

# Bradley Beach Library Summer Writing Contest 2021

## Animal Stories

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### A Not So Empty Nest

By Rosemary Venter

I was so sad when our new neighbors tore down the large green oak that shaded our deck. It grew on their property; so, of course, I had no recourse. I bought a large patio umbrella for shade but that umbrella had to be watched. Especially on windy days, I worried that it might blow away and hurt someone; so, I took it down.

I replaced the umbrella with a sun-setter awning. For that first summer it was delightful, cool and cozy and easily operated with a remote control. During the winter, I just zapped and the awning folded in on itself---Perfect.

Unbeknownst to me, that folded awning was serving another purpose. It also provided shelter to a group of birds, I don't know if they were sparrows or warblers but I could hear their morning chirps as I lay in bed. Sweet, I thought, until I went outside and saw the mess they made on my deck. It was full of bird droppings and stray feathers. I thought, "Not only were these birds living rent free, they did not even clean up after themselves."

One day I cleared them out by sweeping them away with a broom. But the next day they were back busily reconstructing, patiently rebuilding. I brushed them off again but noticed as I warily looked over my shoulder ... "Were they staring at me from that near bye bush?" I went into the house and peeked out through the window blinds only to see them regroup and begin again.

My friend suggested I buy pinwheels to scare them off. After I did this, I spied one of them hop near the pinwheel, hop again a little closer—it was obvious, that this bird knew the pinwheel was no threat and soon he or she told their pals; the nest was rebuilt.

Consulting the internet, I was duped into buying something called, “bird repellent”. It was a paste that arrived in a canister. I squeezed the bird repellent, which was sticky and unpleasant on the spot that the birds had chosen to occupy.

The sticky stuff just made a mess on the deck and it did not deter the builders. Next, I called Cornell, they have a hotline to help us urbanites with such matters. They suggested I buy mirrors, little disk like objects that were also easily found on the internet. I carefully placed these around the nest but the birds continued squatting. Then, I lay the mirrors down horizontally thinking as the birds flew over, they would see their own reflection and assume the spot was already occupied. This worked ---for about a month. Those clever homesteaders figured the mirrors were just another ruse.

This spring, especially in the early morning, I imagined I heard the peeps of little bird chicks. I allowed them to stay because I could not evict a family with little ones. The babies have probably flown away by now but there are still birds ensconced in my awning. Alas and alack, I have been defeated by a not so empty nest syndrome....., or was it by my bird brain?

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## **Muffins in the Box**

### **By Jack Gentempo**

Some years ago, when living in Manhattan, I called for my new date at her 6th floor apartment on 66th & Madison. She needed a bit more time to get ready for our restaurant reservation so she suggested that I sit for a few minutes. She pointed to a gray corduroy recliner. It was a small one bedroom apartment with bookshelves lurking above. I relaxed in this lovely chair and enjoyed the silence. Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, a cat landed on my shoulder like a ballistic missile. Now I understand that human beings can not levitate, but that happens to be

incorrect. I levitated at least a foot and thank God for my love of animals because if I had caught up with that cat I would have relocated him to the ground floor and not by the elevator.

Years later, happily married with 3 children, we moved to a farm in the Neshanic Station area of Branchburg Twshp, Somerset County, New Jersey. Originally 10 acres, we gradually increased it to 150 acres, excellent bottomland farmland near the Raritan River on which our tenant farmer grew primarily feed corn. We had a nine acre apple orchard which we maintained ourselves.

And we had pets, two dogs, a lab and a golden retriever and several cats. The lead cat was Muffins, grey with black stripes, a hunter if you ever saw one, and devastating to rabbits. But she was a very sweet cat and was loved by the kids. The dogs had great respect for Muffins. One fine day our 9 year old son decided to put Muffins into the freezer, for what reason we never figured out. Perhaps it was a strategy to protect his hamster. Problem was, he never told anybody and the freezer was not opened until the next day when our housekeeper, Jesse, arrived. So as best we can estimate, Muffins was in the freezer for 8 hours or so. When finally opened she jumped out, a little frigid but no worse for the experience.

Toward the end of our 18 year romance with four Pillars Farm, our home in Branchbure, we purchased a 20ft, intermodal shipping container for some outside storage. At the time there was a tremendous surplus of these containers so the price was unusually low. Today of course the reverse is true. Nonetheless our storage container was purchased for a purpose and one day I stowed quite a few furniture items and boxes in it. Unbeknown to me Muffins, our favorite cat, was asleep behind the boxes. So I closed the big container door, locked it, and returned to the house. Our kids took to wondering about Muffins, she was not back for her food. Sometimes she would disappear for a few days, but she'd always return. Anyway, one week later again opened the storage container and to my great surprise, out comes Muffins, her tail straight in the air, kind of haughty, and looks at me with an expression I can only describe as "where have you been Buddy". Muffins lived for several years after these episodes. We always remember our "Muffins In The Box", refrigerated or not. Can it be true that cats have nine lives. You bet.

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## **Chad the Tadpole**

**By Lois Kiely**

Chad the Tadpole lived in Sparkling Water Pond and his best friend was Francine Fish. Chad was happy most of the time, but sometimes he felt sad because the big frogs teased him. On those days Francine tried to cheer him up. One afternoon she came up with a special plan.

“Chad,” said Francine, “Why are you hiding behind that rock? It’s a beautiful day and we should be swimming around the pond.”

“I don’t want to go for a swim,” he grumbled. “Every time I do, Herby Frog jumps off his lily pad and pushes me around. He sticks his big tongue out and calls me names. I’m just going to stay right here and hide.”

“Chad, things never get better when you hide from them. If you will trust me, I have an idea I think you’ll like.”

Chad said, “No, I am embarrassed to have you see me.”

“But Chad, we are friends. You don’t need to feel that way around me. What’s the matter?”

When Chad swam out from behind the rock, Francine saw two bumps on the front of his body. Herby Frog caught sight of him and yelled, “Hey, there’s Chaddy, look at his funny tummy! He ate too many flies!” All the other frogs croaked and croaked at Chad.

Francine said, “Just ignore that bully, no one likes him anyway.”

“But look at me, I have bumps I didn’t have before. What’s happening?”

“Oh Chad, now you really have to trust me,” said Francine. “Let’s go for a swim and I will explain everything to you.” They swam way out to the middle of the pond.

“Francine, I have never been here before and it’s kind of scary. Where are we going?”

“Just trust me,” she said. “Don’t be afraid, you will be surprised by what you see and it will help you understand things about yourself.”

Suddenly, a tadpole with front legs swam by them. Chad was amazed, “Francine, did you see that? That tadpole has two front legs!”

Francine Fish smiled, “Yes, Chad. And look over there. What do you see?”

“Wow!” exclaimed Chad. “There’s a tadpole with four legs and a small tail? What is going on?”

“Chad, you are seeing other tadpoles going through changes that will turn them into full grown frogs. This is normal. “

“You mean that’s what’s happening to me? Will I become a frog?”

“Yes, Chad. Those bumps on your tummy are the beginning of legs. Soon you will grow back legs too. Your tail will disappear and you will become a frog, just like Herby. But I know you will never be mean or bully anyone.”

Chad said, “No, I wouldn’t act like that.”

“Are you feeling better now?” asked Francine Fish.

“I guess so, but I love my tail,” he said. “Do I have to lose it? It helps me glide through the water and swim really fast when we have races.”

“Don’t worry,” she laughed, “you will be able to swim just fine, and you can jump out of the water too. That’s something I can never do because I’m a fish. You’ll be able to hop around on the rocks and play in the grass. There are lots of fresh juicy bugs in the marsh, you’ll never be hungry.”

Chad thought about what she said. “That’s pretty neat isn’t it? But I wish you could hop out with me.”

“Don’t worry about me, Chad. I love being a fish. It’s so much fun swimming and diving in the water. And I promise you, we will always be friends. That won’t change. Good friends don’t need to look like each other or do the same things.”

And all that Francine told Chad that day did come true. He grew four legs and his tail disappeared. In fact, he turned into a handsome green frog with brown and yellow spots on his back. He could jump farther than all the other frogs, and his tongue was so long that he was able to catch three flies at once. Even Herby was impressed by that feat.

When it was time to select a new frog king, there was no contest. Herby and his pals were not even considered. All the frogs agreed that Chad should be the Frog King of Sparkling Water Pond, and he became the kindest and wisest king they ever had.

King Chad and Francine Fish remained loyal friends, even though she could not sit on the rocks and sun herself beside him. Every day she and Chad took a swim together, racing and splashing in Sparkling Water Pond. Chad never forgot how kind she had been when he was sad and frightened by Herby and his pals who bullied him. Now that he was King Chad, he made sure that the new tadpoles never needed to feel afraid of the older frogs.

Sometimes troublesome things can be worked out if you have a good friend to help you through them. You don't need to look like each other; you just have to trust each other. Friendship, trust, and loyalty will always guide you through difficult waters. Chad the Tadpole and Francine Fish discovered that in Sparkling Water Pond.

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## **ONE CURIOUS CAT, ONE MOUTHFUL OF FEATHERS**

**By Irene Maran**

My neighbor's daughter Elaine owned a sweet blue parakeet named Pete. The bird was given to her as a birthday present when she turned nine. From their first meeting, Elaine took the time and patience to teach her pal to say a few words. Pete's birdcage stood near the kitchen window where he could watch his feathered friends in the backyard. Within a year, the family pet learned a few short phrases which he often repeated. He welcomed everyone into the house with a familiar "Hello, I'm Pete and Goodbye, I'm Pete."

My cat Max was a frequent visitor in my neighbor's yard. He would lay on a lawn chair and watch the birds in the trees and also Pete from afar. I guess it was only a matter of time before Max introduced Himself.

One afternoon I watched my neighbors carry out lawn furniture

from the cellar into their backyard, preparing for the summer season. They began hosing down and cleaning chairs. Since they walked in and out of the basement multiple times, they purposely left the cellar door Ajar.

Max was as curious and mischievous as any other feline. He loved being outdoors sunning or chasing squirrels. Max sensed this opportunity to sneak into Elaine's house through the inviting cellar door. We all screamed loudly when Max came running up from the basement with Pete in his mouth. They had finally met. What could anyone say or do after witnessing such a horrific sight. We couldn't catch Max as he flew into the bushes with his mouth full of blue Feathers.

How did Max find Pete? Did he have a map or GPS in his possession, or was it purely by sight and sound? A happy afternoon suddenly turned into a disastrous one with this unexpected turn of events. Elaine cried hysterically. Her parents stood by, their faces frozen from the shocking occurrence. I couldn't believe my eyes that were fixed on Max whizzing by with his prey, and then focusing on the

screaming child who just lost her pet. I apologized profusely knowing this could never be fixed.

Max came home an hour later, rubbing up against my legs and purring as if nothing happened. There was a feather stuck in his fur. As far as Max was concerned, this was a natural occurrence. He had just been to an uninvited play date where he was the only one who played.

All that was left of Pete were his feathers scattered in the yard... nothing else. I hoped the end was quick and that the bird didn't suffer. I wondered if he had welcomed Max with his friendly "Hello, I'm Pete," although he never had the chance to say "Goodbye, I'm Pete." The following week, when the dust and feathers settled, Elaine, her mother and I made our way to a local pet store. We were sad yet excited to pick out a new bird for Elaine. I was thankful she didn't ask for a more expensive pet since I was footing the bill. She settled for a bird that looked like Pete instantly naming her Sweetie. We walked away with a happy child and new bird.

I encouraged Elaine to teach her new parakeet to bark like a dog instead of talking. Maybe that would discourage Max from trying to have another uninvited play date.