling recognition, that is just blasé, and I find such blasé indifference worthy of huffy remark whenever I encounter such attitudes in an expecting ruminant ovis aries.

If elephants have their graveyards (and I have seen them), so do sheep — the difference being that sheep are generally transported to theirs, at least in Decanter Bay. Far beyond the Home paddock, just before the area we call ‘Rokannui,’ where native bush is being nurtured to its former levels of splendid resilience, Doris was laid to rest by the mercy of Ki’s hydraulic tipping tray. She is part of a new flock there, her sisters arriving more frequently at this time of year, when heaviness and desperate hunger lead to risks and falls, or inexperience or sheer, plain bad luck lead to complications in gestation or birth. All hunger is gone, all cares and concerns for the reckless young, menacing dogs, strange bipeds, and mass transportation to large, distant buildings from which no sisters seem to emerge — all these tribulations are dissipated, lost, merged with the collective sense of history and recognition that only the living remember.

On the way back, I stopped by the stream to wash Ki down — the decayed lanolin stench lingered stubbornly on us both. Then back to the dam. A chain saw is a wonderful thing, when it works. And although willow is a light wood, it is heavy when damp. The first task was to attack the structure around which the dam had formed. Major boughs were quickly dispatched
in yard-long lengths. Then the messy bit was to break apart the earth and vegetation that had formed behind, a crusty construction filled with earth and mystery. No gloves can work here, because the dam is as much under water as above it — they would quickly fill and become useless. Aside from the potential for plunging naked hands into decaying but still-painful thistles, or sproutings of Onga-Onga — the maximally painful native nettle that burns worse than fire if it catches exposed skin — there is always the thought lurking in a cognitive recess about the local eels, similarly hidden. Eels like dark spaces. And they have an extraordinary sense of smell. And they bite. And my cold-deadened fingers smelled strongly of rotting sheep. And they were probing places eels like to be. And they found one.

Our native Long-Finned eel (kokopu tuna or Anguilla dieffenbachia) is a remarkable animal with a human life-span, during which it may grow to 24 Kilograms in weight. Like humans, females live longer. In Duncan Stream I have seen specimens over four feet long, and one aged lady living in the stream bend just by our driveway is, we think, even longer. My new friend was not quite so grand but every bit as beautiful. It was first clear that he was not a branch or part of the mess of trees and vegetation under the surface because he was slimy and wriggly, occasioning a moment of panic and fear. My hand came out fast, with a gorgeous, silver-gray, writhing eel wrapped around it. Love at first sight! All anxiety gone, I admired with amazement before dropping him back in the stream (which by now was flowing much faster than before) to find another home and grow and grow and become another beloved feature of this old stream, named for a consequence of illicit love and daring escape in ages past.

The final word came from my wife as I trudged towards our back door an hour or so later. “You look great in your waders but you’re not coming near me smelling like that.”
POETRY: FRANCINE MONTEMURRO

ABOUT

Francine Montemurro was appointed Boston University’s first Ombuds in September 2009. Before moving to Boston to establish the Ombuds Office at BU, she was at the State University of New York at Binghamton from 1997 to 2009 where she created the Ombuds office there. She has a bachelor’s degree from the State University of New York at Binghamton, and a JD from Syracuse University. She has extensive experience in alternative dispute resolution, including providing interventions and workshops on mediation and conflict management, teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and providing workplace, community, family, and victim-offender mediation. She lives in Boston with two wonderful rescue dogs and lots of books.

CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT

Writing poems is a private undertaking. I’ve only recently shared my work with others. I’m still a bit reluctant about doing so, and still surprised that anyone else is interested.

I write poetry not because I think I have anything particularly unique or fascinating to say. I write poetry because there are words shuffling around inside my head that want to get out, and because the process of writing gives me insight into things that matter. Half the time, I don’t even know what those things are until after the words have poured out and the first draft is finished.

Usually, I love writing and playing around with words, but sometimes it’s very frustrating. Either way, when I am writing, I am completely present, completely taken up with the task. These are the times when I look up and realize two hours have gone by. My tea is cold, my dogs are restless, and I am late to wherever else I had planned to be.
NOTHING BUT LIGHT

My mother doesn’t need much now.
Not the closet full of clothes
I will paw through
to find something suitable
for the service.
Or the boxes of dry macaroni
I will give to the food bank.
Or the jars of sauce
she’s put up for the winter.
Or the coupons she’s clipped
from the Sunday papers.

It’s warm in here
but I’m glad for the white sheets
they’ve given her for covers.
She’s modest and funny that way.
And for the morphine drip
that keeps her quiet
and out of pain.
She’s not one to complain.

People have come to her
with tales about the weather
she cannot hear
flowers with fragrance
she cannot smell
candies from the gift shop
she cannot eat
greeting cards from Hallmark
she cannot read.

Mom, I hope to come to you
with nothing but light.
Some comfort
some gentleness
to guide you home.
A WILD TURKEY IN BOSTON

Around six a.m. on the Ides of March
I see him step off the curb at Carlton and Beacon.
Slow and even-gaited
he uses the pedestrian right-of-way but crosses against the light.
Horns blare
traffic stops at uneven angles.

Pink scaly toes prod
the tracks of the Green Line.
With deft and a slight bounce
he strides across the street still within the painted crosswalk.

He could be a very small man bald and wrinkled
in a worn gray suit hands dug deep into pockets on his way to pick up a Globe from the rusty dispenser in front of the Busy Bee.

He stops short at the window of the Irish tavern as though pausing to read the menu. Frozen in step he turns his wizened head eyes the leashed greyhound barking and lunging against his owner’s grip.

Instinct wins over and the old man with proper bearing becomes imperiled prey. In three clumsy strides and with wings outstretched he flies off behind red brick buildings where children sleep and dream of wild places.

He takes the curb with one hop and walks east bare feet untroubled by the frost heaves and breaks in the pavement.
A KIND OF CHRISTMAS POEM

Boston in December
is mostly dark.
Barely nine hours of daylight
on the longest day.
Walking home in late afternoon
in my corduroy coat
in cold rain I wish were snow,
I feel how the nightfall
makes the shortest days of the year
seem longest.

The darkness has a heft
un-lifted
by the green and red bulbs
strung around windows and soffits.
The added wattage can’t offset
the absent sun.

You might see birds,
this time of year,
but only at dawn.
And then only skinny street pigeons
and flocks of some small songbird
indistinct in color and species,
squawking, scrapping for fallen millet
on the ground
beneath the seed bell.
I miss the melodies, the colors
of spring migration.

At the Park Drive intersection
The college kids have built
a lopsided snowman:
torn felt fedora,
bottle cap eyes,
one tree branch arm
with a red mitten on the end,
and a foot-long snow-penis
pointing east on Beacon Street.

His cast goes from
amber, to red, to green
in the flash of the traffic signal.
With the approaching downpour,
the well-hung snowman
won’t be long for this world.
The fedora, the bottle caps,
the branch, and the mitten
will all wash down the storm drain
and into the Charles
along with the bird droppings
and millet husks.

What I dream of,
if I dare to dream
this time of year,
is fluffy snowflakes,
big, like feathers in an Iroquois headdress,
kitchens that pull you inside with
the smell of baking sugar cookies
and the promise of mulled wine,
hearts open to The Savior
and to mortal souls gone missing for
months or years at a stretch.

This December day,
the rush-hour traffic
speeds through black puddles,
sends up filthy waves
to douse the sidewalk and
me in my corduroy coat.
I pick up my pace
toward home.
Phoebe Morgan, PhD, COOP, is the Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Northern Arizona University.

I had the privilege to serve as the NAU faculty ombudsman from 2008-2011. During that time, I completed the program's first in-depth evaluation and as a result, reorganized the program, transitioning it from a volunteer-peer model to a professional model. As a consequence of that change, I revised the job description and developed guidelines for recruiting, training and evaluating the program's ombudsmen and obtained my COOP certification. I also reached out to Arizona Ombudsmen and helped foster the networking of 40 ombudsmen across the state. Because the term of my service was limited to three years, after recruiting and training my replacement, I took a sabbatical leave and used that time to deepen my scholarly expertise in informal processes. Key to that endeavor has been a qualitative field study about ombudsman ship. I am particularly interested in how ombudsmen troubleshoot concerns involving bureaucratic red tape. A full time faculty member once again, I now teach courses about alternative dispute resolution, advise the student ADR club, serve on the Faculty Grievance Committee, and consult with the NAU Faculty Ombuds office.

My interest in quilting emerged in 2008, the same year I was tapped to serve as NAU's faculty ombudsman. My father had just passed away and I decided to make a commemorative quilt from his clothing. My sewing skills were pretty rudimentary and I had no idea how to quilt. So, before risking the ruination of his clothes, I took a quilting class and then made ten prototype quilts before I felt confident enough to make a commemorative quilt. The three years I served as the Faculty Ombudsman were “interesting” in a Chinese sort of way. During that time, the economic downturn provoked a historic transformation of every aspect of faculty life. In the first year much of the change was destructive (pay furloughs, benefit cuts, programs discontinued,
faculty lines downgraded, and retirement ‘incentives,’ for example). In the last year, the changes were more productive (overhauls of workload policies, a streamlining of calendars, institution of new electronic performance evaluation, curriculum assessment, course delivery systems, the realignment of performance evaluation criteria and the institution of new pay incentives, to name only a few). In short, those three years was historically turbulent and with the changes came lots and lots of “interesting” concerns. While many of the concerns I heard were typical, many more involved issues and entities that were new to the university and to the Ombuds Office.

While I was the faculty ombudsman, the making of quilts—the cutting, piecing, and quilting—became a means of both problem-solving and self-care. After a long day of “hard listening” I would escape into my sewing room and refresh my spirit with beautiful fabrics and colorful threads. In my quilting room, there are no concerns to sort out. I listen only to the purr of my well-oiled Bernina, the hiss of my steam iron and the snoring of my geriatric terriers.

The blocks that form quilt patterns are complex puzzles. The cutting and piecing of blocks awakens a part of my brain that is often neglected while I am busy listening to faculty concerns. Often, after a day of block piecing, I will emerge from my sewing room with a different understanding of the issues. While piecing, options for resolving concerns often come to mind that no one had considered.

The quilting process (sewing a pieced top to a backing) is almost the opposite experience. While piecing promotes creative problem solving, the mind-numbing repetition required for quilting creates a meditative “Zen-like” experience. Quilting gives me the means to embrace uncertainty and accept imperfection. While I was the NAU Faculty Ombudsman, not every concern was resolved to everyone’s satisfaction. There were numerous times when my personality and the ombudsman profession were unfairly held accountable for faculty conflict. My commitment to the IOA’s best practices prohibited me from revealing facts that could vindicate me or the ombudsman profession. During those moments, I simply quilted out the negative emotions could not be worked out with those I had issue with. Quilting helps me put my own concerns into proper perspective so that I may better hear and think about the issues of others.
DANCE: JAN MORSE

ABOUT

Jan Morse is the Ombudsman and Director of the Student Conflict Resolution Center at the University of Minnesota; past board member and officer of IOA.

CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT: MIND BODY & SOUL

Seeing the world through the eyes of a dancer inspires me to move through the world instead of just being ON it. Dancers are often open to a variety of experiences that non-dancers do not give themselves permission to have.

Inspiration to share this work came from making connections from my ombuds role to theater and dance and integrating the worlds where I work and play. Setting the scene, using non-verbal communication, being in sync with a partner — there are many themes common to both worlds.

Using a learning/practicing/executing loop has helped me build my skill set — and refine and adapt those skills to meet evolving demands. On the stage, or when working with parties to a dispute — you just have to trust the preparations you have made, focus, then do your best and try to make it look easy.

Self-reflection, and getting different perspectives and ideas for improvement from others, keeps the work fresh and interesting.
CLICK ON THE PHOTO TO WATCH THE VIDEO NOW
ABOUT

Rev. Mousin has been the University Ombudsperson at DePaul University since 2001. He received his B.S. cum laude from Johns Hopkins University, his J.D. with honors from the University of Illinois, and his M.Div. from Chicago Theological Seminary. He joined the College of Law faculty in 1990, and served as the Executive Director of the Center for Church/State Studies until 2003, and co-director from 2004-2007. He co-founded and continues to participate in the Center’s Interfaith Family Mediation Program. He has taught in DePaul’s School for New Learning, the Religious Studies Department, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and in the DePaul’s Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies program. He has also taught Immigration Law and Policy as an adjunct law professor at the University of Illinois College of Law.

Rev. Mousin began practicing labor law at Seyfarth, Shaw, Fairweather & Geraldson in 1978. In 1984, he founded and directed the Midwest Immigrant Rights Center, a provider of legal assistance to refugees which has since become the National Immigrant Justice Center. He also directed legal services for Travelers & Immigrants Aid between 1986 and 1990. He co-founded DePaul College of Law’s Asylum and Immigration Legal Clinic and its Technical Assistance program. Rev. Mousin was ordained by the United Church of Christ in 1989. He has served as an Associate Pastor at Wellington Avenue U.C.C. and was a founding pastor of the DePaul Ecumenical Gathering (1996-2001).
NOT IN MY BACKYARD

LYRICS BY CRAIG B. MOUSIN; MUSIC COMPOSED BY CHRIS INSERRA AND SUNG BY “VOICES.”

Congress enacted some of the most restrictive immigration laws in 1996 further limiting the rights of bona fide refugees to seek asylum in the United States. “Not in My Backyard” arose out of frustration over our nation’s retreat from its international, historical, and moral commitments to provide safe haven to bona fide refugees. The verses include elements from cases of asylum applicants I have worked with over the last few decades. Although the persecution of activists occurs overseas, global interaction and the United States consumer market often links that violence to our national wants and desires. Yet many feel no responsibility for discarding refugees from our throw-away society. In further limiting asylum rights in 1996, Congress responded to some in our nation who branded many refugees “illegal,” forcing deportation and a return to persecution. The song engages in word play to name our broken national symbol an “ill eagle”—a hollow symbol of our historical role as a place of refuge that now justifies deportation from our backyard, regardless of our involvement in or our failure to recognize the serious persecution causing refugee flight. Chris Inserra composed the music for these lyrics by Craig Mousin and sung by the Chicago political folk group, VOICES. The song can be found on VOICES CD, “Step by Step” (1996) (for more information: cminserra@sbcglobal.net).
NELSON MANDELA’S CELL AT ROBBEN ISLAND

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

In 1999, I had the good fortune to travel to South Africa and Botswana. While in Cape Town, I visited Robben Island, the small island in Table Bay near Cape Town that had served as a place of imprisonment and exile for many political prisoners from the 17th to the 20th Century. Nelson Mandela, the former President of South Africa and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, had been confined at Robben Island for 18 of the 27 years he was imprisoned by the apartheid government of South Africa. Many of the leaders and participants in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa were also held at Robben Island. Today, some of the former prisoners serve as guides for those who visit this prison as they seek to sustain the spirit of freedom and hope that inspired the anti-apartheid movement. I took this photograph of President Mandela’s former cell. Its quiet dignity reflects the power and hope that sustained Mandela while the prison bars remind one of the persecution and pain suffered under the apartheid regime.
MUSIC: DON NOACK

ABOUT

I served as a Corporate Ombuds for the last 15 years of my 35-year career at Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico before retiring at the end of 2011. I’ve played piano, organ and various electronic keyboards since I was seven years old. Essentially untrained, I play by ear and have parlayed a fairly pedestrian talent into a fun time that seems to give other folks pleasure, too. I’ve played in churches and been a part of 17 bands and musical groups throughout my life.

I have also dabbled in home recording for 40 years, finding a way to preserve my amateur status as both a musician and recording engineer even as I spent way too much money on “more musical stuff!” My best friend and early bandmate during that same 40 years is a part-time Houston area musician. I’ve played in his classic rock band as a guest keyboardist once a year in the last four years. He is also a songwriter, so we’ve collaborated in my home studio, as I have with a handful of other songwriters, contributing to or producing four CDs of their work, as well as, unpublished single songs. My friend Bob and I recorded “Unity” on one of his trips to my home in Albuquerque in early 2012. I play organ, electric piano, synthesizer and percussion while my friend played lead, rhythm and bass guitars along with the bongos. We liked the authenticity of the quirky ending of a 70’s style groove that he wanted to create.
Making music has been more an integral part of who I am than simply a “hobby” I engage in. When I am playing alone, I’m in another world, able to unwind, relax and create in ways that are unmatched in any other area of my life. When I’m playing in a group, the joys and challenges of shared improvisational music making are multiplied. I reflected during my last year as an ombuds in a large corporation — as its management preached teamwork and leadership — that most of what I have learned about those two topics has been the result of valuable experiences in groups with other musicians. Music has been an invaluable source of enjoyment and renewal, a spiritual experience for me and folks in my church, and an essential teacher in how to mediate between talented but flawed folks with different values and motivations.

LISTEN:

UNITY

Written and recorded by Bob Gylling and Don Noack at Don’s HOTWest Studio
POETRY: LAURIE MILLER PATTERTSON

ABOUT

Laurie Miller Patterson has been an Organizational Ombuds at Akron General Health System since 2005. She serves as an Associate Editor on the Journal of the International Ombudsman Association. In 2010, she received the IOA’s certification as an Organizational-Ombudsman Practitioner. Since 2011, Laurie has been an adjunct faculty member in the Werner Institute for Negotiation and Dispute Resolution, Creighton University School of Law, designing curriculum for and teaching the specialization classes in Health Care Collaboration and Conflict Resolution.

With deep roots in social justice and community-based mediation, Laurie is particularly interested in the power of stories and poetry to heal, inspire, educate and unite.

CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT

Writing is what I do when I need to understand something in my life. If I am writing a poem, I am asking a question of life. The work is in two parts: finding what the question really is and then crafting the question in a way it deserves.

This poem, “Scout’s Fashion,” helped me ask a question about being a leader in an organization or in a family. The metaphor is being the person at the very top of a ship’s square rigging, one who has made a life out of discerning movement on the horizon. It is also a question about seeing the future, knowing what’s coming before others know. The answer the poem brought is that I would rather be one of the busy people on the deck, focused on the moment, the task at hand, and the people around me.
SCOUT’S FASHION

What are the wild waves saying, 
Sister, the whole day long, 
That ever amid our playing 
I hear but their low, lone song?  
--Joseph Edwards Carpenter

The relaxed way his hand  
Cups his brow, shields aged,  
Pale eyes, creates shadow  
And depth. As if he were not  
Stories up, balancing on rope and nothing

Else. Second nature, second  
Skin, all these gestures, every callus,  
Every occult response to  
Something new on the horizon.

How accurate the senses, once so keen?  
Perception nearly premonition then, feeling—in  
The way blood moved through his chest, in the  
Dance of the hairs on his arms—ships  
At a distance prior to the proof.

Even the nausea falls in line behind  
His task. Today, in the blare, he asks  
“What is coming?” In the sun,  
In the wind that blasts away  
Hearing, “What ship is that? Who  
On board? Sword and cannon or friend’s  
Warm hand?”
SHORT STORY: DAVID RASCH

ABOUT

David Rasch has been the University Ombuds at Stanford University for eight years. He is a psychologist and previous director of Stanford’s Faculty/Staff Counseling Center. For over twenty years he has also been a teacher, coach and therapist assisting writers with overcoming blocks, procrastination and other productivity problems. He is the author of *The Blocked Writer’s Book of the Dead*, and recently co-wrote an article with his attorney daughter, Meehan Rasch, that will be published this spring by the New Mexico Law Review, on improving writing productivity for lawyers. In addition to his ombuds work and writing, David also enjoys song writing, playing guitar and spending time by the ocean in Carmel, California, where he lives with his wife, Ixchel.

CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT

Recently I’ve been writing 101-word short stories primarily as writing practice. This form is a creative challenge that demands really cooking a story down to a few essential elements, and I find the process enjoyable. Sometimes themes from my experiences working in higher education seep into the stories, and even though they are all fiction, hopefully some larger truths emerge in an entertaining way.
FRUIT FLY

Anger and science make a dangerous cocktail. Like at the MIT’s centennial anniversary celebration when Beth, in a tequila-besotted rage, swiped a Q-tip inside my cheek and vowed to turn me into a fruit fly. I should have taken her seriously but I just chalked it up to professional envy and shuffled back to my bench. Today, hovering above her laptop, I watch with disbelief as Beth writes up my research as her own. And though my thoughts come more slowly now, it dawns on me that even in this form I can exact revenge. I dive into her frosty margarita.

WAVE OR PARTICLE?

Cherie’s quantum mechanics professor was so attractive that as soon as he began lecturing she fell into a trance and became profoundly absorbed in the question of whether love was a wave or a particle. “If a wave,” she theorized, “then it should have many ups and downs. If a particle, there should be a powerful jolt when hearts collide.” Her reveries were rudely truncated when something bounced off her forehead. It was an eraser. Cherie looked up at her professor, who then sternly asked, “And the answer is…?” “It’s a particle,” Cherie replied dreamily, “and I love you too.”

THE 360 REVIEW

Benner Stumpf, the VP of HR, believed the 360 Review was a fantastic management tool, even though he didn’t understand it. Fortunately, he didn’t understand sarcasm either. He gave us all a 360 Review form and told us to write down the unedited truth about our boss, Marcus Tyko (aka “Tyko the Psycho”). So I wrote that Tyko was an “ignorant, arrogant, bully.” Stumpf cornered me later that day and told me I had to change it to “knowledgeable, confident, leader.” I said, “Oh, that kind of unedited truth. I misunderstood the directions.” Stumpf said it was a common mistake.
ABOUT

Tom Sebok has been an Ombudsman at the University of Colorado at Boulder since 1990 and Director of the office since 1992. He helps teach the IOA course “Foundations of Organizational Ombudsman Practice” and serves as an Associate Editor for the *Journal of the International Ombudsman Association*. Tom is a former officer for the Board of Directors of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) and he chaired an IOA Task Force which developed a system to classify the issues with which organizational ombuds assist constituents. He is the author of numerous publications on ombuds practice, mediation, workplace bullying, and restorative justice and has presented on those topics at national and international conferences. He helped create the first restorative justice program in the US in higher education. In 2010 he became a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner (CO-OP). He holds a Master’s degree from the University of Delaware.

Since 1966, Tom has been developing an “alternative identity” as a musician, singer, songwriter, and recording engineer/producer.
LISTEN:

BAD TIMING
“Bad Timing” is the only song I have ever published (BMI, 2000). I had used the title many times over the years in conversations referring to things that had happened in my life. When I wrote it (1984), only one of these vignettes had happened to me (the one in the first verse). And, to varying degrees, I used “poetic license” to tell the stories embedded in the rest of the song. I hope this song reminds listeners of circumstances in their own lives in which, had the timing of events been different; it would have changed history — if only in small ways. I am guessing that most of us tend to see “bad timing” and often overlook many if not most of the times when “good timing” occurs!

BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT
“Benefit of the Doubt” is a song I wrote in the mid 1990’s about how, as my (romantic) relationship developed, my partner and I seemed less willing to give one another this “relationship life preserver” than we did at the beginning of our relationship. With this ingredient I think relationships feel safe — and I’m pretty sure, it also helps them last. Eventually, I noticed the same thing happens between people in relationships at work, too. And, whether personal or professional, while it takes conscious effort, recovering it makes a world of difference.

ACT NEUTRALY
“Act Neutrally” is, of course, a re-worked version of the old Buck Owens song (also recorded by the Beatles with Ringo singing) called “Act Naturally.” In the late 1990’s I was sitting at the stop light at the end of the Baseline Road exit ramp off of US Highway 36 in Boulder, CO, when the phrase “act neutrally” entered my head. Soon after, I heard the melody of the Buck Owens song in my head and began to think about how I might craft the lyric to apply to my “day job.” What motivated me to complete the lyric was the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds (CCCUO) conference at Asilomar. I wrote it there after dinner one night so I could play it for their “Creative Expressions” event that same night! Nothing like having a deadline to motivate me to complete something …
Indu is the Ombudsman at the International Baccalaureate Organization (IB), which is a non-profit educational foundation headquartered in Geneva. She serves the IB’s internal and external stakeholders globally. Prior to the IB, Indu was the Director of the Office of the Ombudsman at the University of California, Riverside. She currently serves on the IOA Board of Directors and the International Committee, and is the coordinator of the Asia Pacific Regional Advisory Committee. Indu earned her LL.M. from the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine University with a concentration in International Dispute Resolution in 2008. She is from West Bengal, India and lives in southern California with her beautifully mixed family.

CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT
Both my mother and father ensured that as children, music, dance, poetry, literature and even the foundations of logic (my mother taught philosophy) were a part of a regular routine. As a Bengali and having some roots in Tagore-town, Santiniketan, this did not seem atypical. As a result, even after immigration to the United States, I was able to learn sitar with Ustad Ali Akbar Khan and kathak dance (Indian classical) with Pandit Chitresh Das — phenomenal luck! The drive to classes was about two hours after a long day’s work on weekdays and Saturdays — not an easy feat or commitment for my parents given it was a time of uncertainty and limited resources in a new country.
Drawing and painting were natural hobbies and outlets since I was very young. I never learned it and in fact resisted being taught in any way. I disliked being told what to paint, shunned art classes in school, and considered knowing what the outcome of a painting would be ahead of time boring. I still like surprises, and in some ways, have kept this part of my life raw, moody and unrefined — both a value and an impediment. Communicating with the use of paint is inexplicably freeing, but also a private exchange with the canvas in a language I don’t need to explain.

A clear source of inspiration include childhood memories from India experienced through the senses and from the perspective of a child — dust floating in the light of day, temperature of the soil, textures of wall paint, noises near and distant, disparities among people, etc. Looking back, I have loved painting women from rural Bengal. However, it’s not surprising given that I have grown up with amazingly strong and independent women around me — from a highly educated, spirited and adventurous mother to several ayas who were single mothers and refugees helping to nurture and raise children who were not their own.

The immigration experience continues to play a poignant point of reflection and it reveals itself in various ways, including in my limited creative abilities. All of the above are really a part of the greater identity question.

My children and my husband are the ultimate source of pride — they teach me and change me for the better. Together, we are unique and certainly a product of this country: a union that would have been unlikely in our countries of origin. The children paint much better than me, and helped to paint “Colours.”
CLICK ON THE VIDEO TO BEGIN WATCHING NOW

Musings of a Hybrid

Indumati Sen

February, 2013
POETRY: MALLORY J. STEVENS

ABOUT
Mallory J. Stevens, president of Mallory Stevens LLC, a corporate communications consulting services firm, is also a former senior vice president, head of corporate communications and spokesperson for IDB Bank; prior to that, she enjoyed a successful career as an international banker. An ardent advocate of the value of the organizational ombuds, having studied Fundamentals of Ombuds Practice with Dr. Marsha Wagner at Columbia University, she is an affiliate member of the IOA. Mallory speaks several foreign languages and, in her spare time, volunteers as a community and civil court mediator for the New York Peace Institute. She holds a Master of Science degree in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution from Columbia and is a summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Hofstra University, with a B.A. in Spanish. (www.mallorystevens.com; mstevens@mallorystevens.com).

CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT
The inspiration for “The Crystal Castle” comes, quite simply, from Pachelbel’s Canon in D. From its first honey-toned notes and gentle pizzicati of the strings, through the delicately built crescendo, to the lush apogee of the musical theme, the piece transports me. It infuses me with a sense of optimism and joy, courage and possibility; I feel the growth of beauty — and the beauty of growth. All this is what I hoped to reflect in my poem.

The desire for creative expression has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. The inspiration for that is easy to identify: My late father, one of the most creative, multitalented people I have known, instilled in me a passion for words, the art of expression, music and art. I consider myself fortunate, as each of these creative channels adds much pleasure and fulfillment to my life.
THE CRYSTAL CASTLE
(for S.K.)

Some splendid, early morning
In the silence of the dawn
A gentle breeze will stir you
As light, celestial, is slowly borne.

Such perfume fills your chamber!
Lotus? Jasmine?
Could it be that you have been transported
to some dream world never seen?

Suddenly you’re traveling through clouds of cotton
Higher now, you’re drifting on a wave of air.
Spread your wings and earthly things are soon forgotten!
Leave behind your weary mind, your every care.

A journey’s just begun across a bridge of color
Magic seems to pulsate from its every hue.
Sailing in your chariot you look in wonder
at the dazzling vision that’s come into view.

There, in the distance, soars a crystal castle,
Towers crowned with golden down and glistening dew.
Light pours out of every door and draws you nearer,
“Come explore beyond your shores!” it beckons you…

Floating by, the pattern of a silken carpet
Slips beneath the cushions of still wary toes;
No delay, you’re whisked away and taken, smiling,
towards the secret, shining place that no one knows.
Now inside, your airborne ride has placed you gently on a velvet balcony, a kingly throne. Look around! Your dreams abound! They fill the castle! And you know that in your mind you’re always home.

You recognize imaginings and deepest yearnings, Some of which you have not seen in many years; Fertile thoughts ignored, fantasies yet unexplored Were lost amid the trellis of your waking fears.

How many rays of light extinguished? No room left here for remorse. How many moments yet uncaptured? Grab the wind and brave the course!

The castle walls have no more borders – The crystal’s magic has broken through! Exploding sunlight hurls you upward While sparks rain down on eyes renewed.

Now, you must end this journey. The time has come to bid adieu. Quick! Close your eyes to capture the wondrous world surrounding you.

Before you know, you’re traveling the bridge of color, Soon drifting as a petal fallen from its place. And while a trill of birdsong grows you sense a whisper and feel an angel’s hand reach out and touch your face.

Now, as you settle in your bed, your eyelids open to a morning steeped in majesty. And at once the memory of a crystal castle wakes you to the knowledge of all you can be.
Noriko Tada has been an Ombudsperson with Guidea for Eisai, Co., Ltd. in Japan since 2006. In addition, she has been a trainer for intercultural communication and intercultural conflict resolution. She is also a faculty member at the Institute for International Education of Students (IES), Tokyo center and the continuing education program in Temple University Japan. She has worked and studied in the US, Switzerland, Germany and India. She earned her MA in International Management and Communication from the School for International Training (SIT) in Vermont, US.

**ABOUT**

When I listen to people in my OO work, many times I notice my body is influenced by people’s fears, sorrow, anger or helplessness. Dance helps my body feel free and empty again. Dancing in nature especially helps me to feel a part of nature, and I feel alive again.

I was introduced to Butoh dance in 1990, and this changed my idea of dance completely. Body flexibility does not matter in Butoh dance. I have been actively involved in performing arts and contemporary art from that time. Contemporary art/dance invited me to see the world in different ways. I also became involved in other types of performing arts or somatic movement like The Feldenkrais Method. I found I really like improvisation because I can allow all my senses or inner feelings to move my body, in this way freeing and rejuvenating me.

**CONTRIBUTOR’S STATEMENT**
DANCE WITH MY BREATHING

Dance with my breathing
Dance with my heartbeats

Feel Feel Move Move

Dance with the sound of water
Dance with touching winds
Dance with the smell of trees

Dance with fears
Dance with sorrow
Dance with the stones

Dance with my tears
Dance with my breathing
Dance with my heartbeats

Dance with breathing in silence
Dance with silence in silence

Dance Move Move Dance
Dance Feel Feel Dance

Dance joy Dance passion

Dance Feel Feel Dance
Dance Move Move Dance

Dance with the breathing
Dance with the heartbeats

Dance with breathing in silence
Dance with silence in silence.

Dance silence
Dance nothing...