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Tompkins
County
Historical
Commission
New York

Living in Tompkins

A Community Writing Project

**Written by
Tompkins County
residents**

Edited by Bruce Estes

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A Community
Writing Project

Tompkins County Historical Commission

Members of the Tompkins County Historical Commission as of the date of publication:

George Boyer
Susan Currie
Susan Holland
Carol Kammen
Michael Lane
S. K. List
Marcia Lynch
Joe Mareane
Michael McGandy
Riché Richardson
Eve Snyder
Simon St Laurent
John Wertis
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- *Recognizing Tompkins County's Suffrage Pioneers*, by Marcia Lynch, 2020.

Introduction

7 Living in Tompkins County BRUCE ESTES

The Land

8 Living the dream, off the grid, in a West Danby commune YVONNE FISHER
11 Life in Ithaca takes on the topography of the land CAROLINE COX
12 The land calms me and raises my spirits DONNA ESCHENBRENNER
14 Our watershed gives us a larger picture of life MARA ALPER

A Special Place

16 Donated books tell a lot about Ithaca GEORGE BOYER
19 The allure of Ithaca in mid-May CHARLES GITHLER
20 The view from Greensprings Natural Cemetery JOEL RABINOWITZ
22 The freshest fish in Ithaca comes in a truck MARY BETH NORTON
23 Ithaca lets me live what I value NINA MILLER

Families & Friendships

24 Finding friends and holding them dear RABBI SCOTT GLASS
28 Ithaca makes it easy to stay busy BOB ROMANOWSKI
29 Family memories packed up in a Cayuga Heights trunk BEATRICE B. SZEKELY
30 Community's warmth makes long winter bearable SALLY MCCONNELL-GINET

Inspired By Nature

32 What's special about Ithaca? Look around BETSY DARLINGTON
32 35 years of tending a garden SUSAN LESSER
33 Wake up and check the bird cam WENDY KIMBLE-DUGAN

A Place That Is Home

35 A beautiful place to stay put DEBBIE BILTONEN
36 Returning to Ithaca and rediscovering my home JENNIFER GABRIEL
38 A place where we could make a life for ourselves SUZANNE SMITH JABLONSKI
40 Finding work, a family and a home S.K. LIST

Of Days Gone By

- | | | |
|----|--|--------------------|
| 43 | Growing up in Ithaca | ADAM PERL |
| 45 | Summers began in Stewart Park | DENICE KARAMARDIAN |
| 46 | When VW bugs were all coming into Ithaca | DOUGLAS KAMMEN |
| 48 | Tiny Town saved me, but I mourn how it is changing | FRANKLIN CRAWFORD |

Life's Passages

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------------|---------------|
| 50 | One Day in Ithaca 25 years later | AARON LAVINE |
| 51 | Another day to learn something new | SUE THOMPSON |
| 52 | Awake before sunrise to a busy day | JOANIE YETZER |

The Pluses of Living in Tompkins

- | | | |
|----|---|-----------------|
| 54 | Home to a zillion nonprofits doing wonderful work | PAM SILVERSTEIN |
| 55 | Ithaca invigorates mind and muscle | JUD KILGORE |

The Minuses of Living in Tompkins

- | | | |
|----|---|-------------------|
| 56 | Annoyances find their way to Ithaca | JODY EARLE |
| 57 | Good boots are necessities | CLAUDIA LAZZARO |
| 58 | It's tough sharing a car to get around town | DIANNE FERRISS |
| 60 | Like it or not, I am an Ithacan | TOM M. PAOLANGELI |

Neighborhoods

- | | | |
|----|--|-------------------|
| 62 | Halloween brings a special glow to Trumansburg | KATHY MAY |
| 64 | Growing some greenspace in the wild West End | ANNE MARIE WHELAN |

Finding Love

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------|------------------|
| 66 | Humbled by my daughter's love | ROSEMARY ROWLAND |
| 68 | Our life in a cold-water flat | ALFRED DIGIACOMO |

Introduction

Living in Tompkins County inspires, challenges, amuses, calms, and irritates. Living here can also be bearable, unbearable, humbling, and memorable with recollections as grand as a summer sunset on Cayuga Lake and as painful as a lost love or a blizzard wind.

Those are among the thoughts that stirred residents when asked to write essays on what living in Tompkins County has meant to them. The call for essays went out 2013, a date of local note. The year was 25 years after a similar community writing project gathered essays as part of the City of Ithaca's centennial. That collection became *One Day in Ithaca: May 17, 1988*, and it was published in 1989.

As the essays of this project arrived, Carol Kammen, Tompkins County historian; Susan Currie, then the director of the Tompkins County Public Library, and Elissa Cogan, an Ithaca native and philanthropist, began reviewing the submissions. I was a latecomer to the project that I took on after my retirement from *The Ithaca Journal*, where I was its editor for nearly 20 years. My tasks were organizing the contents for this publication, lightly editing the essays to preserve the writer's voice, and fixing the occasional misspelling or grammatical flaw. When an essay needed condensing, the writer was asked to do that work. Editor and author Simon St. Laurent of Dryden gave the essays a final reading before they were sent to graphic designer Julie Manners of Freeville to produce the book for printing at Arnold Printing Corp. of Ithaca.

Living in Tompkins essays distill the thoughts of residents from across the nearly 500-square miles of Tompkins County. The collection has the unique taste of Ithaca, but a much deeper flavor is drawn from the county with a geography nearly 10 times larger than the city and a population more than twice as big. The larger portrait of landscape and population give this collection a rich reflection on what it is to be a human in the early 21st century as a resident of Tompkins County.

— Bruce Estes
December, 2020

The Land

Living the dream, off the grid, in a West Danby commune

By YVONNE FISHER

We blew into Tompkins County like a bat out of hell. We were a group of friends, all gay, lesbian, bisexual. We had been living together communally in an old Victorian house in Staten Island in New York City. It was the early 1970s. We found beautiful, inexpensive land for sale in West Danby where there were already many communes.

We were urban, hippie, radical, leftist, feminist, socialist, gay, peaceful revolutionaries. We thought we might pool all our money and buy the land. We envisioned a communal country life. We looked at each other and said, "Let's do it."

We moved up to West Danby in the summer of 1973. We realized that we had to build a house on the land. None of us had done anything like that before. There were about 10 of us and various visiting friends. One group member was an architect. Another was a carpenter. The rest of us just went along and followed instructions. We were young and idealistic. We thought we could do anything. And we did it.

We had holes dug for a cinderblock cement foundation. We got old wooden ammunition boxes for flooring. We got cheap lumber from I don't remember where. Many people advised us and helped us. We put up a wall in a day. It was like a miracle to us. We watched a house get built, and we were the ones building it.

We rented a small apartment in downtown Ithaca near the State Street Diner. We all stayed there cramped together. We didn't care. We enjoyed the whole process. It was the summer of the Watergate trials. They were being televised every day. After building the house all day long in the hot sun we would go back to town, make dinner, smoke pot, and watch Watergate. We were riveted to the trial that was bringing down the corrupt government.

We built our house. It was beautiful and ramshackle and funky and just right for us. We built a deck overlooking a hillside field and some woods. It was stunning. We had two floors and four small bedrooms upstairs. Instead of walls between rooms we hung fabric from the joists and beams. They were floral designs, Indian prints, color everywhere. Ten of us lived there together. We were all so close. We could hear everything from one room to the next. We didn't care. We wanted to hear what everyone was saying. We were always in each other's business. We had

no plumbing or electricity for years. We had an outhouse. We got water from the stream down the road in five-gallon orange crates. We heated water and bathed in big tubs. It was both very difficult and easy. It was fun. We were off the grid. We lit kerosene lamps at night. We had a good time. We were pioneers, pretend pioneers.

After the house was built some of us wanted private space and built ourselves small wiki-ups made from saplings covered with plastic, close to nature. Someone built a yurt. Others built Tiny individual one-room houses. They were all charming and delightful. We dug a pond, it filled up with water from underground springs, and we swam in it.

This was paradise indeed. We were living open, easy, overgrown, gorgeous lives together with common values, commitments, joy and the beauty of nature all around us.

We came to West Danby with an expectation that we would find a lot of discrimination, homophobia, bias, hatred, provincial ideas. We came with a defensive attitude: "We're here, we're queer, get used to it." We made understandable assumptions about people in small towns and rural areas.

Boy, were we surprised! People in Ithaca and surrounding parts accepted and embraced us in welcoming, inclusive ways. The liberal values and community mindedness of Ithaca existed at a level we didn't yet understand or expect. We often went out at night to Cornell gay dances at Willard Straight Hall all dressed up in sparkles and glitter. Everyone there seemed to open to us, to play with us, dance with us, enjoy us. Everywhere we went people were friendly and accepting.

We needed jobs so many of us got connected with worker-owned local businesses in town. There was Samadhara Bakery, which is now Greenstar. They baked their own fresh bread every morning in an atmosphere of fun and community friendliness. It was a great place to work and to own collectively.

And there was Moosewood Restaurant, a casual, worker-owned health food vegetarian restaurant. It would later go on to publish many prizewinning cookbooks and become world famous. At the time it was still a small, hippie, fun place with good food and friendly, dynamic people. I was a worker/owner for years and made lifelong friends with the people I worked with.

These businesses fit so well into our own cultural, political, and spiritual values. It was amazing that we all found each other at this time in history. We were living the dream.

We got more integrated into the community of Ithaca. We joined the Ithaca Real Food Coop which was volunteer organized and run. It later morphed into Greenstar, a nationally recognized food coop. We still shop there today for local, organic food. We joined the newly formed Alternatives Credit Union where we put our savings instead of in multinational big banks. I made a deposit in the Credit Union yesterday. We joined Storefront, a downtown community center which later became the Displaced Homemakers and then became the Women's Opportunity Center, an agency to help women get back into the workforce.

We had big parties out in West Danby, and everybody came, some dressed up in elaborate costumes, some not at all. We all swam nude in the pond, sometimes even under the stars. It was another world. We were also friendly with neighboring communes around the area. There was Dawes Hill who made and sold their own honey. They farmed the land. There was the Yay God commune who lived spiritual, meditative lives and followed a teacher/guru. There were many other communal living arrangements in the area.

Some of the women in our group joined the Feminist Art Studio where we would get together to make art or create performances and shows. It was amazing! There were dynamic theater troupes like Mischief Mime who performed personal, political, topical shows and the studio would be packed with enthusiastic audiences.

This was a special time in our lives and in the world. We were trying to change everything, the culture, the morals, the meaning of life and we were doing it. As gay people we felt free, accepted for who we were, and loved. We couldn't have known that in a few years we would enter decades of grief and loss as the AIDS epidemic took hold. We nursed our loved ones and took care of each other for many years as we went through this terrible time.

Over the years the commune changed. People left, moved to New York City and California. We gradually stopped living communally. Some of us got careers. Some had children. Throughout, we have remained close and still think of each other as family. Many of us get together frequently, rely on each other, celebrate holidays and birthdays together. And many of us are still involved in the community in supportive and fulfilling ways.

That's why I'm still gratefully living in Ithaca. ■

Yvonne Fisher is a licensed mental health counselor and lives in Ithaca.

Life in Ithaca takes on the topography of the land

By CAROLINE COX

I have lived in the Ithaca area (Jacksonville, Town of Covert, and City of Ithaca) since 1969. My former husband and I arrived here on the cusp of change, just after the Willard Straight Takeover and Woodstock. Our intention was to stay only as long as it would take him to get his Ph.D. so I could then finish mine. Life intervened: He dropped out to become a furniture maker but, in the logic of the times, then co-owned a motorcycle agency that still exists on Route 96 and I became pregnant with the first of our two sons. We stayed here having found the beauty of the region and congenial friends, reasons enough to continue our lives here. Along the way, I was fortunate enough to work at a variety of increasingly interesting and responsible positions at Cornell and then at Ithaca College.

Our marriage ended in 1989. Our children felt the brunt of that change but, remarkably, they in their adulthoods have chosen to live in the area. I take their decisions to be one measure of the power of this place. The truth of that idea came home to me when my wonderful second husband and I began thinking about moving away after I retired six years ago. The cold weather, formidable taxes, and length of our shared residence here suggested a change was in order. But then I was driving south on Route 13 along the curve of the Cayuga Lake when I realized that I was in love with the lake. Everything here is defined topographically by the lake. So, too, is my life since arriving here. And for my children and grandchild, the lake continues to be a marker of their lives. Thus on May 17, I continue my daily visit, either literally or in my imagination, to the lake's shores, knowing that Cayuga Lake is a common, constant bond among the generations and a reminder of our place in the greater scheme of eternal change. ■

Caroline Cox lives in Ithaca.

The land calms me and raises my spirits

By DONNA ESCHENBRENNER

A friend of ours died last night. It wasn't unexpected — he'd been diagnosed with lung cancer back in January, and we'd been watching him slowly decline for some time before that, so we knew it was coming. He was 68, and leaves behind children, stepchildren, grandchildren, and a sad widow who dreads waking up in the morning now. As I said, it wasn't a surprise, but still, even when you think you're ready for the death of a loved one, braced by the presence of illness or age, you're really not. It hits you like a blow to the head, shocking and unsettling. And of the many reactions you feel, one of them, not surprisingly, is to remember your own mortality. I'm in my mid-fifties now and am discovering a tendency to look back as much as, or more than I look forward.

I came to Ithaca in 1990, a young mother with two little boys looking for good schools and an escape from the noise and crowding of the New York City suburbs. My husband and I still remember coming up to check out the area and visiting a small park in Endicott near what was to become his new office. After five years in a home near the Long Island Expressway we were astonished by the quiet. It wasn't a large park, it was merely a small suburban park, surrounded by homes, with a school down the street, and some stores visible off in the distance. But the peacefulness was palpable, and so different from what we'd known the previous few years. We decided then that we were going to like upstate New York.

Ithaca was a deliberate choice for us. My husband had been a student at Cornell, and we'd gotten married when he was a senior, so I got to know it then. And after moving around for several years, mostly around the New York City suburbs, we decided to come back. First, we rented an apartment, and then we bought a house next to a wonderful school that both kids loved, right near what would become their middle school. And for 17 years there we watched them grow up, and before I could even realize how lucky I was, they were away at college. Now one is married, and the other is settled and working and in graduate school. We sold the house and downsized to a smaller place, easier to manage for me, since in the meantime I had gotten a good job outside the home.

I was hired at what was then the DeWitt Historical Society, now The History Center, cataloging artifacts. I also volunteered in the archives, training under a smart and serious young man who

wanted to move on to a high paying job at Cornell. When he did, I succeeded him as archivist, and have been learning about the myriad collections in my care ever since. I also learn about Ithaca, studying old photographs and books and documents, discovering how this small city grew and prospered. I get to share those collections with researchers and students, and I still revel in their ah-ha moments as they “get” some new and interesting piece of our local historical puzzle.

This work is a comfort to me, just as raising my kids was. It keeps the daunting unknown future at bay. Another thing that does that is Ithaca’s extraordinary natural beauty. The creeks and the gorges, the recreation ways and Sapsucker Woods, the lake at Stewart Park, at Taughannock, at Myers Point, the green and leafy view of South Hill from my window—they all calm me down and raise my spirits. And when I remember the friend who’s now gone, and the fact that soon enough I’ll be gone too, and so will everyone I know, I try to think about this nice place and the things I love about it, and feel glad that there will be many more after me who will love them too. ■

Donna Eschenbrenner is the archivist at The History Center in Ithaca.

Our watershed gives us a larger picture of life

By MARA ALPER

Twenty years ago I broke free from the magnetic pull of Manhattan and came to Tompkins County. I needed more trees. It was the first time I hadn't lived near saltwater, breathing sea air and it felt strange to me. The seagulls on the lake made me feel welcome. When storms blew up from the southeast, the salt air felt familiar. But the abundance of freshwater drew me in. The lakes, creeks, and waterfalls moistened my lungs, soothed my soul. Little did I know they would define my connection to this county.

The water-filled valley we call Cayuga Lake is the first watershed I've truly understood. We all live in one, no matter how flat or dry our landscape. Someone described it as your two hands together, side by side, palms up. The uphill edges pour water down to the crevice between your hands, forming lakes, rivers and streams as they shed water downhill. This gravity feed is the essence of earth's freshwater supply and in our county, it takes the form of the long, thin lake we admire, boat and float on.

The week I moved here in August 1998, I took a ride on the sightseeing boat, still a tourist since I just arrived. I felt the watershed firsthand — its hills wrapped round, its creeks feeding in, its depth. I saw the marks of the glaciers that shaped it, imagined the ice melt captured underground and the buried salt caves left by ancient seas. In NYC, the watershed that filled my faucet was miles away, up north in the Catskills. Ashokan Reservoir, beautiful and pristine, but too far away to see every day. Here it is my constant companion, my touchstone, my watershed moment.

And Tompkins County has not one but two watersheds. One flows north, one south. Somewhere in Danby, the water runs downhill to the Susquehanna River basin. In Ithaca, it runs north to the larger Great Lakes watershed. This confused me at first after living at the mouth of the Hudson and the Atlantic for so long. How could water possibly flow north? But so it does, and now I understand the importance of a watershed. It is a life source, not to be taken for granted. It is precious. Something to appreciate, honor and safeguard.

In our lakes and streams beauty is visible to all. Our watershed has invisible beauty underground in our abundant groundwater aquifer, source of well water for people living beyond municipal supply lines. Well water that we often take for granted — until the summer of 2016, when we ex-

perienced the first drought ever witnessed by people who have lived here for decades. It may not be the last drought in our changing climate.

We actively protected our watershed and aquifer when hydrofracking challenged our water integrity. Now we have the opportunity to be pro-active and protect its quantity in advance. As water levels decline in other areas of the country and world, water-rich areas like Tompkins County will be sought out for development and extraction. Water withdrawal for bottling and other high volume usage is already a challenge in other Great Lakes watersheds such as Michigan.

Living within Tompkins County's abundant watershed motivates me to see the larger picture and act on it. Although our water is abundant, that's no reason to take it for granted. Instead, let's respect it every day. It is time to give it our full support. ■

Mara Alper is a retired associate professor of media arts, sciences and studies at Ithaca College.

A Special Place

Donated books tell a lot about Ithaca

By GEORGE BOYER

For me the best thing about living in Tompkins County occurs twice every year — in May and October — the Friends of the Library book sale. This event is a book lover’s dream — a few hundred thousand books on almost any topic you can think of, all priced at \$4.50 or less and the price declines as the sale continues. The sale lasts for about 11 or 12 days over three weeks, including a day reserved for people aged 60 and older — I refer to this as geezer day, and it is one of the few reasons I enjoy being over age 60. Every year I see the same people at the sale, some of them my friends, some of them people I often see at the bagel shop or at Cornell and yet don’t know, and some of them the annoying people who use their phones to scan bar codes to determine how much a book is worth, and block entire shelves while scanning each book. I am no hater of capitalism, but to me these people tarnish what should be a fun community event. Some folks buy 50 books a day, some, like me, go every day and typically buy only two or three books a day. Over the years I have gotten to know some of the wonderful volunteers who work at the sale year after year. I always look for “K. C.’s Picks” in the Nature section — her selections are never boring. And, I always check with Pat Welch to ask if she came across any copies of *The Compleat Angler*.

Over the years, I have come up with games to entertain myself while browsing. What history books, or historical biographies, do they have the most copies of? The answer changes from year to year. Thirty, and even 20, years ago there always were several copies of the Report of the Warren Commission. This is understandable — the folks who were downsizing in the 1980s and 1990s probably bought copies of the Warren report when it came out in the 1960s. Perhaps more surprising, in the old days there always were several copies of *Yankee from Olympus*, a biography of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes by Catherine Drinker Bowen, published in 1944. Why were so many local people interested in Justice Holmes? Did he have an Ithaca connection, or were people all over the country buying *Yankee from Olympus*? More recently, there have been many copies of Stephen Ambrose’s excellent book on the Lewis and Clark Expedition, *Undaunted Courage*. In the past decade books by my favorite 19th-century historian, Francis Parkman, have virtually disappeared — this past fall I did not see one copy of *The Oregon Trail*. Twenty years ago, there would have been several. Every year there are several copies of Thoreau’s *Walden*. This seems fitting for Ithaca. Cornell instituted a freshman book read several years ago, in which all freshmen were

expected to read a book in the summer before they arrived on campus. Sadly, there always were many copies of the chosen book at the sale the following year, be it *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, *Frankenstein*, or *Lincoln at Gettysburg*. Many of these clearly had not been read.

As an economic historian, I always wonder what, if anything, is being purchased in my field. The answer is not much. The past few years have seen several copies of Thomas Piketty's *Capital* appear at the sale. None of them appear to have been read, which is sad but understandable. They are gobbled up by dealers, trying to make some capital of their own. Richard Thaler, who taught at Cornell's Johnson School for several years, won the Nobel Prize for economics just as the fall 2017 sale was beginning. There were three copies of books by Thaler at the sale, but they did not sell for several days. Even winning awards doesn't seem to help to sell economics books.

Another game I like to play is to find the books that I donated to the sale in the previous year, and to track whether they sell quickly, or are still there near the end of the sale. My tastes must be odd, because the books I donate don't tend to sell well — except, of course, when I donate a book that I later decide I want to buy back. This is a topic I would rather not discuss. Sometimes I buy books back that I donated simply because they have not sold by 10-cent day, and I don't want them to get "pulped." I often donate them again the following year to give them a second chance at a good home.

I have several sad memories of books I did not purchase. Back in 1990 or 1991, I found near-pristine copies of the first four volumes of Douglass Southall Freeman's biography of George Washington, in their original slipcases, in Collector's Corner. They were priced at \$40 for the set of four books, and I passed on them, not wanting to spend that much money. That afternoon we drove to Pennsylvania to visit relatives, and all I thought of for the three days we were away was those books. When we got back on Monday evening, I stopped at the sale, but the books were gone. I often wonder who bought them, and if they enjoyed them as much as I would have. Just two years ago, I did not purchase a nice copy of Benjamin Klebaner's book on Public Poor Relief in America, 1790-1860, again in Collector's Corner, because it was marked \$20. I didn't think anyone else in the county would be interested in such an obscure topic. Of course, I was wrong, and it was gone by Monday.

But along with the ones that got away there are the wonderful finds. Last year I found a beautiful set of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, three hardback volumes in a slipcase. It is the definitive (according to many) edition edited by Womersley, and I had never even seen

a hardback copy. Then there was *The American System of Manufactures: The Report of the Committee on the Machinery of the United States*, 1855 and the Special Reports of George Wallis and Joseph Whitworth 1854. Not everyone's cup of tea, but a great book on American and British technology in the mid-19th century. And Hew Strachan's massive *The First World War: To Arms*, a well-preserved hardback *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War*, Herbert Hoover's memoirs of his presidency during the Great Depression (a depressing read by a very bitter man), and many more. It is these surprises that make the sale so much fun.

Sometimes the books are not as interesting as what is in them. A few years ago, I bought a book containing an old business card for the John Penn motel in North Carolina, located on US Route 15. On the back of the card was a chart showing the mileage from the motel to other places, along or near Route 15. The motel was 583 miles from Rochester, 342 miles from Harrisburg, and 1,016 miles from Key West. As a native of Harrisburg, I loved it. The motel's motto was "Catering to those who care." Alas, when I looked for the motel on the internet, I found that, while still in existence, it had changed names and clearly gone downhill in quality. The reviews were sad — most said, "Do not stay here!" The best thing I ever found in a book was a 1955 Bowman baseball card of Yogi Berra, being used as a bookmark for a book of witticisms by, you guessed it, Yogi Berra. The book itself was not very interesting, although it contained Yogi's explanation for why he once remarked about a St. Louis restaurant: "Nobody goes there anymore. It's too crowded."

I don't tend to buy books when the text is underlined or highlighted, but I enjoy notes written by previous owners on the end pages. Last year I bought a book for 10 cents on Anglo-Saxon poetry and prose in which the previous owner had written "Bought from Friends of T.C.P.L. for 10¢." The book was published in 1988, and it appeared that the previous owner bought it in 2001, although the date is hard to decipher. No inflation for this book. A year or so ago I found several books in American history that I had been looking to buy for some time. When I got them home, we noticed that they all had the same name inscribed in the front. When I looked up the name on the internet, I found out that the books had belonged to a recently deceased professor (not from Tompkins County). I wish I had known this man when he was alive — we have very similar tastes. For each book he listed the date he purchased it, what he paid for it, and sometimes a summary of it in a few words. In *Vexed and Troubled Englishmen*, which he purchased in 1971 but did not read until 1978, he wrote "silly" beside the book's final paragraph, but his one-word description of the book was "Good." Last spring I bought another of his books, the only one I saw. I hope that his family are still going through his books and will be giving more to the book sale.

Several years ago I bought a pristine copy of the Episcopal Church's *Book of Common Prayer*, only to find that it had been inscribed to someone a year or two earlier. I often wonder why the person who received the book donated it so quickly to the sale. Were they stricken by a horrible disease? Did they move out of the area and leave books behind? Had they become a Methodist or a Buddhist in the interim?

The Friends of the Library Book Sale is a wonderful event. It is one of the many things that makes Tompkins County special. It also is something that might keep me from leaving the area when I retire — I can't imagine an October or May that doesn't involve binge book buying. ■

George Boyer is a professor of economic history at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. He lives in the Town of Lansing.

The allure of Ithaca in mid-May

By CHARLES GITHLER

This time of year — mid-May — in Ithaca, we are finally out of winter (though it snowed in the hills last weekend) and starting to see the rental trucks as the college students are clearing out for the summer. If summer is a weekend, then this would be like Friday night and TGIF. ■

Charles Githler has been an attorney, writer and a long-time teacher at Newfield High School.

The view from Greensprings Natural Cemetery

By JOEL RABINOWITZ

“My son, the cemetery director!”

But it’s not just any cemetery that I manage, and certainly not a conventional one. I’m the director of Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve, the new, “alternative” cemetery in Newfield, just 20 minutes southwest of Ithaca.

“Well,” I say, winding into my elevator speech, “we don’t accept embalmed bodies, we don’t allow metal caskets or those concrete vaults that other cemeteries use, and no standing stone monuments, either...” Instead, the bodies of loved ones are buried in biodegradable caskets (usually of wood), or simply in shrouds—lengths of cotton cloth wound tastefully around the body. Families can choose fieldstones as grave markers; these can be engraved with the person’s name and other memorial information, but the look is natural. We set the gravestones flush to the ground, supported by gravel to prevent sinkage. And families may choose from a list of native perennials or grasses, to plant living memorials on their loved one’s grave.

One of Greensprings’ founders, Jennifer Johnson, is now our burial coordinator. Jen, along with Susan Thomas, our founding treasurer, had dreamt up the idea of starting a natural cemetery in this part of the country. And she had served as secretary of the incorporating board but hadn’t found her true calling until she became the burial coordinator. Knowledgeable about medicinal plants, having studied with a Native American healer, and so empathetic, Jen was a “natural” for the job.

Sometimes, the work requires Jen to meet families to help them select the gravesite for the person they just lost. During a tragic loss, people can be overwhelmed with grief to the point of numbness. Jen can sense what people most need at a time like this, and she’s able, with just the right words, to help them open. “You know,” she said to one such family, “this is a place where you can have your feelings. Where you can feel your feelings.” With that, tears of release began to flow, followed by tight, loving embraces.

Yes, we bury people, but in so many ways, Greensprings is about life. Our biggest asset is the land itself: 100 acres of rolling hilltop meadow and grassland, with a lovely stand of woods next to our largest burial ground. We’re almost surrounded by forest land, whether state-owned or Cornell’s huge Arnot Forest. Greensprings is blessed with an abundance of birds, including some species,

like bobolinks, that are having an increasingly hard time as their grassland nesting places are being destroyed by development or reforestation.

At Greensprings we have a special place with an amazing view. It's our Leopold Overlook, from where, as founding president Mary Woodsen says, "you can see the Endless Mountains of Pennsylvania in the far distance." Closer in view — especially today, in mid-May — you would see bobolinks in flight, and hear them singing their funny, metallic, burbling songs while flying, or you might hear a brown thrasher declare his territory with the largest repertoire of song phrases of any bird species on this continent.

The Leopold Overlook was named for another of our founders, Carl Leopold, plant physiologist, environmentalist, founder of the Finger Lakes Land Trust, and son of the conservationist Aldo Leopold, who wrote the seminal *A Sand County Almanac*. It was Aldo Leopold who first expressed the concept of the "land ethic"— the idea that all living things as well as soil, water and rock form an interdependent community on and of the land, and that what we as humans do to further enhance and preserve that community is ethical; what we do that harms or destroys that community is not. The land ethic forms the essence of what we're trying to do at Greensprings, and it was Carl Leopold who kept inspiring us with this idea. In memory of Carl, who died in 2009, we placed a wooden bench on the Overlook. The bench, in the style first designed by Aldo Leopold, is available for anyone who climbs the path to take in the view.

It took three years after incorporation for Greensprings to receive state permission to begin operating. During the first year, the only people we paid were our resident caretaker and our backhoe operator. Whenever we were called upon to handle a burial, we trustees had to drop whatever else we were doing and attend to it. At our first annual meeting, we realized that this wasn't sustainable, and that we needed to hire someone to manage the cemetery. I got that job.

And six years later, I'm still at it. Some of my friends see it as a morbid occupation. But death is part of the cycle of life, and Greensprings is pioneering a return to an older, more sustainable way of dealing with the inevitability of death. And a more meaningful one, too. Many times, after a burial, family members have said that their loved one, just buried, "would have loved it up here." Or they tell us how comforting it was to hear the birds singing as they were gathered around the grave. ■

Joel Rabinowitz was executive director of Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve from 2007-2015 and lives in Groton.

The freshest fish in Ithaca comes in a truck

By MARY BETH NORTON

This morning early I engaged in two regular activities — one weekly, one seasonal. The seasonal one was dropping my car off at the dealership to get its annual inspection and to get the four snow tires taken off and the regular tires put back on. Last year, I was out of town the weekend that snowstorm hit. My car was buried in snow at the airport, and when I got back — in before-dawn hours in a van from Syracuse, where our plane had to land because the Ithaca airport was closed — I was awfully glad I still had a snowbrush and scraper in the car. But it hit 80 here yesterday, and I think spring/summer has finally arrived, though there was hail and snow in the air as recently as Monday just to the north and east of here, though not in Ithaca. I took the snowbrush & scraper out of the car this morning before putting the regular tires in the trunk, so the weather better stay warm.

It's Friday, so the weekly activity was visiting the fish truck. This "Owls Head Lobster Co." truck is famous in the area. It's been coming since the early 1970s; and it parks at the Triphammer Mall on Friday mornings. I first started going (after seeing ads in the paper for it for a while first) about 1975. I go most weeks when I'm in town. At first, the fishmonger was Tom; I think he had started the business. He drove every week from Maine year-round. Then one winter in the late 1970s or early 1980s he had a bad accident — not his fault, we were told, a car spun out on the ice and hit the truck. He ended up with a broken leg and the truck was wrecked. When he returned months later, he stopped driving in the winter and ever since we have been deprived of fresh fish between Christmas/New Year's and St Patrick's Day.

I see many people I know in line at the truck on Fridays. If it's long and slow, there is time for a chat. I did see an acquaintance this morning, but really just to say hello. Some people, especially those who live at a distance, buy not only for themselves but also for others. Locally, there are people who swear by the fish from Wegmans, but I prefer the fish from the truck, which is truly fresh, primarily from the Atlantic. Thanks to the truck, I am completely spoiled about fish and shellfish. I eat a lot of it — commonly, at least two meals a week, sometimes more — and I really know fresh! That's why I never buy fish at any supermarket. It is mushy and tasteless as far as I am concerned. ■

Mary Beth Norton is the Mary Donlon Alger Professor of American History at the Department of History at Cornell University.

Ithaca lets me live what I value and find lasting friendships

By NINA MILLER

I was awakened early this morning by a dog with an insistent bladder. While I am often irritable when this happens, the morning was so pristine, so clear, so Ithaca-at-its-best that I smiled as I strolled our green and leafy street, the redbuds beginning to lose their blossoms, the irises bursting with promise of what next week will bring.

I have been thinking about home a lot lately, as some friends explore retiring to other communities, or move closer to their children, and as winters seem less and less bearable. I am fortunate enough to escape to a warm place for a few weeks during the worst of the frosty cycle, but coming home, whenever and from wherever, is always an experience that makes my heart surge with pleasure that this IS home.

I have lived here since 1964, raised my children here, found a professional identify far beyond what my meager BA in creative writing might have led me to expect. My husband built a successful psychotherapy practice. He always loved Ithaca, and never drove down Route 13 without saying of the lake and its surroundings, “How beautiful!” We used to tease him about being “Ithnocentric.” He died at Hospicare, a place that had defined so much of my working life, and which took on new kind of grace for me during his last days.

Ithaca is a place where it is possible to live one’s values. We marched against the war, marched for the right to choose, made phone calls for politicians we admired. It is also a place where friendship comes easily, where we develop “families of choice.” I love having known the children of my friends since they were small, and I love watching them now with their own children. I love that there is a seemingly endless flow of good and interesting people, and that new friendships blossom among the long-term ones. I love that there is a fabulous five-screen movie theater where I can always find something I want to see. I love that Rachel Lampert took us to places we might not otherwise go. I love the parks and the waterfalls. I love that what I call traffic is three blocks of tie up on Meadow Street on Friday afternoon, not two hours getting across town.■

Nina Miller lives in the Town of Ithaca and was the first executive director of Hospicare and Palliative Care Services of Tompkins County.

Finding friends and holding them dear

By RABBI SCOTT GLASS

Thirty-seven years ago this month, the members of Temple Beth-El invited me to serve as their rabbi. Although I never expected to stay in Ithaca for more than a few years, I am now the longest serving spiritual leader in the congregation's 85-year history and the longest serving member of the active clergy in Ithaca. A few days ago, my brother-in-law visited town. As we walked through the streets downtown, through the DeWitt Mall and sat for lunch at Moosewood, I greeted, and was greeted by, many people. "What are you the mayor?" he asked half in jest. "I'm not interested in politics," I said. "It's the privilege that comes with being in one place so long that people recognize you." Admittedly, it's a mixed blessing; there are times one would be just as happy not to be identifiable. But, in general, it reinforces the sense that Ithaca is my home; that I belong here.

My love for the community is predicated on my deep affection for, and appreciation of, the people who have made me feel at home here over the years. Many are the congregants who have become trusted friends, people on whom I can depend for support and encouragement. My colleagues in the clergy are wellsprings of wisdom and goodness. I have been warmly embraced by friends and neighbors from all walks of life, every background and age, every occupation and political persuasion.

Although this is meant to chronicle One Day in Ithaca, I am moved to reflect on something about which I think with gratitude almost every day. The demands of my professional life are many and varied. I never know what roles I will play on any particular day. But what I do know is that the influence of my colleagues in the clergy is a constant source of inspiration and guidance and that I owe them, both those who currently serve and those who are long gone, a great vote of thanks.

Somehow, I think that because of the years of my service it has become more difficult for me to deal with the transient nature of the tenure of many of my colleagues and, of course, their deaths. So, instead of writing about the day or week or season, I'd like to remember some of the people of faith who have left a lasting impression on my heart.

In 1978, I found myself in the Tompkins County Hospital which, at the time was still housed in the Biggs Complex on Trumansburg Road. After a stay in the Intensive Care Unit, I was scheduled to be moved to the floor. The only available space was on a ward with several other patients.

I could barely move after surgery and had some trouble breathing. As they wheeled me into the ward, the patient across from me lit up a cigarette. (It's hard to believe now, but it's true.) I turned to the orderlies and said, "You've got to find me a room. I can't be on this floor with someone smoking. I can barely breathe." They said they'd see what could be done. Apparently, the only other available space was in what was supposed to be a private room, but they would ask the patient if he was willing to have me join him. It was my great good fortune that the other patient was Father Thomas Cleary. He graciously consented to my joining him and immediately dubbed our room "the holy room." At the time, Father Tom was the priest of Holy Cross Church in Dryden. He was a warm, friendly, man with a lively sense of humor. We remained friends until his death. I will never forget the mass and wonderful celebration that marked the 40th anniversary of his ordination and his thoughtfulness at supplying kosher meals for my wife and me at the celebratory dinner.

Early in my tenure, the ministers of the downtown churches were among my closest local friends. Bob McCune at St. Paul's United Methodist Church and David Evans at First Baptist Church have retired long ago but they remain important role models to me. They welcomed me warmly into the community and were always very supportive and helpful. I feel blessed that they are still in my life though we don't have the opportunity to be in touch as often as we might like.

With his deep resonant voice and his exquisite homilies, Jack Taylor, was inspiring. He was also a wonderful friend. Sometimes I felt as if Jack was my biggest competition. As the minister of the First Unitarian Church, Jack regularly employed the Jewish holidays as topics for his sermons. Judaism, Jewish practice and observance were incorporated into the Sunday School curriculum of his congregation. And, to be frank, Jack was a far better preacher than I could ever hope to be. I loved listening to him on WHCU and was grateful for any opportunity I had to hear him preach. It was not unusual for him to turn up at a Friday evening service every so often. He would sneak into a back pew just before 8 o'clock when the service would begin. The last time I saw him was on a wintry Friday night a few years ago, when he was visiting from his retirement home in Pennsylvania and asked me if I would deliver the eulogy at his funeral. Although deeply honored, at first, I turned him down. I couldn't bear the thought. But in my heart, I knew I couldn't refuse Jack. It was one of the saddest duties of my rabbinate cushioned a bit by the fact that I could speak with complete sincerity and honesty about this man who was a true friend.

The sadness at Jack's passing matched the sorrow I felt a few years before at the death of Jack Lewis who had been the director of Cornell United Religious Work. Jack Lewis was probably the most

popular minister in town. He seemed to be everywhere—on numerous boards and committees and special panels. Jack was warm and outgoing and affable. He had a folksy, easy-going, southern way about him, but he was sharp and witty and persuasive. He could get you to do something you'd never thought you would EVER do, and you'd end up liking it. My favorite Jack Lewis story: Jack had begun to officiate at interfaith weddings. I didn't especially approve, but it wasn't any of my business until the day Jack called me on the phone and said with his heavy Texas drawl, "Scott, I wonder if you would be willing to record the AHRONIC blessing for me." My New York ears heard, "IRONIC blessing," and I thought, What's Jack talking about? What's the ironic blessing?" And I said, "Jack, what did you just ask me?" He repeated the request and still I heard "ironic." "Jack, I don't understand. What kind of blessing do you want me to record?" Now, a little annoyed, Jack repeated "the Aaronic blessing," and then explained to this none-too-sophisticated rabbi: "the threefold blessing of Aaron and his sons." "Oh, that blessing!" At which point, how could I refuse? It was that benediction that I offered at the end of Jack's memorial service at Sage Chapel.

Through Jack Lewis I met the indomitable, extraordinary Mary Durham. Mary was the widow of the Reverend G. Eugene Durham, a kindly Methodist minister who, in retirement, had taken it upon himself to visit hospital and nursing home patients. One afternoon Mary Durham accompanied Jack Lewis to a meeting of what was then known as the Tompkins County Religious Workers Association. The new hospital had recently opened, and Mary decided that she wanted to memorialize Gene by establishing an endowment for a hospital chaplaincy. This was an incredibly ambitious undertaking, but Mary was convinced she could do it. It's worth noting that Mary was already in her 90s when she was making this proposal. We asked her how she thought she could raise the money necessary for such an endowment, pointing out that it would probably take a million dollars to provide the necessary income for such a position. She hoped, she said, for our help, of course, but she expected that by writing to her Christmas card list, she would be able to raise most of the money. A few people around the table looked away so as not to laugh directly in Mary's face and when she left, to be sure there were a few snickers. But Mary Durham wasn't some silly old lady. She knew exactly what she was talking about and she did exactly what she said she would. Through her generosity and determination, funds were raised, a chaplain was hired. The hospital board realized the importance of a hospital chaplaincy and, with the endowment as a foundation, has not only supported but expanded Mary's vision. My extraordinary friend, Mary Durham, lived to be over 100, and to see her vision come to fruition.

It was the incomparable Rabbi Morris Goldfarb who first introduced me to many of the local clergy. Morris came to Cornell University in 1947 to serve as the director of Hillel, which served the Jewish students on campus. For many years, he also served as the Jewish chaplain at Ithaca College. His gentle, loving ways, his warm spirit and great intellect endeared Morris to the members of the local clergy. They revered him and had a deep affection for him. Morris took me under his wing and mentored me for more than twenty years. He taught me so much about community, about the power of a story, about integrity and dedication, about love of family. He filled his 90 years with teaching and learning and loving.

Even as I remember these and other wonderful friends who are no longer with us and the many blessings that I cherish, I am grateful for all that many new friends in the clergy have brought to my life and to the Ithaca community. I am confident that generations from now, people will look back with reverence and awe at all they have accomplished and all they have given of themselves and realize how blessed we are because they are in our midst. ■

Rabbi Scott Glass served at Temple Beth-El in Ithaca from 1976 until he retired in 2019.

Ithaca makes it easy to stay busy

By BOB ROMANOWSKI

I started today at 7 a.m. by making breakfast for my wife, Ellie, and myself all the while reflecting on my remarks of 25 years ago. It is amazing that that amount of time has passed so swiftly. Since I last wrote, I have “retired” from Verizon along with serving 10 years as an Alderman in the City of Ithaca, subsequently serving 15 years as a Fire Commissioner for the City and am now in my 20th and last year as a Selective Service Commissioner. We have also become grandparents 6 times over. Being busy perhaps explains the swift passage of this time.

It is now 8:15 a.m., and I’m off to take part in the Ithaca High School’s 16th annual “A Soldier’s Story” day, relating my experiences as a member of the U.S Navy during the Korean war era. I am scheduled to speak to a U.S. history class first and an economics class in the next period. One of my granddaughters is a senior and a member of this class, and I suppose I embarrassed her by mentioning this fact. I commend the Ithaca School system in having people who have their stories to tell, being allowed to pass this to the students.

It is now 11 a.m. and I’m back home and will be glancing at the *Ithaca Journal* before making a light lunch. I have several household and yard chores to get at before 4 p.m. We moved out of the City in 1995 and bought a home on Bundy Road with a lot more yard to take care of. My wife and myself are having dinner with close friends this evening. After dinner we usually play a few games of cards as well as catch up on the latest news around the area.

At 9 p.m., we are now home watching a little television before getting ready for bedtime. My days seem to be always busy, but I wouldn’t have it any other way. ■

Bob Romanowski is a long-time community volunteer and resides in the Town of Ithaca.

Family memories packed up in a Cayuga Heights trunk

By BEATRICE B. SZEKELY

The gray metal trunk sits on the ground outside the house where Kate Hopkins Von Berg lived, from the late 1940s until her death in January 2013. It is one of many trunks lined up alongside the gravel driveway of the grand old brick house at 501 Hanshaw Road, part of an estate sale that is a massive clean-out of possessions accumulated by one family over the course of more than 60 years. Our family has lived next door for just under half that time.

This particular trunk in the sale is very special; it was issued to Kate by the American Red Cross for her use in the Military Welfare Service during World War II. Her name and serial number are stenciled on the top and sides, with shipping labels affixed to the lid. Kate served in the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and occupied Japan. Few who knew her knew of her wartime work. After World War II, Kate came to Ithaca to do a master's degree in theater at Cornell, went to work in the then nascent office of career services at the University, met Robert Von Berg in the chemical engineering department, married him and had four children. Kate was known in Ithaca primarily as the wife of Professor Von Berg and the mother of their four children. Like so many of her generation, she didn't speak very much about her contribution to the war back in the 1940s.

It was very strange today to see hundreds of strangers line up to go through what has been for so long "the Von Berg house" and buy their belongings, each of which could tell the story of a piece of their rich life.

What a privilege it has been to be their neighbors. I miss them very much but look forward to next month when a lovely young couple will move in to renew 501 Hanshaw Road. They will create a new set of memories and write a whole new story there

I purchased a cunning cut glass jam jar with a silver lid and spoon from the Von Berg estate to give the new owners as a housewarming present. And, in memory of their dear mother, the very grown Von Berg children presented me this spring with a double-sided teapot that the original owners of my house gave Kate back in the 1960s. Life rolls along, neighbors change. Quite suddenly, it seems, my husband and I have lived on our block longer than anyone else. ■

Beatrice B. Szekely is the Cayuga Heights village historian.

Winters are long, but the community's warmth makes this home

By SALLY MCCONNELL-GINET

Ithaca became home for me very quickly. I was a young child during and shortly after WWII, and for various reasons, including my father's joining the Army as a chaplain, we moved often, never staying anywhere longer than 3 or 4 years, not really long enough to put down roots. Even in early adulthood, there were frequent moves, but when we came to Ithaca in 1971 it felt immediately like a long-term resting place. Initially, that was dismaying, as I was still working on a PhD elsewhere and had no idea how I was going to build an Ithaca-based career. The first job I got was part-time and had some 100 applicants, more than half of whom had advanced degrees. But by the time I was fortunate enough to land a tenure-track job in my field at Cornell, we had long since passed my record for staying put, and the years in Ithaca stretching ahead looked inviting. Our three kids went to Ithaca schools and the two boys to Cornell, with the older remaining in Ithaca for a PhD, staying to celebrate his 30th birthday eating pizza in the Chariot, now long gone from the underground recesses of Eddy Street. And recently our other son has returned to live in Ithaca himself.

We love to travel and have gone on sabbaticals in far-flung places like Finland and for shorter visits involving some talks or conferences or sometimes just pleasure to Burma/Myanmar, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and many other places but returning most often to England and especially London. My first post-college year I had a Fulbright to Girton College, Cambridge, and my soon-to-be (and still) husband joined me for a few months of that time. That's when we both discovered the many delights of London, especially the wide range of superb live theatre. As theatre junkies, we are very involved in Ithaca's Hangar and Kitchen and enjoy productions of other Ithaca-based theatrical groups as well, especially now that we are fully retired from official duties, but regular visits to London, where I am writing this on the 17th of May 2013, recharge the batteries.

I've been retired almost six years now, my husband 14. No longer needing to make regular appearances on East Hill, we seriously contemplated leaving Ithaca about six years ago when we agreed to sell our Bryant Park house with its flight and a half of external stairs and no covered parking (to wonderful people who waited a year for us to organize our move). But the more we thought about it, the clearer it became to us that Ithaca is our home and Ithaca friends our extended family. We still like to travel but returning to Ithaca is always special—the natural beauty

feeds the soul, and there is a wonderful range of people and of activities that keep us engaged in life. And when things go wrong, there are many kinds of help and support. For example, 350 women, including my daughter and me, signed up to swim across Cayuga to raise money for Hospicare; the Women Swimmin' event draws on and builds community support for services to make the final stages of living as full and rewarding as possible. So we still complain about winter being too long, NYC too far, people occasionally too 'smug', and so on, but ultimately Ithaca, Ithacans, and predominant Ithaca values suit us well. ■

Sally McConnell-Ginet is professor emerita of linguistics at Cornell University.

Inspired By Nature

What's special about Ithaca? Look around

By BETSY DARLINGTON

Last week at Six Mile Creek, I heard my first wood thrush, Baltimore oriole and Louisiana water thrush of the year. Best of all, the three Belle Sherman fourth grade classes that I was taking there to see the spring wildflowers also got to hear them. We are so lucky to have such a place just a short walk from home and school, and to live in a city and region with such incredible beauty and natural diversity. I feel thankful every day for this, and for the wonderful people who live here and care about our special place. ■

Betsy Darlington lives in Belle Sherman and has been active in environmental issues and habitat preservation issues for many years.

35 years of tending a garden that was here before we arrived

By SUSAN LESSER

It is time for planting, planting, planting in our too big garden on Coddington Road. Much of today has been spent outside, pulling weeds and removing overgrown sedum in the perennial plots. This is the 35th year we have put in tomatoes, parsley, basil and peppers in the vegetable garden, out past the lilacs. The leeks look like tiny spikes of grass, and it is hard to believe that by fall they will be thick stalks promising a happy transformation into cold weather soups and stews.

We have an influx of a new weed in the garden this year. I suppose it has been around in some small amount all along. It is called Hairy Bittercress and is a rather pretty small plant, hugging the ground with a circular fan of leaves and sending up several thin stems topped with white flowers. The trouble is, it is everywhere. A few years ago we were invaded by the dreaded Garlic Mustard, but it seems to have retreated a bit. ■

Susan Lesser lives in the Town of Danby.

Wake up at 6 and check the Cornell Lab of O's bird cam

By WENDY KIMBLE-DUGAN

This morning I awoke at 6 a.m. to a bright sunny day, and I knew that spring had arrived at last. I went to my computer to check on my bird families. As hundreds of people in Ithaca and many more people around the country and world know, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology has two remotely-operated cameras set up: one at a site on the campus and the other at Sapsucker Woods a few miles away. People who sit down to watch the bird dramas feel like voyeurs for a while, but then, realizing that the birds are unaware, get “sucked in.”

I first check the red-tailed hawk family — two doting parents and three little nestlings, about two-weeks old. I have watched the parents since early April (from time to time) as they built their nest, full of sticks that they patiently interweave to make the perfect home for their expected family. Now the babies are hungry and one parent stays with them as the other goes out for little animals (squirrels, chipmunks, voles, pigeons, snakes! etc.) that they can take to the nest and rip apart for the kids. Watchers can see that the young are well fed because they collapse in a sleepy stupor.

As I read the red tail moderator's morning remarks and those of the chatters who also stop by, I could tell that all was well with Ezra (the male) and Big Red (the female) and their fuzzy, clumsy little ones, D1, D2, and D3. Parental care is amazing and includes the father, Ezra, shielding the whole family with his outstretched wings during a freezing spring downpour. Observers were really touched. These are very handsome, intelligent birds.

So I went on to the Sapsucker Woods site and checked on my other feathered friends, unnamed parents, male and female Great Blue Herons. The “dad” is the same heron who lived at this nest last year with his mate. Watchers from the Laboratory of Ornithology say that the female is new. I just happened to be looking in the day these two set up shop. I was surprised to see that the first week or two are spent fortifying the large nest (10 feet across) in a dead tree by the Sapsucker pond. One of the majestic birds would gracefully swoop in with a delicate branch, just chomped off a nearby tree. The other would accept it and seemed to try to weave it into last year's nest remains. This was part of their courtship ritual. When they weren't weaving branches, they were either fishing or mating. All this weaving seemed ineffectual until two weeks later when “mom” produced an egg! At the same moment, “dad” brought her a bough with a flower on the end!

What really inspires me is how the animal instincts of bird parents control them. They know exactly what to do, and their patience with weather, wind and waiting are exemplary. They are gentle, observant and eager to find good food for their young. Human parents can certainly identify. Soon both sets of young birds will mature and fly away, most likely never to return to their nests. The parents, however, will probably return to the same nest or nearby.

How like my own family, which my husband and I successfully raised in Ithaca, of three daughters, one of whom lives on the West Coast; they have all flown away. I stay in Ithaca, the town where I grew up. I have visited and lived in many other places, but I am always happy to return to Tompkins County, where our beautiful gorges, forests and scenic parks are always waiting for us. I don't know many of the people I see about town these days...Their experience of Ithaca may be very different from mine. They may be here for school or a job. They may leave in four years or in 20 years. Or they may stay, as we do.

I continue to pursue a lifestyle that includes artistic endeavors — music and art, and sports with my husband, Dirk. I also volunteer with Habitat for Humanity, helping families to obtain affordable housing in Tompkins and Cortland counties. We build houses using volunteer workers, with the help of the future homeowners. “Stick-built,” they call it.

A lot like these very smart birds, I think. ■

Wendy Kimble-Dugan resides in the Town of Ithaca.

A Place That is Home

A beautiful place to stay put

By DEBBIE BILTONEN

I came home the night before from a visit to my octogenarian parents in Florida. My morning routine was quite typical. I woke my son for school, and as he was getting ready; I reviewed our pantry to see what I needed to pick up in Ithaca. I drove my son to the Elizabeth Ann Clune Montessori School of Ithaca, happy that we had the option to send him to such an amazing school. We moved to Trumansburg 3 years ago because we heard their schools were good. Unfortunately, we found they were a not a good match for our clever son.

After I dropped off my son, I took our dog for a wonderful hike along upper Buttermilk Falls. Although I was there last week, there were so many new wildflowers along the path. A truly glorious hike, only moments away from the school.

The rest of the morning was devoted to errands, picking up items for the house. When I returned home, I spent 2 hours mowing our grass, which seemed to grow an inch a day while I was gone.

I really enjoy living in the Tompkins County region. It offers so many things that I feel are important. There is an excellent local food system available, amazing natural beauty, strong herbal network and healthy community ethnic that supports a diverse population. The only challenge for me living here is that it is difficult to travel to other destinations and I spend a lot of my time traveling. ■

Debbie Biltonen resides in Trumansburg.

Returning to Ithaca and rediscovering my home

By JENNIFER GABRIEL

As I reflect back on today, I also reflect back on this day, 25 years ago, and re-imagine what I might have written. Just like an ink stain on a favorite sweater, and for reasons that have nothing to do with big hair or shoulder pads, 1988 enjoys some staying power for me — though, at the time, I didn't know that. I was just trying to get through each day without embarrassing myself.

Tuesday, May 17, 1988. A few months ago, my parents moved us into an apartment on South Hill while we wait for builders to finish construction on our new house. The apartment is a dump. Some of that can be blamed on the landlord, but some of the dumpiness is our own doing. Our stuff is in storage, so we use black trash bags to cover the windows and sleep on flimsy cots from Kmart. The foam mattresses are about two-inches thick and do nothing to protect us from the frame's coils, which creak and sag under even a small amount of weight. I do not invite friends over. I am embarrassed by where we live. Also, I don't have any friends.

Friday, May 17, 2013. In my late-teens, after I'd graduated from high school and fled New York, I looked down on my peers who still lived in Ithaca. I felt they had gotten stuck. I assumed friends who said they chose to stay in Ithaca were lying. There are so many thrilling places to see and extraordinary things to do. Why would anyone choose this place as home?

In time, my family moved from Ithaca, and there was little reason to ever come back. The next 16 years found me living in some of the best cities in America: Boston, Boulder and San Francisco. Then, my brother relocated back to the area. Some friends did the same thing. I found myself one August morning in 2007 on a red-eye from the West Coast, headed to Ithaca for a visit.

You know what it feels like after you get home after a long trip. You smell your smells, you see your things, and everything in the universe is suddenly okay because tonight you get to fall asleep in your own bed, under your own blankets, on your own pillow. You know that feeling? That's home. That's what I felt when my plane touched down at the Ithaca airport.

It's been six years since I decided returning to Ithaca was the right thing to do, and it's been three and a half years since I convinced my husband we should do it. The first part involved winning

an internal argument about moving back to a place I thought I despised. The second part only happened after a lot of long conversations about how the winters aren't *that* bad. And besides, he could take up fishing again. Wasn't he always talking about taking up fishing again?

I started today like I start most days — by rolling over to hit snooze on the alarm clock and trying to ignore the cold, wet noses that poke my forehead to say 'Hey! It's time to eat!' I drove to work and am struck by how beautiful the landscape is this time of year. Spring offers so much hope, and everything looks bright and crisp and new. There is rarely a day that I drive to work that I don't take a moment to appreciate Ithaca's beauty. Even in the dead of winter when we haven't seen the sun in weeks and dirty snow sits in piles along the side of the road. I find a beauty in that because it means that I live in a place with four distinct seasons. In Ithaca, the weather forces you to remember to live in the moment. Embrace that sunshine and warm breeze because it might snow tomorrow.

There are still things that bother me about how small Ithaca is. Sitting three tables away from me at lunch today was the mom of a former high school friend. I also can't go to Wegmans without running into people I know. But at the same time, there are perks to living in a small town. I was reminded of that this afternoon on the Commons, when I was running behind and found that a stranger deposited a quarter into my meter so I wouldn't get a ticket. Or maybe it wasn't a stranger. Maybe it was someone who recognized my car and saw the blinking meter. Either way, I thanked the universe and popped a few dimes into the meter behind mine.

My office on South Hill is a stone's throw away from the trash-bag curtains/Kmart cot apartment. Sometimes I drive past Dewitt Middle School and remember that I was a bagel butt and wore elephant sweaters. But instead of pain, I feel gratitude. My history in Ithaca is what shaped me, and it helps me appreciate how far I've come.

The world is so much bigger than Ithaca, I say. There are so many thrilling places to see and extraordinary things to do. That's why I leave from time to time. I have adventures, meet interesting people, collect crazy stories. But Ithaca is the place I choose to come back to.

This is home. ■

Jennifer Gabriel lives in Ithaca and works in development and community relations at Hospicare & Palliative Care Services.

A place where we could make a life for ourselves

By SUZANNE SMITH JABLONSKI

When I first forayed off campus as a freshman at Ithaca College in 1988, I thought to myself, city girl that I was, “Get me out of this one-horse town!” Fast forward to graduation, and lo and behold, Ithaca had stealthily made its way into my heart.

In the years that followed college, my boyfriend-then-fiancé-then husband and I would find ourselves thinking about moving back to Ithaca. We asked ourselves if we were hankering for a return to our carefree college days, or if it was the community itself that was calling us. After a good bit of soul-searching, we concluded that yes, it was Ithaca itself that held the appeal. It seemed like the kind of place where we could make a life for ourselves.

As luck would have it, in 2002 as I was job-hunting, I came across a position with a wonderful nonprofit organization in Ithaca. It was a cause I was very committed to, and a professional opportunity right in line with my career goals. “Should I apply?” I asked my husband. “Sure! Toss your hat in the ring and see what happens,” he replied. Sure enough, I was offered the job, and we seemed to be on our way. Contributing to the feeling of coming full circle, I began my new job the day after my ten-year college reunion.

For the first three years, my husband continued to live and work about 250 miles away, coming here only on weekends, while he searched in vain for a job. (Low unemployment rate notwithstanding, Ithaca was a tough place to find a professional-level position in the ‘00s.) Finally, we came to decision time — one of us had to quit a job so that we could be together. I could easily have quit and returned “back home,” where there was more opportunity, and we had friends and family. But we didn’t, because all of the reasons we’d wanted to come here in the first place were still valid.

We wanted a different kind of life than the one we saw ahead of us had we stayed in the tri-state area. Fewer people, less stress and pressure to “keep up with the Joneses,” less focus on acquiring stuff. But the appeal of Ithaca was not just about what it didn’t offer, but also what it did: the chance to be part of a community, beautiful natural surroundings a stone’s throw away, an opportunity to own our own home, progressive ideals.

How do I feel about Ithaca now, 11 years on? Nine times out of ten, I love that I'm here, in this small town, and that I both live and work in the same community; that tenth time, I want to flee to the nearest big city and never look back. But overwhelmingly, my everyday life is made so much richer because of the things that make our community special.

I love that there are parks, and art, and something fun to do for grown-ups and kids, at every turn. I love marching in the Ithaca Festival parade, which is bereft of marching bands but awash in weirdness and hearing the enthusiasm of the crowd. I love being able to indulge my second-hand shopping hobby all over town, because our community believes in re-use. I love looking out my kitchen window and seeing the pileated woodpecker, a magnificent, mythical-looking creature, feasting on suet.

We've met some of the most remarkable people here, and I'm convinced that while there are great people everywhere, we have a preponderance of them. I hardly ever encounter people for whom status or wealth are paramount. How cool is it that the neighbor with whom I barter brewer's-grains-as-chicken-feed for eggs, who I met on a town list serve, turns out to be a world-renowned physicist? The diversity of experience, interests and expertise that's represented among my friends and colleagues blows me away. I learn so much from being surrounded by them. I'm awed, too, by how many generous people I've met, who give so much and make this a better place to live.

As with so many aspects of life, having a kid gave me a different perspective on what it means to live in this community. I think about the life lessons we try to share with our son, who at the time of this writing is six-and-a-half — don't sweat the small stuff; be gentle; don't worry about what other people think; you are in charge of your own happiness; take care of yourself; sing and dance every day; take a breath, it'll be ok — and I am encouraged that we live in a place where these values are prized. For the most part, at least among my set, it's not important what your parents do for a living and how much money they make, or how big your house is, or what kind of car you drive.

We're in this community for the long haul, which I think is the best testament to how I feel about living here. It's our home. It's where our son was born, and where he'll grow up. I was clamoring for a place where I could feel a part of something, and I found it. Thanks, Ithaca. ■

Suzanne Smith Jablonski is Executive Director of the Tompkins County Public Library Foundation.

This place helped me make my work, my family, my home

BY S.K. LIST

A few decades ago, when my son was in a car seat, I used to ride around exploring with him. We found low-priced action figures in discount stores and went to garage sales together a lot, wandering across the region. Sometimes I'd say, Look out the window! Look at the beautiful place where we live.

I do think that about this place. It is beautiful. In the big picture, the long lakes, deep green and sometimes streaked with purple, the wide-open vistas of rolling hills, the big farm fields are stunning. I lived in Massachusetts for a while before I got here, and if I go back there to visit, when it comes time to leave, I pine a little. The scale, the steeper hills, the established New England architecture all have some lasting hold on me. But then I get to the small picture as I cross the line into Trumansburg, my home, and I breathe a sigh of pleasure.

Harsh weather — or at least its reputation — helps keep the population down some in these parts, and we like it that way. Sure, sometimes the weather of the Northeast can be a drag, but it also tucks you up indoors with good food and a cozy blanket. It's an ingrained cycle, like the circadian rhythm. It leads around to that ecstatic, deep-breath, burst-out feeling when the spring is coming and snowdrops show, and you can smell the earth.

I came here in the fall of 1975, from the beautiful but quiet territory near Cooperstown, with a group of four smart, solid and hardworking young men, one of them my boyfriend. I was a bit older, a divorcee, floating in a sea of possibilities as I tried to find the place where my feet would touch bottom. If that household configuration sounds odd, maybe it was — looking from outside. But after a series of changes and impermanent living places, I was ready to make a stand somewhere, and these guys were part of that picture. Not long out of high school, they demonstrated remarkably sound instincts. They were natural homemakers. They knew about buying the economy size jug of detergent. They knew how to make and serve dip. They kept their personal spaces and the shared spaces tidy. They'd more or less grown up together and the way they knew each other and helped each other was admirable. We no longer live in a group and haven't for years, but we are still bound together. They were the stability I needed, especially as found in the one I claimed for my own.

We first came hereabouts to reconnoiter on a perfect September day: crisp, clear, blue and gold, with the bright yellow school buses chugging down Ithaca's streets. Ithaca looked like it might have what we wanted. Which was more — more movies, more restaurants, more activity. Pretty quickly, we rented a worn farmhouse on the outer fringes of Tompkins County between Caroline Center and Speedsville.

We'd been trying out farming for a while, working together and with others, in a sort of a commune, a sort of a community. I had been a blacksmith there; my boyfriend became one. We weren't ready to let that life go. We'd brought along two goats: Dimples and her dark-brown daughter, Nod. The house had a shed for them out in back.

Across the road from our place was a working dairy barn. The farmers there were country folks, but they got to know us a little and saw me heading out to my job, saw that the young men were not work-averse, and we became friendly. We stayed all through the winter. The road lay along the bottom of what the weather forecasters call "an outlying valley," always due to pull the coldest temperatures. Facing twenty-eight below on a few mornings, my little VW Karmann Ghia would refuse to wake up. The guys set it up with an electric dipstick heater, as well as a light bulb under the hood and a blanket over the top. They'd bring the battery into the house and stand it in a sink of hot water. All to get me to work close to on time. Mostly, I made it.

One of the guys I worked for noticed my interest in photography, he guided me toward using those skills to record some of the lab projects. That made it a short step for me to take a couple of Cornell photography classes as "work-related," which meant I attended for free and during working hours. They even let me set up a little darkroom in the corner of the lab. At some point, I answered an ad in one of the local alternative weeklies for a photographer. They promised me some work. Two weeks later, they had an ad for writers. I went back and said, I can do that, too. Next thing I knew I had some assignments.

Eventually, I quit my lab job. I filled the income gap some by taking in typing at my Flash Typing Service. Ithaca's two weekly newspapers merged, and I got a job one day a week preparing the calendar. As a result, I always knew about everything that was going on around the area, sometimes in advance. I became a regular writer; rarely a week went by when I didn't contribute. My beat was mostly arts and culture, with some long features.

A day came when the editor of the paper quit. Very tentatively, I put my hand up and waved to the publisher, saying, I can do this. He gave me the chance. That was the beginning of my career in local journalism, and it's another story of its own. I stayed with the paper for years. Then I worked for a national art publication based in Ithaca and, later, with a few friends, owned and produced a parenting paper for 11 years. Over time, I've had to mix in a few other relevant jobs. Sometimes, I've had five or six at once—a crazy quilt of a work life that makes you feel like no matter what you're doing, you should be doing something else. But overall, it worked out. The boyfriend became my husband. Our goats are gone. Our close compadres mostly moved away, although we get together every year. But the foothold I found in this place helped me make my work, my family, my home. ■

S.K. List resides in Trumansburg.

Of Days Gone By

Growing up in Ithaca

By ADAM PERL

In the summer of 1957, shortly after a devastating fire had destroyed most of our downstate home and my parents' marriage had ended bitterly, my mother and her three children arrived in Ithaca. We were all happy to be in a new place where no one knew us, and we didn't know anyone. It was a clean break after the one-two blow that life had just dealt us and a chance to start over. I was 11 years old and had just finished elementary school.

Our apartment at Lakeland Homes on Highland Avenue was small — especially compared to the large Victorian home we had just left behind. But there were lots of kids in the complex to play with and a lot of space to run around in. I soon made friends with several other kids there and after only a couple of days, I was challenged to a foot race against Richard Bigelow and Bob Storandt. That was the first time I realized that I was a fast runner, as I beat them both and thereby gained acceptance into the neighborhood gang. The three of us plus the landlord's daughter used to hang out together, play in our "Hundred Acre Woods" which was soon to be bulldozed to make room for the Congregational Church.

My older sister, who had a tougher adjustment to moving to a new high school in her junior year, made friends with Rochelle Odom and I soon made friends with her younger brother, Ronnie. Ronnie was a year older than I was and taller and much cooler than I would ever be. He could fix things both mechanical and electrical and was into motorcycles. We used to go up to Residential Heights Club — a campus motel just behind the apartments — and wait for the clerk to step out and then help ourselves to several books of their free matches which we stockpiled for future experiments in pyromania.

Inevitably, summer ended, and we all had to go to school. Middle school was difficult at first, since I didn't know anyone, but I soon made friends — some of whom I am still close. Two events changed my life that year. The first was when our music teacher, Mrs. Tarbell, put four 7th-graders together in a quartet and taught us to sing "Go Down Moses" in four-part harmony. Eric Loberg on soprano, me on alto, Hank White on tenor and big Steve Dougherty on bass. It was the first time I had ever sung four-part harmony, although my sister and I were pretty good on almost any Everly Brothers song. I was blown away by the sounds we made and by the ability to make such beautiful music with just our voices. These feelings have never left me and to this day I still

sing with both an all-male group and a SATB group. It was the beginning of many decades of joy through singing which eventually led to two trips around the world!

The second life-changing event was less dramatic, but its effects were no less profound. One day, my friend Mark Heinicke brought to school a thin little pamphlet entitled, “Cash for Your Coins”. It was a booklet intended for beginning numismatists, as I quickly learned coin collectors were called. But it was not a book full of rare coins that could only be bought in coin stores, but of common coins one could still find in change. The idea that a dime could be worth a dollar was astounding to me. I began looking through my change, my friends’ change, my mother’s change and anyone else who would let me. I even made friends with the cashiers in the cafeteria so I could look through their change as well.

I started finding coins that were worth more than their “face” value. I had no plan or means of selling them, I just wanted to own them. My younger brother Josh got the bug too and somehow, we managed to get \$50 together (I have no idea how, since my allowance was 25¢ a week). We would go to the bank on Fridays and buy a \$50 bag of pennies. They came in a giant canvas bag that was quite heavy and we would take them home and dump all 5,000 pennies out on the living room rug and sort through them. Usually we would find about a dozen or so that were worth keeping and we would substitute an equal number of regular pennies for the ones we took and on Monday morning we’d take the bag back to the bank and get our \$50 back only to repeat the process the following weekend.

As with singing, I had no idea what a profound effect this experience would have on me. I became a serious coin collector and that eventually led me to my life-long career as an antique dealer.

All of this happened within a few months of our arrival in Ithaca. I was soon to fall in love with the beauty of the scenery, the vastness of Cornell University — which I later attended — the spectacular waterfalls and gorges the very smell of which still evokes these formative years. I did leave Ithaca for a few years to work in New York City and explored the coasts of Florida and California for a while, but eventually I came back, fell in love, got married, bought a house, started a business and raised three children here. I cannot imagine living anywhere else, nor can my wonderful wife of 35 years, who is originally from Colorado. There is a certain magic in Ithaca that is hard to put your finger on, or explain, but when you go away for any length of time, you notice it is missing. ■

Adam Perl was the long-time owner of Pastimes Antiques in downtown Ithaca and an avid constructor of crossword puzzles.

Summers began in Stewart Park

By DENICE KARAMARDIAN

I've been thinking a lot about how May feels in Ithaca with its promise of summer days as school days wind down — the sheer joy of it from as far back as I can remember. I spent lots of time this week — as I did in the '60s — back and forth downtown, between the high school, park and the Commons. Although I did not live there, downtown is where I felt I grew up. So today I sat at Stewart Park, felt the breeze through the willow trees and thought about growing up here and how while so much has changed, it is amazing how much feels just as it did 50 years ago.

I recall most days after school at DeWitt Junior High (in the Dewitt building downtown), hanging out at the Parthenon — the building that now houses Just a Taste — for French fries and gravy; later on I'd meet my parents for dish to pass dinners either at the Masonic Temple or at the Baptist Church on Wednesday nights. Or I'd catch the Swarthout bus home in front of Chargans (spelling long forgotten) at the corner of State Street and Tioga; a few years later I'd be walking down Cayuga Street with a gang of kids from the high school to the Busy Bee restaurant by Cascadilla Creek. That soda shop is the only building missing today from these memories.

I remember when the new library on Cayuga and Court Street opened and doing many projects there. It seemed so 'state of the art.' My first library experience had been somewhere on State Street — that spot I cannot recall.

The Youth Center was a big part of my life. We had a snack bar hang out space on the 2nd floor of the CSMA building and held dances on the 3rd floor. We girls would dress for the dance at the Shaw's' house on Seneca Street and then walk down the hill, trying not to run our stockings in our penny loafers. The dance floor is exactly as it was with the bank of benches along the walls, the stage, the feel and smell of it.

On May days towards the end of the school year we found our way to Stewart Park after school. As far as I can remember Stewart Park was central to the warm months here. The large pavilion is one of the most familiar things from my childhood — day camp in the 50s and 60s, waiting for the Fresh Air bus to arrive from Brooklyn and deliver our Puerto Rican summer sisters, or watching my sister Patrice making cotton candy in the snack bar. I can see my Dad cooking with other men at the long barbeque pit with for some group or the other. And the beach and the willow

trees — we swam in those days. Always the willow trees. It seems summers began at Stewart Park until we got older.

As teenagers we swam daily at the suspension bridge, sliding down the falls and taking breaks at Willard Straight for lemonades. I'd walk from home on Warren Road across the golf course, through the Hasbrouck apartments to get there. We also sat countless hours glistening in baby oil while sunning on the bridge at Beebe Lake. I spent many summers gathering the courage to jump off that bridge — everyone was jumping and swimming — and was just about ready to one year. But I looked down and saw a snake swimming in the spot I had targeted, and the jump never happened. After those long days in Six Mile Creek we would make our way downtown for cokes and French fries with gravy — this time at the Rosebud Diner on State. Catch a bus home at the end of the day or just walk back up through Library Slope and over the golf course.

Wherever I have lived since — Boston, Manhattan, Fort Lauderdale, Denver, Brazil — I have pined for Ithaca in summer, especially on a warm May day when the lilacs are in bloom and college kids are taking in the sun on porches and rooftops. I sit among the willows and stroll around town today feeling blessed to relive those memories with all my senses right here, right now. ■

Denice Karamardian lives in the Town of Ithaca and owns and operates the Coddington Guest House.

When VW bugs were all coming into Ithaca

By DOUGLAS KAMMEN

I was born and grew up in Ithaca, but for the past 16 years have lived on the other side of the world. Since I am not in Ithaca now, I cannot write about my day there, and I wouldn't know where to begin writing about what Ithaca the city or Ithaca the town or the Ithaca Commons or Ithaca High School or Cayuga Lake mean to me. But the longer I have been away, and particularly now that I have a son who is about to turn seven, more and more often I remember (not by choice, but because the memories return) particular times and places from when I was a little kid in Ithaca. These memories are a big part of what Ithaca is for me.

One of the earliest of these memories that goes beyond the peculiarities of my own family, home, or backyard is of an early summer day when I might have been five or six years old. I think I spent most time outside playing in the backyard and the adjacent dirt and root-covered slope leading down to a small stream that would eventually connect to Six Mile Creek and from there past the old Woolworth's and on to the inlet and eventually out to the lake. But the memory that returns is not of the backyard and the dirt paths for hot wheels cars, but of the front yard. I remember lying in the grass in the front yard overlooking State Street/Route 79. Cars passed in twos or threes, then a gap, then a few more, coming up the hill and heading out of the city limits. Perhaps people driving out to the reservoir or Brooktondale or Slaterville, or perhaps further to the interstate and places far beyond. From the left, similar clusters of cars were coming into town. Lying on the grass, knowing nothing of Henry Ford or Detroit or foreign competition, my eyes were drawn to the funny looking cars — cars that looked like giant insects, except that they were small compared to all the other cars. The VW bugs. I started counting. One red bug. A pale blue bug. Another red one. In all I think I counted 11 or 12. The VW bugs were all coming into Ithaca. Not a single one was going the other way.

Another of early memory that pops into my mind every now and then must have been from a year or two later. My brother, who is four years older, took me to a lacrosse game at Cornell's Schoellkopf stadium. At that age, going somewhere without parents or adults seems like a big deal, even more so when there are thousands of college students holding and spilling plastic cups and funny looking old people with hats and umbrellas and kids in tow. I don't remember who the Cornell lacrosse team was playing or who won. What I remember is halftime when two streakers raced out of the stands on the east side of the stadium and dashed across the field. The spectators started yelling and the few security guards on the side lines made a feeble effort to corral them. The streakers easily reached the stands on our side and disappeared into the crowd, which roared in approval. After the game, walking home through Collegetown, my brother surprised me by saying we should go into a restaurant on College Ave for a hamburger. No parents, no need for permission. Just two kids going to eat burgers.

Ithaca in the 1970s was a great place to grow up because it was safe, and the media and parents had not yet decided that kids had to be watched and protected at all times. From front yards to college sports events and then, with bikes, just about anywhere we wanted to go. ■

Douglas Kammen lives in Singapore where he teaches at the national university.

Tiny Town saved me, but I mourn how it is changing

By FRANKLIN CRAWFORD

Before I proffer a few dissenting opinions about the place I long ago dubbed “Tiny Town,” I want to make this clear: I love Ithaca. This place saved my ass time and again. It is the reason I am greater than the sum of my parts: The many loves I had here, the dear friends, my sister who, like me, by chance wound up in a good place, my former and present colleagues who taught me much during my checkered career here. They all saved me from myself. After a rough start growing up on Long Island, Tiny Town embraced me unconditionally. It is my home, and I morphed from transplant to townie.

That make me a little touchy about outsiders coming in here and mucking-up the place that I knew.

You can pick your friends, but one’s enemies have a way of showing up unsummoned. My number one enemy today is Change and how it’s being handled here by a bunch of people who have invested little in the place, except to invite tax-abated real estate hooligans into our home. The latter have managed to alter the downtown and Collegetown cityscape so the top looks like bits of Yonkers and the bottom looks like any other place on the U.S. map: Neo-urban porn. There is little character in these new buildings built for the wealthy and that marks a departure from Tiny Town’s sweet role as a haven for misfits and the down-and-out, to becoming an easy mark for even locals who are turning buck and their backs on our home.

I’ve been grouching about this since I was a columnist at the now void of relevance *Ithaca Journal* (1988-1998) — a paper of record that — due to forces outside a reporter’s control — no longer serves the local community with news of import and kept on top of local doings. Every paper in this town and some online news-sites are basically glorified Chambergrams. That loss is not singular to Ithaca, but the death of journalism did the most damage to small communities like ours, and we have suffered. Disgruntled journalists talk re-establishing our missing Fourth Estate here, but to date, attempts to organize a coordinated news machine in Ithaca have not cohered. Maybe they will, and the public will have access to actual news, not PR-generated crap from all sources, including the tourism bureau, Tompkins County Area Development, City Hall and the Ithaca Police Department. I can think of nothing worse than authorities vetting what crime news gets published and what does not. And I’m a friend of these public servants, and I know they are stuck in their own churn.

Sigh.

I'm not going to blame the mayor or city council, although to see such a herd of sycophants holding public office is dismaying. Pushback is discouraged. They vote in lockstep, dissenting voices are quashed or muffled or worse, ostracized. Go ahead, vent your spleen. Our current officials have no truck with alleged "conflict." Their generation can't handle it. You will be categorized, placed in the enemy camp of naysayers or simply considered old and in the way.

Fame and money spoil everything and are the ruin of Tiny Town. Is it a safe place to raise your kids? Sure, of course. But I don't have kids and could care less. It's not an easy place to be a poor adult who spent his life here scratching out a living, surviving sometimes thriving, shooting existential spitballs at the powerful, but still in love with the place, passionately so, willing to put myself at risk of being labeled a whack-job. Anyone who has seen my images knows only an eye for the details of this area could produce such a raft of observances. Yes, in my own way, I've inadvertently contributed to Tiny Town's downfall via Facebook.

Back to the love: Yep — this place saved my life. Truly. I wouldn't have outlived my crazy youth, in and out of college — and, occasionally — in and out of the ER, without the loving support of the fine people who have lived here most of their lives. It angers me that old-timers and townies are being shoved out of the way by a bunch of alleged "progressives" who are no more than sheepish capitalists in Thinsulated clothing.

And STILL, I am touched by the common decency of the people whose work it is to attend to the many walking wounded in our city; to the cops who have to deal with one preposterous crime after another and maintain form (not always, tragically, but generally); to the artists here who took me in when I was yet unformed, as one of their own. This place adopted me. My people are still here, they vote, and we're paying attention.

So, Ithaca, I still love you, but I hate what's gone down lately.

A friend who is in the thick of the developmentalist movement once asked me: "What did you want, Franklin? For the city to languish in the backwaters of the 1970s?"

Yes, that's exactly how I would like things to have remained. We had a collective soul back then. Now, I have to go looking for it. Because it's still here. ■

Franklin Crawford is a journalist, photographer and long-time Ithaca resident.

One Day in Ithaca 25 years later

By AARON LAVINE

Twenty-five years ago today, I shared my eight-year-old's view of Ithaca: a brief essay on our exceptional natural setting. Forgotten for most of this quarter-century, I recently re-read those words in the 1988 book that was published out of the community's efforts on this same project that day. It seems only proper that I again take the time to celebrate and memorialize this city that we share and love, this time with a few observations on my day.

I began today by checking email for work, two experiences (email, and work) of which I had no inkling in 1988. I am Ithaca's City Attorney, and the job comes with a more-than-healthy dose of email on any and every topic, from sidewalk funding to lawsuits, construction projects to parking easements, ethics inquiries to contract negotiations.

This morning's particular blend focused in on safety mesh under city bridges, bringing me to an ad hoc press conference on the Stone Arch bridge at Collegetown with a handful of Cornell representatives and some members of the media; today is the day that the fences came down, yielding to the far less obtrusive safety mesh that Cornell has installed with City blessing below each of East Hill's seven bridges. After answering a few questions and thanking Cornell for this opportunity to cooperate in crucially improving public safety while restoring cherished views, I stopped to marvel at those newly restored views of our city, its gorges, trees, waterfalls, downtown, and hills beckoning beyond.

Heading down the hill, I paused for a couple minutes at the Fontana's sidewalk sale (my shoes are becoming worn) and then made my way to City Hall. Chatting with our ever-friendly assistant. Scanning through yet more email. I focused in on the next topic: a letter to send pushing forward the contract negotiations for the rebuild of the Ithaca Commons, already well underway, and already subject to a ballooning design budget and a crush of a construction schedule. But we'll get there somehow! More email. More topics. A brief meeting. Unlunched and famished by 3pm. Walking through the Commons about which I've just been negotiating, past exciting rubble with such potential for the new and improved, I bumped into the excellent Commons outreach coordinator who had just read the letter that I sent. A small world.

To the counter at Viva Taqueria for a few tacos, surveying the *Ithaca Times* I stumble on a profile

of none other than that same outreach coordinator with whom I've just been chatting. An even smaller world. Back to the office. More email. A couple phone calls. A research project on West-law. By dinnertime I drove out to Upper Treman for a picnic and group hike in the waning light. A tad chilly but enlivening and refreshing. One day in Ithaca. ■

Aaron (Ari) O. Lavine is Ithaca's city attorney.

Another day to learn something new

By SUE THOMPSON

Today has been a great day. I went to two places in Ithaca that I have never been to after living in Ithaca all my life. I volunteered to go on a school field trip with my granddaughter today to Cayuga Heights Elementary School and the Wildflower Garden at the Cornell Plantations. I drove myself to the school as there was no room on the bus from Enfield Elementary School. At the school I met another parent who I had never met, found out he had gone to Danby School like I had, and he also had gone to Cayuga Heights school. From there he told me all about the CH school, and how they could eat lunch outside and explore the woods in the back of the school.

Two of the classes (3rd grade) went to the Plantations and two stayed at the school. Some of my observations of the school were that it seemed very crowded. There were lockers in the hallways, but the doors had been removed. In these lockers were the kids backpacks and other belongs hanging there for all the world to see. I guess these children have no choice in where their backpacks are but their childhood belief and trust in their fellow classmates must be great! We met the principal of the school along with a few of the teachers. It was a great experience. At the Plantations we were met by wonderful guides. Each of the children has a "passport" in which they had researched one wildflower. From there we went with our groups and found each of the flowers in the passport. It was great exercise! After I came home, I took a nap. I hope the kids learned and had as much fun as I did today! ■

Sue Thompson is the Town of Enfield historian.

Awake before sunrise to a busy day

By JOANIE YETZER

This native Ithacan is delighted to have an opportunity to take part in the current write-in. It hardly seems possible that a quarter century has passed since we writers did this initially. Paradoxically, it seems that 2013 is a lifetime removed from the earlier effort.

In 1988, I was the middle of a three-generation writing family. Now, there are only two generations of us living. I am hoping that my now-adult daughter, Joyce Russell, has remembered to participate again. We were both keen on the idea when we learned of it some weeks ago.

Looking around our fair city, one finds a mind-boggling number of changes in appearance over the past few years. The Cornell campus looks great, but that is not so for the rest of the city. Our infrastructure is failing, and we have allowed many unique historic properties to be replaced by cheap-looking, cookie-cutter type projects. The rational citizen, I submit, will note with dismay that a large percentage of new housing and civic building has been done with the idea of making life easier for the citizens who contribute the least, and who often, but not always, do so by choice.

Awaking before sunrise, this writer's day began with checking the internet for news. How marvelous it is to be able to watch the Canadian national news, or the Australian "60 Minutes" when the mood strikes. After enjoying the sunrise, it was time for my regular breakfast...a bagel with one slice of reduced-fat Swiss cheese and five pieces of turkey pepperoni, all warmed nicely. My husband took the lunch I'd fixed for him and left with a friend to go fishing on Seneca Lake. As we are retired after many years of employment with the city (37 years for me, 29 for him after beginning his working life elsewhere), we were each free to do as we pleased with the day. I chose today to get another hour or so of sleep once the dog and I had the house to ourselves.

Later, I considered doing a little floor-painting out in the pool house but decided to wait until my husband could help me move the furniture. After all, I reasoned, I'd had a pretty productive day yesterday by going to select and buy numerous plants, before going grocery shopping and then returning home. I filled window boxes and two planters. While up on the ladder with the window boxes, I'd noticed that the gutters cleaned last fall could use another cleaning.

Dinner was casual this pleasant day. My husband grilled a rack of ribs, and we had leftover potato salad, tossed salad, corn on the cob and fresh fruit. Eating in the sunroom is always relaxing, and

we opted to forego the 6:30 national news we often watch while the two of us have dinner. 7:30 means Jeopardy! though, and tonight was no exception. Our house rule is that we do not answer any phone calls during Jeopardy. It's one of the things I have enjoyed from childhood to retirement. After that, a little more internet perusal and this missive.

And now the day has come to a close. Good night, Ithaca. Sleep tight. ■

Joanie Willsey Russell Yetzer lives in Ithaca.

The Pluses of Living in Tompkins

Home to a zillion nonprofits doing wonderful work

By PAM SILVERSTEIN

I am a long time resident of Ithaca. I came in the mid 60s. My husband, Spence, had flunked out of Cornell, and we came back to finish. We had a small child in tow. We ended up staying. Ithaca is my home. I love it. I love the people and their ethic. Today I am volunteering for the Cancer Resource Center at Wal-Mart to spread the word. CRC could be any other non-profit. Ithaca has a zillion nonprofits and other wonderful things...all worthy and needed. I love this town. Thank you for being my home. ■

Pam Silverstein resided in the Town of Dryden when she submitted her essay.

Ithaca invigorates mind and muscle

By JUD KILGORE, MD

Today, May 16, 2013, has been a gorgeous, 70 degrees, magnificent clouds, and a too full mental list of tasks mandated and optional. As medical director at Cayuga Nursing & Rehabilitation Center, morning rounds are a must. As an eager but scatter shot gardener/lawn person, mowing, weed eating, planting optional, but somehow putting off till tomorrow never works well. I am 83 years old, a mostly retired doctor, still active in the Free Clinic and Cayuga Ridge, and enjoy the activity needed to keep the grass down and the flowers up.

Spring is the best time of year for me. I look forward to warmer Cayuga Lake water so I can take my Sunfish out and marvel at how many colors the lake can be as I splash over it. I never tire of seeing Cornell and IC from the lake and feel grateful for the myriad ways they enrich our community. As a confirmed liberal, I am glad to be in an area that knows it is smarter than the alleged reality surrounding us. I am pleased to be in a community with a fine library, a great place for theater and music, and a welcome home for Planned Parenthood. I feel safe in a town with a hospital like Cayuga Medical Center. During the past two months, I have had a coronary stent, and my wife has had a hip replacement — both done with consummate professionalism.

It may be the spring day, the ability to do a little yard work, and a satisfying day in the Free Clinic that makes this as good a day as any to write about. There have been, and I hope will be, many more as good or better. There will also be the gray February, the snow days, the chill rain when we don't need it, and the dry days our gardens need rain. It will be that way almost anywhere one lives. I am glad I am spending my days here on West Hill, terrible traffic and all. ■

Jud Kilgore is a retired physician of internal medicine and lives in Ithaca.

The Minuses of Living in Tompkins

Annoyances find their way to Ithaca

By JODY EARLE

I'm traveling through my senior years, and the present times cause me some mini and major annoyances. I wonder how many of my following pet peeves will be issues in the future:

- ◆ I wish for a more civil time where we share consideration, empathy, and sensitivity for others instead of finding fault with everything and everyone. Working cooperatively and generously aids reaching common goals, and we must set goals.
- ◆ I hope for medical care to be more user friendly, more affordable, and less driven by insurance regulations. Sick people are struggling with their maladies and shouldn't need to struggle with an elaborate medical care maze.
- ◆ We should all try more frequently to engage in personal conversation without just relying on electronics, partial sentences, incorrect spelling, and minimal eye to eye contact.
- ◆ The frenzied hustle-bustle of a jam-packed life leaves us without a sense of calmness, serenity, or contentment. The quickest way is not always the best way. Take time for family, friendships, leisure, curiosity, and listening.
- ◆ I want our political leaders to speak about what they hope to do instead of telling me all that is wrong with their opponents. If they act more respectfully, they will earn our respect.
- ◆ I find that I have minimal patience for those who litter, vandalize property, are wasteful, drive impaired or while using a phone, or are lazy and bored.
- ◆ I wish to have less junk mail, phone solicitations, and use of plastic water bottles.

- ◆ I want no magazine fold-out pages or inserts or half size newspaper pages which make it impossible to easily hold my reading material.
- ◆ I would discontinue the manufacture of glassware with bottoms that collect water while in the dishwasher rack.
- ◆ Merchants should be glad that I selected their establishment in which to shop, and in return they should offer me their best price without requiring coupons, memberships, bonus points or any other gimmick; just be glad I chose their place to spend my money. I also want no advertiser shouting unless there is an emergency. ■

Jody Earle lives in Freeville.

Good boots are necessities

By CLAUDIA LAZZARO

I realized that I have spent almost half my life in Ithaca, from the time I arrived in August 1980, an enthusiastic assistant professor at Cornell after five years of temporary jobs in California. Although I grew up in New Jersey suburbs of New York City, Ithaca was a shock: no cities anywhere near, very limited shopping, long winters, springs that went by in a flash, and summers that always start late, and the grey, endless grey days, winters wearing practical boots for months on end, a necessity to get out of the car in the mushy parking lot and across unshoveled paths. But on good days, bright, sunny, and blue skies, summer or winter, it is truly gorgeous, glorious in the spring, spectacular in the fall. Looking out the window at home this magnificent spring, I remark every day how beautiful it is. As now I often look both back on life lived and forward, thinking of what else I want to accomplish, my attachment to Ithaca, its beauty, calmer lifestyle, and nature, has grown deeper. ■

Claudia Lazarro is a professor in the College of Arts & Sciences at Cornell University.

It's tough sharing a car to get around town

By DIANNE FERRISS

A few weeks ago (on April 23rd, to be exact), I had a car accident right in the intersection by Purity Ice Cream and Za Za's Restaurant. My car was totaled when I was hit by another car, which also sustained significant damage, although no one — thankfully — was hurt.

This began our (my son and I share a car) deliberations about whether to buy another car. Not knowing whether I would ever want to drive again, but also knowing we needed access to a car for our weekly shopping at GreenStar, etc., we decided to try Ithaca CarShare. I expended several hours getting us signed up and approved and felt good about doing it.

Ithaca CarShare is just what it says: people living in Ithaca share some cars, which are parked at various places around town, that can be borrowed to provide needed transportation. It's a wonderful system that covers the maintenance, insurance, and gasoline for about 20 cars shared by folks in the community for a monthly fee and "rental" charge based on the miles driven.

Unfortunately, during our second carless week, my son sprained his ankle, which meant he was unable to ride his bike to the bus stop as planned and had to call on the help of neighbors. (Another wonderful system instituted in Ithaca is the addition of bike racks on the front of TCAT buses, which would have allowed him to get to and from work every day up on South Hill.)

We gradually realized that going without a car was severely constraining life as we knew it. Although I was accustomed to walking and taking the bus to do lots of things (it's one reason I live downtown), making numerous additional trips on top of my two daily dog walks tired me more than I had anticipated. Because I have fibromyalgia, this became a problem for me.

So, just for fun, I decided to look for a used car on Craigslist, a national online system for advertising goods and services, with a "branch" in Ithaca. The first one I noticed — a 2002 Subaru Forester with just 53,000 miles on it — looked very promising. I called the number and had a delightful conversation with the man selling the car; we kept finding these strange parallels in our lives and began to feel that this car purchase was "meant to be." Thus began a 3-day odyssey of buying a car from Cortland that we hadn't seen or driven until we went to pick it up, with fingers crossed that it would live up to our expectations. I am happy to report that we loved the car, decided to

purchase it, and are extremely pleased with it. For my son, it's definitely an improvement to have an SUV (though we're promised good gas mileage!), rather than a 2001 silver Nissan. And I am happy to have a dark blue car rather than a silver sedan like so many other people in Ithaca.

Today, May 17, 2013, I returned our "keys" to Ithaca CarShare without ever having used them, and a little bit sad that we weren't up to the challenge of going carless in Ithaca. ■

Dianne Ferris resides in Ithaca.

Like it or not, I am an Ithacan

By TOM M. PAOLANGELI

I was born here 57 years ago in the old hospital on Valentine Place. The converted hospital now houses college students. That is fitting. Hospitals are about life and death, and Ithaca's health is dependent on students. Ithaca inhales students in the fall, resulting in increased traffic, high rent prices, sales tax revenue, and jobs. It exhales them in May, giving townies a chance to find parking, tables without reservations, and a bit more room in the produce aisles at Wegmans.

Cornell University sits like a contented fat cat on East Hill, well aware that as the county's biggest employer, it calls all the shots. It owns a ton of tax-exempt land in Tompkins County, thus shifting the tax burden to everyone else. Oh, it gives a token sum for things like fire protection, care of roads, etc., but Ithacans still pay one of the highest tax rates in the nation.

Cornell brings culture to Ithaca. Music, lectures, sports, theater... Of course any event worth attending probably means you have to pick up tickets (if the students haven't claimed them all) at an on-campus location with no parking during normal work hours, but hey, they offered. Kind of...

And let's not forget the number two educational institution on South Hill, my alma mater, Ithaca College. (Motto - We're Number Two, So We Party Harder!) It may not be as large, or as prestigious, but that doesn't mean they can't charge more to attend. But its smaller size works in the townie's favor — you can actually attend cultural events fairly easily at IC. And my wife and I do.

The Cornell/IC dominance is a mixed blessing. Ithaca would be yet another boring, cultural-deprived, dying upstate town without the recession-proof education industry here. Hey, low paying jobs in a high tax, high rent town are better than no jobs in a low tax, low rent town. Other upstate cities have been devastated when the manufacturing base shifted south and overseas. Ithaca also lost most of its old-school manufacturing (Morse Chain, National Cash Register, Ithaca Gun.), but close proximity to Cornell has helped spur a growth in small high tech firms (Advion, Kionix, etc.)

People here are passionate about their pet cause. They have an opinion and you deserve to hear it! Unlike most surrounding counties, Democrats outnumber Republicans, so mostly what you hear

about reflects liberal ideology. We're way more Maddow than Limbaugh. I suppose there's a welcoming place in the world for right-wing-nut, gun-toting anti-government whack jobs, but it ain't Ithaca. Not that a few such folk aren't here; they're just vastly outnumbered. However, if you're a left-wing, anti-gun, anti-drone, anti-government whack job, well, there's a street corner reserved for you.

So in general we're over-educated, over-taxed and underemployed. Me? What did I do with my BS in Cinema, '78? Well, I've worked for Cornell at various times, showing films to ILR students or editing bird song tapes for researchers. Other jobs in Ithaca involved selling real estate, playing in rock bands and running sound companies. My present employment is with the county government, ensuring our election process goes off without a hitch. It's admirable, important, civic-minded work. It's also rather tedious and not much of a challenge after 10 years. So I write in my spare time, mostly humorous pieces, because I figure there's enough tragedy in the world — just watch the news — so I'll try to bring some laughter.

And Ithaca is family. My parents were born here, and a lot of my extended family still resides here. That counts for a lot, and partly explains Ithaca's magnetic pull on me. I like that I really know this place, that I have serious history. I can remember downtown before The Commons, Triphammer Road before the Mall. I've visited the public library at three different locations. I've seen neighborhoods cycle from families to elderly to students and back to families again. Fifty years of physical environment changes are available for recall in my mind.

I didn't have any choice; I was born here. But the few times I've ventured away there was always a reason to return. A lot of the rest of the USA holds little appeal to me. You can keep your crowded big cities, or your desolate flat plains, your arid desserts or any place even colder than here. I once drove across the US and couldn't imagine living anywhere along the way until I reached Seattle. Rolling green hills, lots of trees and water — sound familiar?

Even now I try to plot an escape, based on needs Ithaca can't fulfill, like a good job and warm weather. But so much of my life, my soul, my being has been crafted here. I'll always remain an Ithacan at heart. It's too late for anything else.

Like it or not, I am an Ithacan. I mostly like it. ■

Tom Paolangelì resides in the Town of Danby.

Neighborhoods

Halloween brings a special glow to Trumansburg

By KATHY MAY

One of the best nights of the year for village living is Halloween. Each year in tiny Trumansburg, the whole village comes alive with families of moms, dads, kids, aunts and uncles, cousins and dear friends celebrating imagination and make believe.

Our porch plays a prominent role in the celebration, and there's no better place to be on this special night. Drove of kids from near and far, from the outskirts, from neighboring towns and even some from Ithaca come to T'burg to enjoy dress up and make believe. The red carpet gets rolled out for everyone.

Having moved to the village some years ago from a place in the country, we were warned by our neighbors early on to be prepared for hundreds of kids on Halloween night. Having come from the outskirts, where we were lucky to have 10 kids on Halloween, we had some doubts that we'd see hundreds, but we decided to do as instructed. Candy, especially the good stuff like Hershey bars, Reese Cups and Snickers, is not cheap. We stopped at \$100 worth.

We called our friends to invite them to join us for the evening, to see a spectacle and to help hand out candy. We planned a simple potluck dinner and without realizing it at the time, started a tradition that continues to this day.

We decorated the front porch with spider webs and ghoulish ghosts hanging from the ceiling, candles flickering in the darkness and eerie music from beyond. Some friends came dressed in full costume, others in their work clothes — playing themselves in a make believe world. Sometimes it's too hard for grown-ups to check their identity at the door.

The kids started coming and the doorbell rang incessantly from 6 o'clock until we ran out of candy at 7:30 p.m. There was a steady stream of ghosts, goblins, witches and mummies. Barb and Steve and the girls, Nanny and Ben, Pat and John, Paul, Linda and David all came to spend the evening sitting on the porch, handing out candy and enjoying all the creative costumes.

What started that first year continues and grows with each year, and we wouldn't miss the chance to celebrate 'til all hours playing dress up with families spending time together. Halloween in T'burg village is a holiday that reaffirms the best of what it means to be a kid growing up in small

town America. It's heartwarming to see whole families out for an evening stroll, playing make believe and having fun.

To this day, people talk about Halloween in the village. They anticipate for weeks in advance what they will be and who they will become for just one night. The youngsters who came in the early years are now grown and have transitioned from dressing up for candy to handing out the candy. We saw this happen in our own gathering, where the kids grew up and preferred to hang with the adults on the porch. I wonder how long it will take them to realize that we porch-sitters would rather be among the little ones — all dressed up and fantasizing to be a kid again growing up in small town America.

You see everything on Halloween night. The little ones with trepidation and wonder, the older kids bold and using pillowcases for bags, calculating just how much more candy they can collect if they use two different masks to hit the same house twice. We watched it happen one year as Batman came to collect the first handout and then disappeared behind a nearby bush to switch masks, coming back as Count Dracula. I guess we'll always have vampires.

Towards the end of the evening at 7:30 p.m. or so if it's a school night, we end up giving handfuls of candy away just so we won't be tempted with overindulgence for the next week or so. We tell the last of the kids to help themselves and to take as much as they want. And, they can't believe their good fortune and for just a split second they are going for it. But then, we hear their parents speak up and say, just a few, say thank you, say Happy Halloween. And, they do.

We can't wait for this Halloween. Maybe this year I'll leave the other grown-ups sitting on the porch and I'll join the goblins out on the street. I'm not that into candy but the treat is in the make believe for one night as a kid growing up in small town America, safe, all dressed up, with mom and dad, sisters and brothers in tow, wanting for nothing but a little sugar. ■

Kathy May lives in Trumansburg.

Growing some greenspace in the wild West End

By ANNE MARIE WHELAN

I missed participating in the first Great Ithaca Write-In — that was two months after my daughter was born; and this baby did not want to be put down despite it being one of the hottest summers on record. Now she's 25 and living in Brooklyn, and I have a little more time.

I still live in the same house that she grew up in on West Court Street in the West End of Ithaca. It's now nestled in the middle of the highway median between north and south Route 13, but back then Route 13 was not a divided highway and trees still lined the sidewalk on Fulton Street, which is now Route 13 South, but was then a quiet side street. In the late 80s the divisive debate over what to do to untangle the Octopus broiled over. It eventually ended with the compromise of the one-way pair for Route 13 and two new bridges over the flood control channel. Thankfully there is not an overpass roaring over the Cayuga Inlet as some had proposed, along with a four-lane highway on West Hill. One day we returned from vacation and all the trees on Fulton Street and the last block of West Court Street were gone. We endured several years of construction noise and dust. The pounding to tear up the street caused fractures in the foundation of my house. Fortunately insurance covered the damage and the new sewer lines prevented future flooding. The neighborhood has slowly been healing as the new trees grow, but it's still a neighborhood scattered with blight — vacant and run-down properties.

It may not be obvious to the thousands of drivers going through the neighborhood, but there is a lot of green space here on the median. When I bought this property with my ex-husband in 1986, I was drawn to the deep sunny yard and envisioned an urban paradise. Four old peach trees graced the property. Three survived for a few more years providing us with the most delicious peaches I've ever tasted. They were planted by a previous owner, Cesar Capucci. An acquaintance, who was a friend of his daughter Ann Marie, remembers seeing him plant some sticks in the ground when she was a child, and she was doubtful when he said they were going to grow into peach trees. He also had chickens to the chagrin of his neighbor Frank Gatch.

When Mr. Gatch died in 2001, after living there for over 50 years and raising three kids, one of whom, Ed Gatch, was Ithaca's postmaster at the time, we negotiated with the family to buy his house. We had shared a driveway and chats about our gardens over the fence for 15 years, and my partner Steve had his eye on the garage which would make an excellent workshop. Previous-

ly he was toiling away on his sculptures in our five-foot basement. We appreciate that the Gatch family worked with us to buy the house, even though a neighborhood developer was bidding on the property as well. The developer has been buying up properties on the block for years and then they often go vacant or are rented out but not kept in repair. It seems to be a long-term plan to eventually knock down houses and put up apartments.

Today we are continuing some of the old traditions of the Italians and other working families who lived here in the past — gardening, canning, and raising chickens. Soil and drainage are excellent as we stand upon an ancient marsh that was filled early last century; and the long growing season is the envy of friends who garden in the surrounding hills. In mid-May we're already eating abundant greens from the garden — the dandelions and garlic mustard weeds that others disdain; kale, radicchio, and spinach which we had covered with leaves to survive the winter; broccoli raab and wild arugula which re-seeded itself, as well as the thinnings from the lettuces, spinach and arugula I sowed in early April. We hope that in the future there is always some green space in the middle of this block in the wild West End. ■

Anne Marie Whelan resides in Ithaca.

Today my daughter told me she loved me and once again, I am humbled

By ROSEMARY ROWLAND

My day on May 17th, 2013 was actually a pretty great one. Weather, of course, was beautiful, which if you live here, needs no explanation. What made it so extraordinary was its simplicity. I have a wonderful husband, my best friend, and soon we celebrate our 39th anniversary. We parent our daughter who has cerebral palsy and my days are combined with hers. No longer a child, she is now an adult and life becomes more challenging as we all go through the aging process together.

A child with disabilities goes through a different experience than an adult with disabilities in Tompkins County. I have been frustrated, angry and exasperated beyond belief dealing with ignorance and cruelty, but I have also been reduced to tears by the kindness of individuals toward my daughter.

I am so proud of her and how she faces life. She is open to new opportunities and is sure that it will be a great experience, whereas, I hesitate — will I be able to do it? Will I look foolish? She is confident and sure of herself, wearing clothes that reflect who she is. I am always asking — how do I look in this, too fat, wrong color? She is never afraid to say no to what she doesn't want. I still try to please. She accepts disappointment with grace. I try hard on that one. She is the woman I have always wanted to be. She is my teacher.

I remember a time when she was very young and another mother of a child with disabilities asked me if she could talk. Being a very young and sensitive mother myself, I was insulted saying, "Of course, she can talk." She answered, "oh, you are so lucky. I would give anything if my daughter could tell me she loved me." I never forgot that lesson. Today my daughter told me she loved me and once again, I am humbled.

I am blessed to have work I love. Being the deputy historian of Newfield I get to "do history". Currently, researching women's history of Newfield is taking up my time. This research leads me to questions and understanding of women's roles with special interest of the mothers of children with disabilities. How did they cope? What did they think? How did they feel when they realized

something was amiss? Last century, children born like my daughter were “put away” in asylums or schools for “feeble” children to be forgotten. It is heartbreaking to read or imagine. How I wish there were diaries or letters left behind to shed a light on their world, but those situations were covered up and hidden many times.

I am glad my daughter has a different life, and I hope things will be even better and more inclusive decades from now. My part will be to start documenting our experience for those future mothers to read some day.

So, all in all, today, May 17, 2013 was simple but exquisite. ■

Rosemary Rowland resides in Newfield and is the author of Women as Bright as Stars: The 19th Century Women of Newfield, New York.

Our life in a cold-water flat

By ALFRED DIGIACOMO

I served in Europe during World War II and was discharged in November 1945. I had been a grocery clerk but with the G I Bill I wanted to go to college and get a degree. However, my application for college was rejected as I had a business diploma from high school. Noting the advertisements for architectural draftsmen in the paper made me decide to pursue that profession. I enrolled in drafting school in February for a 9-month course in architectural drafting.

On January 9, I took my sister Carmella to the movies and as we entered the lobby a coworker of my sister and a former high school classmate named Mary O'Brien and her mother were coming out. We stopped to talk, and my sister said to Mary "You remember my brother?" Yes, she did and then we went our separate ways.

Later, I thought about our meeting and on January 27, I called up Mary and asked her for a date.

We went to the movies together and started dating. I finished school in November and found employment as an Architectural Draftsman with a local architect at a salary of \$35.00 a week. I was then able to meet Mary for lunch. We dated and talked on the phone. We did a lot of walking home from the movies as we did not have a car.

One night in June when we were walking home from the Movies, I asked Mary to marry me. When she recovered from the surprise she said yes. We got engaged and set Oct. 11, 1947 as the date for our wedding. We started looking for a place to live but with so many ex-service men getting married there was a shortage. We finally found a house that had been newly renovated and were able to rent the space on the second floor for \$40 a month. Mary was earning \$40 a week, so we together with my \$35 we had \$75 to live on each week.

The owner of the apartment had purchased at a tax sale and it was newly refurbished with plaster walls and a bathroom added to the north side of the house directly opposite the stair. We have three rooms. On the east side is the kitchen and a bedroom with a large walk-in closet. On the other side of the stairs is the living room. At the bottom of the stairs is a small entrance lobby where we kept the ice box my mother gave us. In the winter we use a window box. The space downstairs is also a rental.

The kitchen has a cast iron double sink with one deep sink for washing clothes. There is a clothes-line running from one of the bedroom window to a pole in the front yard. The first floor has a heating system, but we do not. It is a cold-water flat, and we must provide the heat. The landlord has installed a concrete base for a stove and had a gas line installed to the second floor. There is no hot water, but in the corner next to the stove is an upright 30-gallon hot water tank with a side-arm gas water heater piped to it. All we had to do is light it.

We now had to purchase a stove to provide heat. We answered an advertisement about a gas and coal stove for sale from the second floor of a house. We purchased the stove for \$50, and with the aid of several strong friends, we moved it from that house to our new apartment.

The stove had both gas jets and a coal burning section that we used for heat in the winter.

We settled in after our honeymoon and soon found that the house was not insulated so in the winter it was cold. In the winter months the kitchen stove did not throw out enough heat to use the living room, so we kept the door closed to keep out the cold. And the bathroom was cold exposed on three sides on the north side. Visits to the bathroom were kept short in the winter and bathing was even shorter. In the morning as Mary was closest to the kitchen, she would hop out of bed and run into the kitchen, shake down the ashes and dump new coal on the fire and then hop back into bed until the space warmed up. In the summer, it was a sweat box.

We needed a screen door to help ventilate the upstairs. The landlord dropped one off, but I had to trim and cut it to fit the opening.

We spent two summers and three winters in that apartment. In 1950 with the assistance of the GI bill we were able to purchase a two-bedroom home. ■

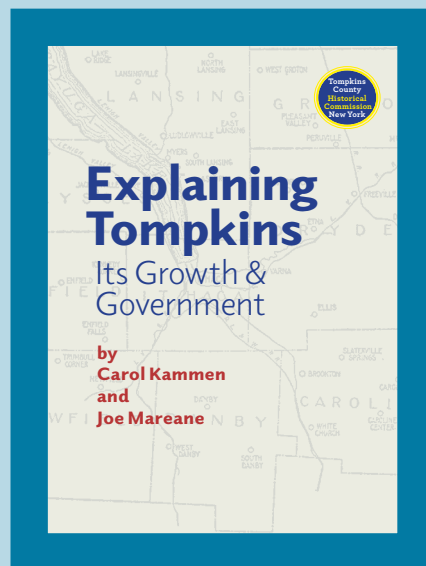
Alfred DiGiacomo resides in Ithaca and worked as a senior architect and manager for Cornell Architectural and Engineering Services from 1980 to 1993.

Meet your neighbors.

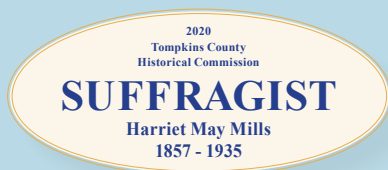
Dip into *Living in Tompkins* and see what they have to say about life, love, leaving and returning, joys and sorrows of living in Tompkins County.

Find your neighbors living in a cold-water flat, standing in the fish line or walking through the aisles at the book sale; greet them as they move to Danby, live amid a garden in the West End, or find comfort in the beauty and birds at Greensprings Natural Cemetery in Newfield.

The county Legislature created the Tompkins County Historical Commission in 2018 to promote researching the past and creating ways of making history visible to residents. Publishing well-researched pamphlets was the first goal of the commission but other means will also be used. A video presentation of county history is planned.



The county began its pamphlet series with *Explaining Tompkins*, a book about the geographical and governmental origins of the county we live in today.



Oval markers have already gone up around the county to honor those unsung people among us

in the 1890s through 1920 who stood up for expanding our democracy to include women in the voting process. Those white markers honor Suffragists, both men and women. A pamphlet explaining their actions accompanies them and is available where the plaques are seen.