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Magazine

June, 2016

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720 E. Second St.
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(810) 233-7459

Web Site: eastvillagemagazine.org
E-mail: eastvillage@sbcglobal.net

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Commentary *Only in Flint: where they set the water on fire*

By Paul Rozycki

"But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.

"Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."

"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.

"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."

..... "Have I gone mad?" said the Mad Hatter.

"I'm afraid so, but let me tell you something, the best people usually are." said Alice.

– Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

In a year when Donald Trump is the all but certain nominee of the Republican Party, Hillary is being given a run for her money by a 74-year-old socialist, and the Chicago Cubs are in first place, perhaps nothing will seem odd or strange. But in Flint we're doing our best.

I suppose all cities have problems and crises from time to time. But leave it to Flint to top them all and enter either the twilight zone or the world of "Believe it or Not." And sometimes it takes just one small incident to underline the strangeness of it all.

Consider the following, somewhat random, features of the Flint water crisis.

It would only have taken \$100 per day of the right chemical to treat Flint River water and avoid the whole water crisis.

Perhaps as many as a dozen governors, mayors, emergency managers, department heads and scientific experts have had a hand in creating the crisis, yet we still don't really know who's really at fault. And most of them blame each other.

While the crisis has produced its share of villains (see above) it has also produced many good leaders who had the courage of their convictions and were willing to stand up for the people of Flint.

By most measures Flint has the nation's highest water rates, yet some are projecting that those rates will double in the next few years.

After years of preparation and nearly \$300 million in construction costs, Flint is having second thoughts about joining the Karegnondi pipeline.

One of the water distribution sites had to shut down for a short time because of gunfire in the surrounding neighborhood.

Six months after a mysterious break in at City Hall, where files related to the water crisis "might" have been taken, a private security company has offered to upgrade the security in the building.

Two of the experts on the Flint water crisis, Virginia Tech's Marc Edwards and actor Mark Ruffalo, are now in a dispute

over whether or not we can bathe in Flint water. For all the distrust Flint citizens have of the experts, now we have a new dilemma – can I take a shower tonight?

Just as funds begin flowing into the city, there are charges, accurate or not, that the mayor diverted funds intended for the water crisis to her own personal account. Some donors are having second thoughts.

Within a week or so both the president of the United States and Snoop Dog visited the city to offer support – the most recent in a long line of celebrities, athletes and politicians who have touched base in Flint. Yet, the state legislature is still trying to decide if "the check is in the mail" to rebuild Flint's lead pipe system.

But, for all its troubles, the Flint community has come together in remarkable ways. Many of those who have come to Flint to observe, study and assist, have been impressed by the spirit and energy of those they have met and worked with.

Dozens of panels, hearings, forums and presentations have been well organized and well attended, possibly making Flint citizens among the best informed on the details of water.

The city made famous or infamous in "Roger and Me" 30 years ago, is now known as "the City that poisons its kids." But many in the arts community have successfully adopted the water issue as a vehicle of both protest and creativity.

Yes, all of those things are depressing, hopeful, surprising, unsettling and worrisome, but leave it to Flint to beat its own record for "Believe it or Not" happenings.

Of course we all know that we are in the midst of a water crisis that is garnering national attention and generating more bottles of water than we can count.

We also know that as the city's population declines, houses are abandoned and left to decay.

And all too often those decaying houses are tempting targets for arsonists and vandals who practice their own form of

(Continued on Page 5.)

Cover: Guess



Photo of the Month

Photograph by Edwin D. Custer

"We are better together": Social justice in black and white

By Bob Thomas

Seemingly different as their backgrounds, Beecher black pride and Northside Chicago white privilege, Artina Sadler and Tracie Kim share a common passion for social justice. They teach a course titled "Cultural Competence in Health Care" at UM-Flint where they have been teaching colleagues for 11 years. They have become friends.

In conversation with each other and an audience of 25 at the Flint Public Library May 25, they traced their individual journeys to becoming friends and how their mutual goal of social justice has been affected by their friendship and how the friendship has deepened their commitment to social justice.

"So how can the dynamics of a cross-racial friendship move us forward for social change? That's really the crux of what we're getting at tonight," Kim said.

The conversation was a continuation of the Tendaji Talks sponsored by Neighborhoods Without Borders (NWB). Tendaji W. Ganges (1948 - 2015) was one of the cofounders of NWB, whose goal is dismantling systemic and institutional racism. The talks commemorate his life and work.

Sadler and Kim are all about outing systemic and institutional racism. But despite their common interest in social justice, the path through a cross-racial, cross-cultural friendship was rocky.

"It was anything but an organic process," said Kim. "There were no rules to this road."

Sadler talked about the need to share our stories, but, she said, you have to "tell the

truth when you tell your stories. That is what is necessary. If you don't understand where I'm coming from, that's a problem."

Kim said she came to understand that "in a cross-racial relationship, trust is definitely not given; it's not automatic. It's earned. And it's earned over time. You have to keep coming back to the table. You have to be willing to change."

Both women praised the power of a cross-racial friendship because it empowers a change that exposes and destroys the Big Lie, they said, that whites are the superior people, a lie that remains very much alive and kicking in racially – and culturally – divided America.

"Because the lie lives on," Kim said, "we tend to live in fear. We might not acknowledge this fear, but the fear can take many forms. There's a palpable fear when people in Grand Blanc think about coming to Flint, into those neighborhoods. The fear that people of color will take our jobs, our security, and even rob us of our nostalgic way of life."

But the fear for whites is temporary, Kim said, because they can escape their racism under the systemic umbrella of the Big Lie.

Black fear is different, Sadler said. "Can I be honest with a white person and what are the consequences? What is the risk? Racial protection is minimal. Black fear is seen as trying to be white."

One of Kim's most difficult hurdles in her friendship with Sadler was the dis-

mantling of her white blindness by Sadler's black perspective and history.

"History provides foundations for good relationships needed in advance to support social justice work," Sadler said. "The intersection of history and self-awareness is where social justice work begins. If you don't understand history, you are not going to be able to actually structure yourself so you can move forward."

"When people of color don't know about history, we don't have context for why we see things the way we do. It makes us prone to see things as personal instead of relation-

(Continued on Page 5.)



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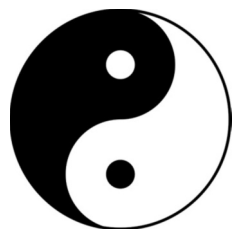
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... Justice

(Continued from Page 4.)

al,” she said.

“So, it’s not just a system of racism, it’s me. And when we don’t understand history, we don’t see the connectivity between the things that happened then and the things



that happen now. And that is detrimental to us. We grow isolated and self-destructive and self-defeating. We hurt ourselves and our families, reinforcing and passing

on the stereotypes that have constrained us. History is important for everybody.”

For Kim, “hearing the real stories” created an even bigger fear. “Exchanging perspectives is a scary place to be because you don’t know what replaces it.”

As for disappointment, Kim said she echoed many of her students of white privilege in stating, “We feel as if we’ve been lied to about life.”

Cognitive dissonance often results from such cultural shock, Kim said. But she and Sadler persevered because they kept coming back to the table.

Kim recommended “a really, really good book for white people” by Robin D’Angelo, *What Does It Mean to Be White*.

The book explores “the fragility of whiteness,” defined as “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include emotions like anger, fear, guilt and behaviors like argumentation, silence and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, reinstate white racial equilibrium.”

Paraphrasing something she heard from Tendaji Ganges, Sadler said, “Oppression is a double-edged sword; you cannot wield it without being cut yourself.

“White fragility is the consequence of white privilege,” she added. “This is why it is so difficult to have honest, cross-racial conversations. White people have a very difficult time hearing the meat of the matters of the history of our country. White people don’t know what they don’t know. In order to move, we have to understand our respective roles in the process.

“People of color, white people cannot learn what they need to know without you.

“White people, you cannot fully comprehend or progress in social justice work without a person of color in a significant position in your life because you need somebody to talk to, to bounce stuff off. You need somebody to clarify, to help you see other perspectives.

“You both need to see other perspectives, to help each other. You can’t learn in isolation. Iron sharpens iron. You have to realize

that we are better together. When we can’t come together, everybody suffers. We couldn’t be who we are without everybody.”

Kim said that had she not had Sadler and her family in her life, she “couldn’t challenge stereotypes as authentically. I couldn’t challenge what white people throw at me; what the media throws at me; what my family throws at me. I am able to speak with confidence now after having had these difficult conversations.”

Sadler challenged the audience with two questions: “What kind of world do you want for yourself, for children, for your grandchildren? And what are you going to do to make it happen? Go forth and do.”

An audience member commented that “it sounds like in your relationship what you two found was beyond physical appearance. You found essence. You found the very element that we are as human beings. It sounds like you had the opportunity to recognize yourselves in the other person.”

As Kim put it, “It’s a true friendship in black and white.”

The Tendaji Talks, held at FPL on the first Tuesday and third Thursday of each month at 6 p.m., are community conversations profiling systemic racism and the African American History of Flint. The first four of the Tendaji Talks are now available on YouTube thanks to Justin Brown, a young Flint filmmaker.

EVM staff writer Robert Thomas can be reached at captzero@sbcglobal.net.

... Only

(Continued from Page 3.)

urban renewal by setting them afire. Yes, our arson rate is high, but unfortunately it’s a common occurrence in many declining cities with empty houses and buildings. The plume of smoke on the horizon has become an all too familiar part of our landscape.

But leave it to Flint to go one step further and have someone try to set the water on fire. According to news reports, the Greater Holy Temple Church of God in Christ was collecting water for their north Dort Highway neighborhood. Then they smelled smoke and discovered that someone had set fire to the water bottles behind the church. It was the second time it had happened. Yes, arson is all too common in Flint. But setting fire to WATER? Unless I missed something in my high school chemistry class, isn’t that what they use to extinguish fires?

(Some thought that the sun shining through the water bottles may have caused the fire, but, on investigation, that seems unlikely, though it is possible. Heat

from the sun could also degrade the plastic or encourage bacteria. So, just in case, it’s a good idea to store bottled water out of the sun or under a tarp. Another strange element to this bizarre story.)

Just when you think you’ve heard it all. Other cities have high crime rates, declining populations, empty houses and high poverty rates and may face problems with their own lead pipes.

But leave it to Flint to set fire to its water.

Believe it or not.

Paul Rozycki is a retired professor of political science from Mott Community College. He has lived in Flint since 1969 and has been involved with and observed Flint politics for many years. He is author of Politics and Government in Michigan (with Jim Hanley) and A Clearer Image: The History of Mott Community College. He can be reached at paul.rozenycki@mcc.edu.



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Sixteen local artists receive Share Art grants

By Stacie Scherman

Sixteen local artists recently received a total of \$60,000 in minigrants through the Greater Flint Art Council's (GFAC) community art funding program, Share Art Flint. Several of the recipients described their projects at a public sharing session at GFAC in May.

The purpose of Share Art Flint is to support innovative art projects in the city of Flint that address community issues, according to the program's website. The funding program targets individual artists who may not have access to other types of funding.

Desiree Duell, who received her second Share Art Flint minigrant this year, said, "I'm an independent artist, so I can't apply for nonprofit grants. That grant allowed me to do something independently that didn't need approval from an organization. That's the strength of the grant."

Other 2016 Share Art Flint grant recipients include:

- "The Air We Share," by Rod Campbell;
- "Art of Our Own," by Mike Naddeo;
- "I Am Here," by Craig Hinshaw;
- "Arte en el Parque," by Ana Vargas;
- "Arts at Vista," by Patrick Beal;
- "Arts Immersion Summer Camp," by Brittany Reed;
- "Branding & Marketing Master Class for the Modern Day Artist," by Kyonna McGhee;
- "Engagement in the Park," by Andy Ellard;
- "Flint Drop Fest," by Jerin Sage;
- "Gallery on the Go," by Sandra Branch;
- "Hands of Praise Deaf," by Melicia Scott;
- "Illuminate Flint," by Hannah Kovalchek;
- "Phenom Fire," by Traci Currie;
- "Stories in the Park," by Roshanda Womack; and
- "The Brennan Project," by Michael Pea.

Share Art Flint has awarded minigrants every year since it began in 2012 with most of its financial support coming from the Ruth Mott Foundation. According to Suzanne Lossing, Share Art Flint grant coordinator, 2016 could be Share Art Flint's last year. "I was told that the Ruth Mott Foundation will be allocating their funding resources to help address the top issues. The arts was not one of the top concerns," Lossing said.

The Ruth Mott Foundation recently released its new strategic plan for 2016-2020 that focuses on the north end of Flint and includes four priority areas: youth, public safety, economic opportunity, and neighborhoods. The foundation held a series of community meetings with over 500 Flint community members, and community health and the arts ranked too low to be included in the four priority areas, according to its website.

"I was told by my grant contact at the Ruth Mott Foundation that if GFAC

would like to put together a proposal to see how the arts could address one of the [four] issues using the arts, they would consider the proposal," Lossing said.

Duell said she is disappointed that the grant may not continue next year. "It's unfortunate because I feel like the strength of doing art is that you have the freedom and the vision to do things no one else is doing. There are very few opportunities here for individual artists."

Duell received her first Share Art Flint minigrant in 2015 for her "Body of Water" project that included community workshops and installations at three locations: Woodside Church, the Hispanic Technology & Community Center and the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Flint.

At the workshops, participants of all ages created drawings about the water, and Duell drew silhouettes of several children. Duell then transferred the silhouettes onto platforms and attached empty water bottles with lights inside so that only the outline of the child would be visible. "The final installation was at city hall," Duell said. "From far away it looked like a river, but when you came up to it, it was actually children. It looked like a river of children."

Last year, it took Duell 170 water bottles to make one child, and six to eight hours to set up one installation. This year, Duell said that her project will be bigger, and instead of several smaller installations, she is thinking about doing one or two big installations at key places, including Free City Art Festival in Chevy Commons.

"We really need more grants to individual artists because artists can see things and bring up issues that people don't want to talk about," Duell said. "With 'Body of Water,' no one wanted to touch it because at that time it was a controversial subject. This piece wouldn't have been possible without that grant."

The 16 recipients were chosen out of a pool of 75 applications by nine reviewers. Lossing said that 53 applications were submitted on the last day of the application period (March 15), which overwhelmed the reviewers. She added that the reviewers had a hard time choosing finalists because of the strength and quality of the applications.

Reviewers change each year and are chosen with diversity in mind from of a pool of applicants, Lossing said. Reviewers score each application using a rubric that includes community engagement, community change, appropriate budget and collaboration. Funding allocation for each recipient is determined by the applicant's budget and requested grant amount, with a maximum award of \$5,000.

Grant recipients will conduct their projects in the city of Flint between May and October of this year. Events will be

updated on the Share Art Flint Facebook page and at GeneseeFun.com.

Staff writer Stacie Scherman can be reached at sscherma@umflint.edu.

... Moonlight

(Continued from Page 8.)

Now midway through their first June blooming time, the roses have flourished in my absence.

My SoCal winter getaway spared me several months of cold and ice, of dreary days of Great Lakes overcast. But I have missed early June and the moist black earth of the Midwest where the worms are as thick as my little finger.

I'm on Pacific coast time of course – my body says it's only six o'clock. The gardening gloves are still on the kitchen table where I left them in March. I pick them up and turn back to head out the front door.

I can already feel the give of the soft earth against my tug when I will grab a first handful of that barley grass.

EVM columnist Teddy Robertson can be reached at teddyrob@umflint.edu.

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CCNA hears parks and council-mayoral reports

By Kayla Chappell

More than 55 people attended the College Cultural Neighborhood Association's (CCNA) May meeting that concentrated on an expanded agreement for park maintenance between the City of Flint and Genesee County Parks and Recreation Commission. City issues were also a focus of the meeting, presented by Kate Fields, Fourth Ward City Council member. Another point of interest was the College Cultural real estate report.

Hamilton Dam coming down

Amy McMillan, director of Genesee County Parks and Recreation, summarized the now five-year agreement with City Council to maintain and operate parks within the city of Flint. The initial two-year agreement included the maintenance and operation of Max Brandon Park, Flint Park Lake, Thread Lake Park and McKinley Park.

She said the agreement still includes those parks but has now expanded to maintaining trails. A section of the Flint River Trail, which stretches from downtown Flint to Bray and Carpenter roads, will now be maintained by Genesee County Parks as well as sections of the Iron Belle Trail. The Iron Belle Trail begins in Detroit and ends in the Upper Peninsula.

Another addition to the agreement is the Riverfront Restoration Project which will include the renovation and restoration of the Hamilton Dam, Riverbank Park, and Chevy Commons in a way that will permit safety.

The Hamilton Dam, "the single most dangerous dam in the entire state of Michigan" according to McMillan, will be removed except for the "super structure" under the water. The new design will allow fish passage and water hydraulics, and the pedestrian bridge will be rebuilt to "better connect both sides of the community," according to McMillan.

"Riverbank Park will be the focus of

event programming downtown," McMillan claimed. Riverbank Park holds a large part of the project's budget and will open a variety of recreational opportunities to the city, such as fishing, community events, and will bring major events downtown.

Chevy Commons, formerly "Chevy in the Hole," is now being transformed from concrete to grass with a system of trails. McMillan said it is approximately a \$35 million project with \$18 million of work, mostly from grants, already completed.

City Council concerns

Kate Fields, Fourth Ward City Council member, attended the meeting outside of her ward and addressed the group, stating that "the decisions City Council makes affects the entire city — it affects all residents so I really consider myself as representing all of you folks, too." The Seventh Ward City Council member, Monica Galloway, was not in attendance.

Fields mentioned former city administrator Natasha Henderson's lawsuit and expressed concern that the settlement might wipe out the City of Flint's self-insured fund. Fields said she was disturbed to then hear that the local NAACP is filing a class-action lawsuit suing the City of Flint and the State of Michigan on behalf of all residents.

She voiced concern about what she characterized as the Mayor's reliance on unpaid counsel by Aonie Gilcreast, husband of Flint NAACP president Frances Gilcreast. She said the relationship seemed like a conflict of interest considering the NAACP action.

Her comments were not contested by those in attendance. After Fields' remarks, Keeler asked former Mayor Dayne Walling, who lives in the CCN, if he had any comments. Walling said, "The councilwoman gave good updates."

Two CCN residents, St. Paul's Episcopal Rector Dan Scheid and his wife Kate, walked out of the meeting at the end of Fields' presentation.

In a follow-up email to EVM, Scheid, a Weaver supporter, wrote, "I simply was too troubled to stay any longer. I was mad at myself. I didn't stand at this meeting to offer one voice, at the very least to request that we not litigate her alleged shortcomings in a meeting where no one from her administration was present to answer the charges."

CCNA President Mike Keeler said after the meeting that the association's policy is that it is open to visits by any Genesee County politician. He said Fields had spoken at other CCNA meetings, adding he has worked with her often and finds her "thorough."

A more detailed account of this item is available online at eastvillagemagazine.org.

Positive news for property

Local realtor Mark Fisher updated residents on the housing market in the College Cultural neighborhood. Fisher said, "When you look at our numbers, we look really good." The report shows an increase in home sales, from 37 active homes for sale in January to 23 this May. Not only are more homes being sold but the average price per square foot is up by ten dollars since January, he said. Sales statistics show the average selling price is also up from two months ago — at 92.5 percent of the asking price.

Fisher claims that water is still an issue but is not interfering with sales. Homes have an average of 76 days on the market, down from 81 in March, with inventory dropping 18 percent in the last two months.

The CCNA's next meeting is set for 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 15, in MCC's RTC Auditorium.

Staff writer Kayla Chappell can be reached at kachappe@umflint.edu. EVM Editor Jan Worth-Nelson contributed to this report. She can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.

"Happy Anyway" Flint book launches

By Jan Worth-Nelson



Happy Anyway: A Flint Anthology, a collection of 24 essays by 22 writers, all with deep Flint connections, is expected to be out this month from Belt Publishing, according to Scott Atkinson, a local writer, teacher and editor of the 184-page book.

Flint launch of *Happy Anyway* is scheduled for 7 p.m., Monday, June 27 at Soggy Bottom Bar. A number of readings and book signings will follow through the summer, Atkinson said.

Writers include Bob Campbell, Stephanie Carpenter, Sarah Carson, Connor Coyne, Will Cronin, Katie Curnow, Tracie Currie, Nic Custer, Emma Davis, Patrick Hayes, Edward McClelland, Layla Meillier, Sarah Mitchell, Andrew Morton, James O'Dea, Melissa Richardson, Teddy Robertson, Stacie Scherman, Becky Wilson, Eric Woodyard, Jan Worth-Nelson and Gordon Young. Local web designer Shane Gramling did the book design.

Their stories offer a complex range of Flint experiences, from accounts of a break-in and a subsequent quest through local pawn shops, to an opus about Flint basketball to facing down a gun-wielding street person, to a dubious recollection of a grandma's stories, to growing up on the Eastside, to an exploration of Glenwood Cemetery.

"I wanted real stories about Flint, whatever that may mean ... it can be a great place a live, it can also be hard," Atkinson said. "Flint has been worth listening to for a long time, so I hope this helps."

More information about the anthology is available on Amazon or through Belt Publishing, http://beltmag.com/belt_publishing/.

Belt Publishing, founded in 2012, publishes non-fiction with a focus on the Industrial Midwest. Other anthologies cover Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh and Youngstown, with upcoming titles featuring Akron and Buffalo.

EVM Editor Jan Worth-Nelson can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.

Village Life

Pulling weeds by moonlight

By Teddy Robertson

I got home late, a bit after 9 p.m., coming back in June to my house in Flint after a several months' sojourn in the south bay beach cities west of Los Angeles. My partner Dennis – an LA native – won't arrive until July.

I'll be on my own in Michigan for a while.

Dennis lives in Torrance, just over the hill from the Pacific coast. It's usually warmer than at the beach, but when I hike up the steep hillside behind his house I can see the ocean in the distance. This part of SoCal (as the media call it) is about as perfect a late winter getaway as a Michigander could have.

The climate is "temperate," also termed Mediterranean. What could be more perfect? Locals lament the lack of rain (or the threat of mudslides if rain comes), the sirocco-type winds called Santa Anas, and the long allergy season that starts in February. Potential earthquake drama lurks in the background, although people don't fret about it much. I heard on public radio that someone's developing a mobile app to sense tremors – users will know what area's shaking the hardest. Just check your cell phone as roof and walls collapse.

So the region has a climate – but not weather. At least by Midwest standards. The term "outerwear" is unknown and no one has a coat closet at the front door. Gutters and eaves troughs hang unattended; no one seems to clean them. Screen doors are

optional. The weather crawl rarely runs across the bottom of the TV screen.

The Torrance population boomed in the 1950s as the postwar aerospace and petroleum industries grew. New homeowners planted fruitless olive and pepper trees for shade. The small yards of two-bedroom houses accommodated citrus trees – lime, lemon, orange, or plum, avocado, and pomegranate. Water was no problem as the city utility grid expanded along with the population.

Today few residents tend the trees laden with abundant fruit in winter despite the last five years of drought. Plums, lemons and limes fall into the street to be mashed by traffic or roll under the cars parked on the pavement after everyone returns from work. Garages were long ago filled with stuff or turned into extra rooms.

Along walkways to old apartment buildings, tree roses still thrive. In a neglected corner against a faded stucco house, I'll see a blooming pink camellia bush, thick with glossy green leaves above patchy, jaundiced grass. Brilliant cerise bougainvillea drape their vines of papery flowers over collapsing fences. Mexicans bent beneath shoulder pack leaf blowers propel the dry olive and pepper leaves from one yard to another with the fervor of Zapata's army. Brittle and desiccated, the leaves never rot.

Landscaping in drought-era SoCal is all about native plants. Nurseries and websites educate gardeners; some water departments give credits for purchasing rain barrels. At area conservation sites guides explain native flora to hikers and birders. I'm trying to learn the varieties of sagebrush, toyon, blue elderberry and lemonade bush. But I have to say none of them seems very distinctive to me. Small spots of color come from lupines, sunflowers, poppies and primrose, and manzanita with its red bark. Subtle shades – or wan, depending upon your view – in contrast to the florid tropical imports.

In southern California, land of sand and clay, the dirt is a creamy tan color. Where bulldozers have gouged away hillsides, no striations of color or texture emerge in the carved earth. Its dry, light consistency sheds a powdery dust everywhere that natives seem not to notice.

Gardeners plant in pots, but the squirrels rummage in the container mix, scatter the ersatz soil. It's a hard go. Two years ago Dennis's landlady capped her sprinkling system pipes, poured pea gravel into the box hedge borders and then sprayed the gravel with a plastic coating. The shiny pebbles never move. Finally, last year she abandoned the lawn struggle and laid down a carpet of AstroTurf in her front yard.

In the alley behind Dennis' house there's a prickly pear cactus: *opuntia ovata*, one of the few naturally thriving plants and now some six feet high. A tight right turn with the

car and you can break off some of its flat spikey pads, the cladodes, or in Spanish, "nopales." I backed into the cactus myself once. Only an elderly Mexican lady respects the cactus' dignity; she trundles down the alley to pick its fruit when its yellow, orange, and pink blooms fade in late spring.

Stretching my legs after a five-hour flight, I walk up to my Michigan house and sense that it must have been a perfect day here, perhaps in the mid-70s. I've returned to a perfect Midwest evening – still and mild. No jacket needed; the air warms my skin like velvet. I breathe in the continental air, not yet humid, but heavy compared to the bracing Pacific coast. It's three days until the summer solstice.

Above my front porch the photocell outdoor lights flicker and hiccup, hesitant to commit to their nighttime task. It won't be really dark for another hour.

In the eerie half-light I can see the shrubs flourishing – an incandescent green sumac, spirea beginning to flower, phlox erect at attention but the blossoms not yet open. Against the garage siding the peonies lay prostrate on the grass, collapsed beneath the weight of their blooms.

Friends messaged me that May had been cool in Michigan, some rain but no sudden heat waves. Great weather for gardens. In the new front yard flower bed clumps of feathery wild barley grass (*hordeum murinum*) rise over a foot tall. Their mandorla tufts glow in the light of the not quite a half moon. Silent invaders in my absence. Days of weed-pulling are ahead.

Lugging my roller bag up the front steps onto the porch, I pass the window box with its wilted leaves – remnants from Home Depot's paltry assortment of tulips, daffodils and hyacinth. I resolve once again to order really big bulbs from Holland for next fall. Read up on late blooming tulips at the Michigan State Extension website.

The twist of my key in the door lock and clatter of the suitcase wheels across the loose metal doorsill that should be repaired – all sounds I've not heard for months now.

As I prop my suitcase up in the hallway, through the kitchen windows I can see the backyard. The orange poppies have come and gone, and now seed-filled rattle heads dangle from the crook of their tall stems. The lilac is finished too, its conical clusters of blossoms deceptively intact, but dead. Another loss.

But at the edges of the security light beam-ing from my neighbor's garage I can see the roses, twelve of them lined against the retaining wall. Three bushes are a decade old. Last year I battled black spot and mildew, sprayed their leaves with dish soap and baking soda. I wept when one of them developed twisted leaves and thorny stems, symptoms of the bizarre rosette virus. It was a summer of struggle.

(Continued on Page 6.)

INSOMNIA

By Grayce Scholt

Fingerlings of thought
race back and forth
through dark and light
turn this way, that--
and that is night.

When all the world's asleep
and is, except for here and there
where my poor body twitches,
itches in a kind of pain,
but it's not pain
no nomenclature, name
for what it is
for what remains
the snippets, glimpses, schemes--

the waves that roll
that crush the everlasting
comforters that once encircled
dreams.

Grayce Scholt is a retired English professor from Mott College who wrote art reviews for the *Flint Journal*. Her book of poetry, *Bang! Go All the Porch Swings*, is available online from Amazon. A personal narrative of the poet's life in Europe in the early 1950s, *Vienna, Only You*, is available at gscholt09@comcast.net. The author's new book of poems, *Night Song*, is available from Friesen Press (www.friesenpress.com) and Amazon.