

# NEW INSIGHTS



[ 2004 ]

**D**ARN, THIS WILL BE A DEAD LOSS MORNING!  
I am volunteering for The Learning Disabilities Association's California Branch Annual Meeting here in the San Francisco Bay Area. My assignment is overseeing the room where Nancy Bell, of Lindamood Bell, is a speaker. Her company helps people with learning challenges. I have heard her before. The presentations are very dry, and the information never seems relevant to me. I know the basics about dyslexia. It is aggravating to be pigeonholed as a dyslexic with no real solution.

This room is packed. Attendees keep crowding in as Ms. Bell begins her presentation. Now that latecomers are settled, I have time to notice that she is drawing two circles, one in red and one in blue, on the pad of paper on the tripod. The red circle she titles, dyslexia, adding three common phrases to describe it, sounding out words, reading words, good vocabulary. Yup, I can do all of those.

What's she writing above the blue circle? Hyperlexia? What's that?  
Let's see what goes inside the circle. Visualizing and verbalizing!  
That's Greek to me!! Time to write down what she says as fast as I can!  
It might be important.  
Ms. Bell just shared  
The reason some people can't comprehend is because of their  
poor ability to visualize and then verbalize what they see.  
She just stated  
The cat has a pink tail that wiggles.  
Sounds silly to me!  
Now, she is asking for us to visualize this statement.  
I have a few words, a round cat, a long tail.

Ms. Bell just gave me a jolt: People with hyperlexia see those words  
and can decode them but don't see the details of the images  
that the word or combination of words make.  
Yes, yes, yes, that is me! I see the words but only the outline of a pink-  
tailed cat, not the details. Oh, my goodness, that could be me, my issue!  
Now, she is sharing for us gathered another shock  
That can be the reason you are not comprehending what you read.  
Wow, now I have something meaningful to explore.

Ms. Bell?  
She is packing up.  
Could I be hyperlexic even though I was diagnosed dyslexic  
twenty years ago?  
Yes. I suggest you consider being retested.  
Her characteristic dry, uninvolved manner slightly unnerves me  
and shatters my excitement as she asks  
Where do you live?  
San Francisco.  
There is a Lindamood-Bell office in San Francisco.  
She's gone. I follow, much like her, without any feelings.

Driving home, I keep asking: Is it possible there is an answer to my confusion? Is there a chance I might comprehend what I read? It isn't that I don't comprehend all that I read, but words, words, words eventually just become a blur and it's because I don't comprehend. My mind, feelings and senses are blank. My body is giving me a message. Fear. I feel frightened. I am very frightened. My body is shuddering! Gosh, why, why, why? I feel fear of repeating. Fear of hearing, once again, a solution that doesn't address my issues. A gnawing voice inside says: *Ann, don't be silly. All those adventures have made your dyslexic life less annoying.* Yes, true, it's just I wish there were a way to end the confusion. *Remember what Zoosh said: You may learn lots to make reading easier, but the experience will remain.* Grumpf! Whoops, I almost missed the turn off to the Bay Bridge, the one that is being repaired after the 1989 Earthquake.

Oh, look, there are the tall cranes building the new Bay Bridge into San Francisco. I love these bird-like sculptures with long legs, always in a different formation, lifting a strange looking piece into place. Wouldn't it be fun to spend a day with them? I would create different designs in the air and ask someone to photograph them. Thanks, birds; I feel better. My fear is gone. I am enjoying the glorious day. The sun is bright, the sky is bright light blue, the Bay water is bright dark blue dotted with white sails, all accentuated by the orange Golden Gate. Spectacular! San Francisco, you make me plain happy. You signify hope!

Whoops! Better pay attention. Drivers are crisscrossing to exit. The cars are pinched, everything is pinched, even my thoughts, down to the pertinent question, Am I ready to hear what Lindamood-Bell has to tell me? Gulp. No, I don't think I am.



I have just learned the man with whom I mis-stepped thirty years ago has been living in San Francisco and is divorced. I will write a letter and say hi.

It's odd, but now I am motivated to call Lindamood-Bell.



What a relief! The Lindamood-Bell office isn't grungy and dark like the dyslexia testing office in Washington DC twenty years ago. That was so depressing!

My nerves are a bit jangled. They are not helped by that woman, the one working on her computer on the other sofa. Something is clearly odd about her. She keeps chattering. She seems angry. No one is paying any attention to her. I am not comfortable here.

Oh, look at that adorable child. Can't be more than eight. Strange, he can hardly walk into the waiting room. He's blinking like he just woke up. No, No. The mother on the computer is offering him Halloween candy! The worst! How can she not know the negative effects of refined sugar? Lindamood-Bell needs to consider talking about diet with its clients. And they should have a rule that parents can't sit in the waiting room for hours while their children are working with counselors if they are going to be disruptive. Yes, I know I am jittery, but still.

Hello, my name is Jodie. Please come with me.

My jangled thoughts are grateful to be interrupted. We enter a small room furnished like a little girl's room with a round table, a tiny blue checkered tablecloth, four white painted chairs and warm incandescent light.

Jodie is friendly, very friendly. I feel better already. She seems keen to learn my story.

I discovered I am dyslexic twenty years ago. After listening to Ms. Bell at the conference last week I think hyperlexia is the condition I have.

Jodi starts drawing the same two circles Ms. Bell had done.

I go into fear and, oh dear, I am no longer with her. My brain just

chugged on somewhere else. She sees it  
Ann, most who come to Lindamood-Bell, be they adults and children,  
are fearful at first.

Would you read out loud this short paragraph? I gulp inwardly  
and tell my body to stay focused.

Yea, I got through it just fine. I think I did very well.  
Can you tell me what you learned in that paragraph?

I report.

Please, read the paragraph again.

I do so.

She asks again. Please report on the content.

I am bemused. Why is she asking me for this twice?

I have already reported the information! I comply.

Jodie lowers the boom!

Ann, you are only reporting half of the information that you read.

Nonsense, I thought.

We examine sentence by sentence. She's correct. She conjectures  
I might not be visualizing all the words when reading, which could  
explain why I am not able to report the details back to her. In an instant,  
the concept of visualizing and verbalizing became clear. I have to be  
able to visualize the word in order to say what I saw.

Jodie, I want to know more about my condition;  
please schedule a full set of tests.

Jodie warns me

Bring snacks. The tests could take five hours.

It's D-Day. I am being tested. But I am prepared. Brain Gym exercises  
have grounded me, and I have healthy snacks.

Each hour brings a different test and a different clinician.

I feel comfortable with these women who seem well-prepared  
and show concern for me. The vocabulary test went well; deciphering  
word opposites didn't seem overwhelming, sounding out words was kind  
of fun, oral reading was a breeze. I use the five-minute break each hour

to wolf down cheese and chocolate without refined sugar or leave the premises to move my car – only two-hour parking is available. We are near the finishing line, the fifth hour. Enter the comprehension test. I don't have the answers. I just don't get it. Yup, this is where my weakness lies. My enthusiasm plummets. One more exercise, a writing test. I am so tired I don't know what I am penning. I really don't care.

Freed and mentally exhausted, 24 Hour Fitness is my destination. The elliptical machine – legs moving up and down, up and down – renew my spirit. Physical movement always makes me feel better. Lindamood-Bell is a new adventure. Was today a beginning or an ending? I will know in ten days. Meantime, I am off to Denver and the Annual International Dyslexic Conference.



There are pluses and minuses in Denver. For the first time at this IDA conference, I was invited to speak at a breakout session. Twenty people showed up, interested in alternative approaches. After the IDA conference, I was invited to the NAASLN conference, an association which serves adults with special learning needs. They were very enthusiastic about what I had to say. Strangely, neither organization had any session on hyperlexia. When I brought it up, I was met with blank stares!



Hi Jodie, I have to admit I am a bit nervous this morning. Ann, it is normal. You have taken a big step in being tested. She opens her red folder with my Pre-Testing Summary results. I like that she is very organized and methodical as we review the scores of each test. I am really glad we are sitting in the little girl's room. It's comfortable here. Your phonetic awareness is at the highest it can go. Your oral reading is at the Grade 12 level.

That feels good.

Your reading skills are above average, at the 75% level.

Your recall ability from reading is at a Grade Six Level.

That doesn't sound very good.

Your auditory processing is very weak. Your comprehension skills are at 16%, Grade Three level.

Grade Three comprehension skills!

I feel myself go numb.

The reason?

Your brain doesn't automatically visualize. Your challenge is hyperlexia.

Jodie sits quietly, giving me space just to be.

I am sixty-eight years old with Grade Three reading comprehension skills.

Doesn't make me feel so great! Now I have a choice. Do I stay as I am, or do I commit to changing the status quo? I turn to Jodie

What's involved?

We have a process that retrains the brain so it will visualize.

We recommend five days a week, four hours a day for roughly seven weeks. The more intensive, the more effective. The cost is \$10,000.

I gulp at these facts.

I want to comprehend. I sign up.



I am in an Ann organizing mode. My bedroom is tidied, I have bought "legal" cookies and chocolate, cheese and pears for snacks, packed my colored markers. And done lots of Brain Gym to ground! I am ready. Tomorrow I begin retraining my brain.

The phone just rang, it was he. The man who made my heart sing thirty years ago.

Hi, Ann. Sorry to take so long to catch up.

The call was brief. He said he would call again, the week after

Thanksgiving. That's ten days away. The ball is in his court.

I sure hope he feels like bouncing it my way.

## WEEK ONE

The counselor is holding a card with the word tiger in big black letters.  
I am being asked to describe it.  
Black squiggles, straight and angled lines.  
Why isn't that what you want?  
What is the word saying?  
A Tiger.  
Describe it.  
It's an animal, a large animal.  
More? Its fur is in stripes of yellow, brown and white.

I hate looking at words. I no more want to look at words than fly to the moon. No, I would like to fly to the moon. But it hurts to look at words. Words, words, words. What do they mean, why do they exist, why do I have to deal with words? They are just words, words, words. They mean nothing! I learn differently. I sense what is happening. I know through feelings. Words trap me. I say too much, or I say too little or I say the wrong thing. Words, words, words. Why me? Why do I have this problem? Why?

You want me to tell you my picture of the word? I don't have one.  
You tell me your picture. Maybe I will get it the next time.

Why don't I want to? Why? Why? Why? It is so strange, everything is different. I see squiggles and lines. They ask for an image. It's not easy to do that. And no sooner have I the image than they give me another word and ask for an image. It's a teeter-totter. Words, images, words. Yipes! I don't like words. I don't like telling what I see. I don't like what I see right now. What I see and what I know is not what they want to hear. It hurts to look at words, it hurts in my head, it hurts in my arms, it hurts in my eyes, it hurts everywhere.



Thank God, a break. My red marker will help.  
My page of paper is smeared with red, red, no words, screaming,  
red, red, red.  
Oh, my God, I am pouting. I am behaving like a child.

*Ann, listen up, it's you/me, we at nine years. I am trying to warn you. I tried at school to understand those lines, those squiggles. It didn't work. What makes you think it will work now? Growl, growl! This imaging thing makes me so, so angry. My insides are screaming with pain. My upper arms hurt.*  
Oh, my little Ann. I was so confused about what was happening. I felt like a child. But now, I know. You are speaking. Oh my gosh! No wonder it is all so strange. You are speaking. My dear little Ann, I need your help. Please! I want to understand what I/we read. Please, please.  
I feel certain we can do it.  
*I feel awful, I hurt. It all seems hopeless. I don't want to do anything. I certainly don't want to image.*  
Gosh, I understand. It is much harder than I expected! Yet, I want us to succeed. To do that, I need your help. Please, please?  
*What's it worth to you?*  
What do you want?  
*A deal?*  
What's the deal?  
*You keep talking to me.*  
I promise. Thank you, thank you. I promise.  
Maybe we can be a better person.

The word is Elephant. It's grey, has fat legs, it's huge, it has crinkly skin, floppy ears, a long trunk. Now, do you get it? That's an elephant.  
Don't you get it?  
Do you know how hard it is to describe that?

Thank God, a break. I need air. My car, my car. I need to move it,  
air, air, air, water, water, water. Thank you, Ann at nine.

Those squiggle lines say: crab. I know a crab. I see a Crab.  
 Where are the words to describe it?  
 A many-legged grey shell.  
 Darn, they want more.  
 White background.  
 More? White sand.  
 More? Grainy.  
 More?  
 On the beach, of course.  
 Is there a smell?  
 Yes, it's fishy and, when I was a kid I chased crabs at Crescent Beach.  
 That's how I know they are grey before they are cooked.

*They don't want my story. How can they not? I love telling stories  
 and I am good at it. Darn.*

I know, I agree. But those are their hints to us on how to make imaging  
 easier. Ann at nine you were wonderful. We came up with images!  
 Thank you for helping.

Good thing the first day is done, done, done. My head is so tired.  
 Give me 24 Hour Fitness and the elliptical bicycle! I need a positive  
 frame of mind. Why didn't my Brain Gym balance stay all morning?  
 I started off feeling grounded and ready to learn. It all fell apart.  
 Tomorrow I will do Brain Gym's cross crawl at the break.

*Why did you agree to learn imaging? It is so much work. It hurts in my head.*

I want to change. I want to solve the mystery of not comprehending.

What upset you when being told no stories?

*I don't know. I don't know.*

Our chakras will help.

*Yes, yes, they takes us where we know. Ask our feet, ask our feet.*

Look at that, it's the throat chakra, where we speak out our creativity.

That's odd. In the last while, I have allowed my creativity to flow.

What can that mean?

*I know, I know. It's a message for me. Mum didn't like my stories. She said I was being obstreperous, chattering away with my thoughts. She stamped on my creativity. I hated that.*

Well, now, we can unleash it completely. It seems to me imaging should help.

Thank God, Week One was short. We have Thanksgiving weekend to recuperate!



## WEEKS TWO TO SEVEN

What is up today? Memory? Remembering a sequence of images? Gulp. *Ann, Ann. We can't remember. I don't want to be embarrassed and fail. Remember, Crofton House? Failing and fading into the floor. That hurt!* The clinicians say we can remember if we image. Will you try? *No, no, it's too hard, impossible.*

Why?

*Because imaging hurts my arms and really hurts my head.*

I agree. I feel that, too. But sorry, this time I am going to overrule.

I am going to try. Please help me. The words say a robin on a tree branch high above the ground is chirping.

Why do you have a stack of different colored felt squares? To help me with memory? They present an image? Not sure I understand but...

A robin, how do I picture a robin? A bird with a red breast, pointed beak and long brown tail.

Hey, they buy that!

What color do I want?

Nine-year old Ann, you pick the felt to represents that image.

*Red.*

Okay, I am putting it right here, to the left of the table. Remember this red felt says robin. Now, on a tree branch.

Gosh, I see two, tiny web-shaped feet curled around a tiny brown stick attached to the trunk holding our robin to the tree.

Yea, they buy that image. What color felt do you want?

*Brown.*

On to the next.

The branch is ten feet, about, above the ground.

Yay, success. What color felt?

*Black*

One to go. We are doing a fabulous job,

Our robin is singing in short chirps.

We scored again! What color?

*Orange.*

Why orange? How does orange represent chirping?

*I don't know, but it does.*

Okay, okay! Now, we need to remember the images from each felt.

We need to repeat the sentence. Help me!!!!

*Okay, okay.*

Hey, we remembered two images out of four. The felts were helpful.

Next time we will do better. Little one, thank you for helping me.

*I like picking the felts. The color and softness made me feel better.*

That is your job from now on. Whew, a break. Let's eat legal chocolate.

We deserve a treat!

I am on my way to 24 Hour to chill out.

*I didn't like the replacement clinicians today. One wasn't clear in what she wanted. She was so confusing.*

I think she was a beginner.

*Why are they giving us beginners? I don't like that. And the other fidgets.*

*I can't learn around fidgeting.*

I agree. They made it difficult for us. No wonder I no longer could image at hour four.

Thank you, Ann at nine, thank you. I know it's painful.

Yet, you hung in there. You were great and I love you.



And so, the next six weeks went, more of the same with me struggling to image. They wouldn't let me tell my stories, they wouldn't let me use the word because. They were strict. I was in rebellion.

I began to notice that as my skill in imaging progressed, so did the inner Ann progress, moving from age nine-ten and now eleven, then up to fourteen.

At the end of week three, we, my inner child and I, progressed to Grade Six reading comprehension. I found that encouraging. I shared with Jodi during my weekly meeting to discuss my progress. I know my emotional behavior is disruptive, hindering my ability to learn. Their response didn't surprise me. If you hadn't said it, we were going to!

You know I didn't want to tell them it is my nine, ten-year and now eleven-year old who has been speaking most of the time. She has to grow if we are to be successful and image. If that means emotional behavior, so be it.

Through this painful seven weeks, I kept hoping. Yes, for a call from my old friend. Hoping he will be wonderful and a wonder and call. He didn't! He has a name now, Mr. Standoff. I don't get why he doesn't divine I need his attention to help me through this pain and imaging struggle. He always understands what I am saying.

The Elliptical machine at 24-Hour Fitness is my savior. I gain insight in my inner child/adolescent battling behavior. Now she is claiming her power, seeing she can stop my forward movement. She knows I need her cooperation if there is going to be growth.

As we progressed, a paradox appeared. I am beginning to have fun feeling masterful and hopeful as I image, providing word summaries and main

ideas. But there is a growing fear lurking. I fear the new lifestyle I am creating: it being okay to sit and read a book, comprehending as I go. Seems silly, but it's true.

### END OF WEEK SEVEN

Alix, Week Seven has ended. Wow. I am proud to have moved through imaging words, to phrases, to sentences, to paragraphs, to half-pages and now articles from the *New York Times*.

I must say I am glad *not* to be imaging another snake.

*We did it, we did it! Remember me, Ann at fourteen.*

Indeed, I do. Yes, the collective efforts of the Anns were a major part of our success! You were important collaborators.

*Yay, yay!*

I am feeling strange. I am exhausted. I want my sense of humor to return. These seven weeks blackened my laughter to a dot.

The final test showed I progressed to Grade Nine reading comprehension level. Three friends have volunteered to help me hold this skill.

They came into Lindamood-Bell to be trained on the system. I giggled.

The biggest piece of advice that Jodi gave was

Do not help her.

Make her brain work to get the image.

# NEW TOOLS AND TWO HEARTBREAKS



[ 2005 ]

**B**ACK TO SAN FRANCISCO from ten days in New York where chilling out with friends in art galleries, in conversation, and at performances was a great diversion after the painful intensity of training my brain to image. Sadly, my body still aches – no downright hurts – from that experience. My wonderful spirit feels damaged. Why on earth is such a process necessary? I should be over the pain of the Lindamood-Bell experience. I am not! And to make matters worse, I don't feel any joy at the thought of reading. And can you believe? Mr. Standoff hasn't called.



I am scheduled today to show up for the beginning of a four-day Brain Gym class. My fourteen-year-old is now a doubter. *What makes others think that Svetlana Masgutova from Poland has answers? Let's just snuggle under the covers and return to dreamland.*

Ann, Ann, wake up, wake up, you still have time to get to your Brain Gym class.

My intuition, my wonderful personal power center, is urging me to move my big body out of my cozy bed.

*No, I won't.*

What if I treat us to a Starbucks Grande Chai Latte extra-hot?

*Okay, but do we have a deal: If this class has any suggestion of being cruel to our body, we leave?*

Yes.



So many new faces! All women. Must be fifty of us!  
Great, there is a seat in the back row and near the windows.  
These black chairs are very comfortable, the backs curve inward and have big holes. Why the holes? I guess the designer felt our backs need to breathe.

I am not late. The introductions are just beginning. I can feel my fourteen-year old checking out the participants. She wants to know if we are safe here. Seems like there are three groups of participants: parents of children with challenges, physiotherapists and Brain Gym specialists. I am sure we are safe.

Good morning, my name is Ann Farris. I am a dyslexic/hyperlexic. Why is everyone looking so surprised?

Oh, my goodness: Even this crowd of specialists aren't aware of hyperlexia!

Ms. Masgutova is nodding to me

Ann, please explain hyperlexia.

It's a condition that describes an individual who does not comprehend while reading, because they are unable to image the words they are reading.

*Well, I have a purpose. Perhaps I can help them understand a bit about people like me.*

Now it's Svetlana Masgutova's turn to talk. This small-framed lady in her mid-forties with black hair and piercing black eyes is speaking English



with a lilting Russian accent. I love that sound and the memories it brings me of my work with the Bolshoi Opera and Kirov Ballet. By her very presence, she commands and receives total attention. I like that.



SVETLANA MASGUTOVA

How interesting! Svetlana was introduced in North America by Brain Gym. She read Dr. Paul Dennison's book, *Switching On*, and saw a linkage with Brain Gym's development of Edu-Kinesthetics. His unique process – merging brain research, learning theory, and body awareness – seemed to connect with her work on the body's reflexes. Now, I understand why Brain Gym is presenting her. Nice also, this class gives me credits towards a Brain Gym certification.

Svetlana is now into the meat of her presentation.

A reflex is an automatic, instinctive, unlearned reaction to a stimulus, like sucking.

That's helpful. I had no idea how to define it.

Reflexes normally develop and mature while we are in utero and during the first three years of our lives.

I wonder if my reflexes developed in the expected fashion?

Reflexes are genetic and influence all aspects of learning.

If reflexes do not mature in the appropriate timing, development of other skills may be held back.

Okay, that makes sense.

If they are operable but not yet integrated into the whole-body system, other skills may be affected.

This woman is fascinating and making it all so simple to understand.

Thank heavens, she's a storyteller. I am imagining some while she goes along.

My work integrates abnormal or inactive reflexes, which allow the body to access normal movement patterns. These patterns are important to enable growth and progression to higher development levels, which result in integrating all parts of the brain.

Here we go again. The brain, the brain, always the brain!

*Wouldn't you know the brain is involved with reflexes! I get so frustrated with the focus on the brain. How come the emotions are never considered?*

People with learning challenges are operating primarily from their brain stem, the part of the brain located at the lower back part of the head.

Its focus is security and survival of an individual.

That's interesting. The base of my head, at the back where the brain stem lives, often feels sore. Well, it's true my child and adolescent didn't feel secure.

*You are right about that!*

The challenge is training the brain, so it can go beyond survival and security and into a developmental level.

I am sure she is correct. When I feel secure, the world is my banana.

Everything works. What's she saying now?

Emotional stability changes when reflexes become balanced.

Oh, my goodness. Emotions are part of her scheme. What if my reflexes aren't balanced? That might explain some of my struggle.

*This is important stuff. We need to pay attention.*

Svetlana continues

Through a study in 2004 in Russia involving eight hundred fifty children from the ages of one to twelve with different challenges including aggressive behavior, autism, dyslexia and cerebral palsy, ten percent of the mothers of these children experienced emotional trauma during their pregnancies and transferred this trauma to their child in utero, causing some of the reflexes not to develop normally.

I can hardly breathe. Thank goodness for the hole in the back of my chair.

I have a space to fall into and chill out. That's me! That's me.

Svetlana may have an answer for me.

Mum, thank you, thank you! How could I have doubted you? You were so sure you caused my dyslexia when you were pregnant with me, convinced your emotional upset during your third trimester was the reason. I didn't believe you. Now, it may be true. You may be correct!



These last four days have been intensive. Svetlana had us experimenting with the two different kinds of reflexes, dynamic and postural. Dynamic means a healthy reaction to a specific stimulus, like touching a baby in the upper part of its palm resulting in it automatically clutching its hand. In Svetlana's study, there were five reflexes in this category that were not usually integrated for dyslexics.

Postural reflexes are static; preparing the body to be ready to get into specific positions. In Svetlana's study seven Postural Reflexes were not integrated for dyslexics. We were assigned to explore one, the Bonding Reflex. It is activated during the first forty-five minutes to one-hour after birth and continues developing for the next eight to ten months. I am sure this reflex is not switched on in me. My mother chose to have an anesthetic while I was being birthed. She told me she didn't see me until several hours had passed. I am sure, given what she had gone through emotionally during her pregnancy, she wasn't in much of a hurry to see me.

Svetlana continues. Children with an undeveloped Bonding Reflex reject their own feelings.

All of this and more makes complete sense to me.

I just had a private session with Svetlana. There are twenty-three reflexes that are not functioning normally. She was so encouraging. In eighteen months, with continued focus on stating your goal, exploring what emotions are involved, and doing the exercises, you will reach reflex balance.

*I believe her. That is really good news.*

Now, let's do some work. What is your goal for our session?  
 Less confusion, more clarity. While she and a colleague make movement corrections, they question me about my emotional behavior. This is deep work. So deep, at the end I choose to stay put for an hour to let the integration process begin quietly.



Svetlana has gone. And we have just uncovered the tip of the iceberg on the process. I have joined three support groups to practice Brain Gym and The Masgutova Method.

Valerie, the super-mum with the video camera at Svetlana's class, has gathered several of us together in another spacious room that Diane, the silent one, has arranged at the San Ramon Hospital. This time the view is gorgeous – rolling hills of Northern California with a receding sun dropping into the horizon – a beautiful space in which to learn.  
*Ann, the forty-minute drive is long but worth it. We would never have learned this stuff on our own.*



My days are full for I am also continuing my efforts to master imaging. Elisa, my former Yale roommate, dressed in her pretty pink knit sweater, and I are seated around at her kitchen table reviewing the Lindamood-Bell process. My fourteen-year old is giving the instructions.

*I will read a sentence, eventually a paragraph and then give you images of what I picture. When you agree that my image matches the definition of the word, sentence or paragraph, I will try to give you a word summary and then the main idea. Remember don't give me your images.*

*I need to push to find them.*

Okay. We need a resource.

That's a typical Elisa comment. She's up and retrieves a dictionary, a very thick Webster's, and places it on the table. This may come in handy. Elisa, I have brought along Dr. Paul Dennison's book *Switching On*. As I am studying Brain Gym and need to learn the details contained within, I thought it would be smart to use this book as my tool for

improving my imaging.

Great idea. I am very interested in Brain Gym.

I, or rather my fourteen-year-old, start reading the Introduction.

*American education is in a state of crisis. Learning disabilities abound in every school. Tens of millions of functional illiterates have been passed through the system, and their numbers are growing fast.*

Ann, slow down. You are rushing like you want to get done with this.

I look at her and laugh

You are right. That is how I feel. If I read fast, maybe the information will drop into my head and I will have an image.

Start again.

Elisa stops me after every sentence to image. She is very skilled at this, after having spent years teaching stage and performance skills to tiny tots and adolescents. I am happy being here.

Finally, we finish one paragraph. It took me several tries to satisfy her with my word summary. For some reason, the main idea is easier.

Elisa, I am tired.

We look at the clock. An hour has passed. It hadn't been awful, just hard work.

We set our appointment for a week hence and I depart.

*Ann, I like doing imaging with Elisa. She gives us space to be.*



I am full to the brim doing my best to keep my life balanced. Yoga, 24 Hour Fitness workouts, hiking, symphony, opera and parties fit that bill. I love going to parties, meeting new people. One night, I am surprised. In fact, stunned! Mr. Standoff is there. Oh my God! My heart is thumping so loud, it must be blasting the room!

What shall I do?

The wise woman in me suggests

Sit down, Ann, gain composure. And observe.

He has gained a few pounds, not the svelte gentleman of years of yore.

His face is rounder and sweeter than ever. He seems happy, talking with others. Not surprising. He's a talker.

I can't put off connecting with him any longer. I have to be with him. It is what I have been waiting for. I inch myself through the groups of people chattering with one another in the dim pink light of the room, easing my way into his view.

Hi.

He's looking at me like he doesn't know me. Maybe my blonde hair is confusing him? Gosh, he really doesn't recognize me.

Now, oh, now he knows

Ann Farris! grabbing hold of me, nestling me in his arms.

He has no words, nor do I.

Oh my God, I am in his arms. He wants me in his arms.

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh! He's so strong. I can hardly breathe. I love this.

A dream being fulfilled!

How amazing, he is lavishing kisses all over my face, sloppy wonderful kisses. I feel strong and fragile, lost in his energy, his space, his impetus.

I am melting, melting. This man is happy to see me.

Actions sure speak louder than words.

No, please don't let go! Whew! He's not, he is just changing our position turning me around still clenching my right hand. I feel so safe with him!

Oh, he is caressing my hand. Oh, oh, oh, I am so happy, blissfully happy.

Shall I return the pleasure? Of course! He has a chubby hand,

lots to stroke. I like knowing him this way!

Who's he talking to? Oh, my goodness, it's a friend.

Do you know how special this woman is?

Yes. I know her well and she is very special.

I don't care what they say. I just want to feel the warmth of his caress as he tightens his hold on me. The warm light of the room makes it all perfect.

Taking out his Blackberry, he says

I want your number.

Darn, no more caressing, but good, he wants my number.

We laugh and giggle as he struggles with it.

Eventually my number is recorded. I blurt out

I don't feel it's my place to call you.

That's nonsense. Call me when you want.  
I am not so sure about that but didn't say it.  
He makes a comment that prompts me to say  
You are so smart, I just love being with you.  
I don't like that.  
Wow, that was fast abrupt feedback. Clear he didn't like that.  
You are also very funny.  
He is very pleased. Look at his face shine! He knows I mean it.  
Oh, it is so wonderful to be with him.

What happened? He's gone, gone, gone, walking to the other side  
of the room. What did I do? No, goodbye, no, see you, no nothing.  
He just walked away to the other side of the room and is staying  
by himself. Oh my God that hurts! I feel so empty.  
Guess my comment about him being smart offended him!  
Or, perhaps the intensity of our energy together frightened him.  
I don't know, but I do know there is something special between us.  
Damn. I need to get out of here. I am confused.



A few days later his secretary calls, a sure sign he is making space  
for himself. We set a date, a couple weeks even later.  
I am very excited and e-mail my news to a confidant, Tomas.  
He always has sound advice  
I see you both exploring friendship as a route into balanced communication.  
Once you begin to develop a sense of who you are and feel comfortable  
communicating through the heat, you may find movement into more  
connection. If not, you can choose to enjoy whatever transpires  
as a playful gift from the Universe.

Today is the day. I show up first. It's a quiet restaurant with many windows  
and dark wooden banquettes, each with a sizable table and white tablecloths.  
He arrives a few moments later. We're shown to our banquette,  
off by ourselves. As he is sliding into his seat he asks

What's up in your life?

I know he is choosing a safe way to get us going. No doubt he has a sense of embarrassment from his explosion of emotion with me a few weeks earlier. Little does he know I loved it, until he walked away!

But this approach gives us space.

Returning to San Francisco eight years ago, I am continuing to focus on solving my dyslexia...

I really don't care what we talk about. I am just so happy to be with him. Everything feels right. There is no posturing, just glorious time together. He is a great listener.

I ask

What about you?

He brought me up-to-date. We laugh and commiserate.

Of course, as life goes, not all had been roses.

As the time to part nears, he asks

Are you seeing someone?

No.

Are you living on your own?

No, I am sharing.

Quickly, he asks, with a man?

No.

He seems relieved to hear that.

Parting he gives me a kiss, a peck on the cheek, like an old friend.

Then, comes a quick kiss on the lips and he's gone. I wonder what that last kiss meant. Does he have any interest in me? I know not.

I walk to my car, numb. I loved every moment with him. His energy permeates me and makes me so happy. I just pray he calls.

Another e-mail from Tomas, responding to mine where I shared my happiness and perplexion (yes, that is an Annism). The message is clear. People come into your life for a reason, a season or a lifetime. When you know which one it is, you will know what to do with that person.

I want a lifetime.





Rosemary, my faithful doctor, is concerned about my intensity for Mr. Standoff.

Ann, romantic love is beautiful, but carried too far, is unwise.

The intensity can be too much for the body. See if you can transform your deep feelings into universal love.

Perplexed, a few hours later I Google “universal love” for a definition.

A quality of boundless and gentle love, a delicate light experienced as the presence of softness, sweetness and generosity. It is love for everything and everyone – universal love, A. Hameed Ali reports. Hmm. Not yet for me. I have just one focus: Mr. Standoff.



My reading sessions with Elisa continue. She has many suggestions.

The funniest one, a green rubber turtle perhaps a foot in diameter filled with air!!! Turtles are almost round, you know. I couldn't imagine what she wanted me to do with a turtle!

Ann, how about setting it on your lap? It might help with grounding.

I look at her and laugh. It is both a game and a tool.

My fourteen-year old is in heaven.

*A blankie!*

Turtle and I become bosom buddies as I nestle it comfortably on my thighs while we read Dr. Paul Dennison's book, *Switching On*.

I am getting better at staying with the content of the material as I unearth a pattern. When frustration hits, usually near the end of our hour,

I resort to going up and out there, bringing in Mr. Standoff with the hope of rescue. Elisa and I agree to stop.

I know I need to break this pattern. How?

My disruptive behavior is fodder for a Brain Gym and/or Reflex balance.

Arriving home, I write down the disruptive issue and let it sit for day.

Re-energized, the next day I develop a goal to correct the issue at hand, explore what emotions are involved and implement the appropriate

Brain Gym or Masgutova Method movement corrections. Step-by-step I sense changes are happening.



Today, working in a Brain Gym class, I discovered that I am unable to crawl when on my tummy. My left side will *not* activate and move. It took two classmates to move my left arm and leg so it would get a feeling for what it needs to do. It is going to take some time to be able to do this on my own.



Memorial Day weekend, time for a visit with Romilly, now back living in Santa Cruz. I love driving Highway One, drinking in the blue, expansive ocean with its white caps, stopping at the strawberry farm for a tray of newly-picked, organic red juicy strawberries.

Romilly and Kai have a large wooden kitchen table comfortably seating ten, around which we chew our dinner and one idea after another.

Kai, in her wry manner asks

Are you still yearning after Mr. Standoff?

Oh, Kai, yes I am.

I am glad those days are over for me.

Kai is in her mid-eighties.

I bring Romilly up to date with the Masgutova Method.

Then, we focus on Mr. Standoff. She suggests

Ann, look at these deep feelings, your yearning, as a gift. The yearning is asking you to look behind it. What do you find?

I sense it might be deep grief.

Perhaps it might come from the lack of bonding.

Yes, I didn't bond with Mum at birth. My bond with my father got cruelly broken, and now Mr. Standoff's eschewing any bonding with me. HmMMM!

Romilly continues

Remember, when we are conceived, we are bonded in every aspect.

Well, that wasn't really the case for me: My dyslexia was already in action from Mum's great fear of what would happen to her and me.

You are right, so your life lessons had already begun at birth and probably had to do with the breaking of your bond – to your mother. It's a part of the path of life.

Rom, this lesson is hard. I think you are suggesting that my yearning for Mr. Standoff relates to my bonding disconnect early in life.

She continues

Could it be that your yearning for Mr. Standoff is allowing you to re-experience the pain of separation so you can heal it? We have a challenge to fulfill our deepest yearnings. This may be your way of handling it.

Hmmmmmm. She gets it at a level I have yet to reach.

Driving home, the fast way – Highway 17 through the hills from the Pacific Ocean to the San Jose valley – I have a sudden and very clear *ah-ha*, so earthshaking I shout

A part of my yearning is Mum's yearning for my father, not mine.

She dropped this on me when I was in utero. Oh my God, this is true.

Now I am screaming.

This deep, painful feeling has been locked in my psyche since utero.

Oh, my God!

Ann, watch out, Highway 17 is a windy road.

Hold your *ah-ha* till we reach 280.

I feel my body go entirely empty: no feeling, nothing.

Some of this yearning is not mine!

Finally, a straight road! I can drive the highway, robot-style, here and not here. Mile after mile goes by. All is quiet.

As the Bay Bridge comes into view I feel deep gratitude for my *ah-ha*.

I continue to 24 Hour Fitness. The routine motion, back and forth, of my legs on the elliptical machine, give me space to say

Yes, there certainly is a reason Mr. Standoff is back in my life.

He is here to help me see that two yearnings are hooked together: my fantasy pattern of wanting something, which I feel certain I can't have and my mother's yearning for my father. Wow and hmmmmmmm. So, now I get that lesson! Mr. Standoff, now won't you just come in?



The summer San Francisco Opera season is in progress. Tonight, it's *The Marriage of Figaro*. A magical evening with glorious voices, imaginative acting performances and a creative staging that heightens the mystery and humor. It is also a night when I pull together several pieces. The plot is convoluted. A chambermaid and a Count's valet are planning their wedding. The Count decides to pursue the chambermaid. The Countess is being pursued by a young page. The potential of infidelity abounds as each character sets up one situation after another to expose each other's nefarious plots, all of this bathed in the beautiful Mozart music.

As the singers sing their love for one another, I send my love to Mr. Standoff. As the performance continues singing along, I stand back and look at infidelity. I am really angry at the Count; he's my father. What right does he have to be unfaithful to the Countess/my mother! As the Countess and page play their scene, I see myself and my infidelity with married men. Yipes, nobody is perfect. I relax into the music, musing how much I am learning about myself, about relationship, about being in my body, about letting go of control, about the excitement of feeling so much love for Mr. Standoff and still waiting. And yes, even about it being okay that Mr. Standoff and I may not work out. At the opera's conclusion, I am laughing at myself. This opera is life!



Svetlana's back with a four-day Birthing and Facial Reflexes Workshop. She has a real sense of the theatrical and knows how to grab an audience, starting the class with a video of a baby in utero, beginning in the first few weeks continuing through to the birth. As the video progresses, Svetlana indicates when the baby first begins a reflex movement. It is fascinating!

There, before me, one after another, are tiny versions of some of the reflex moments I have been doing for the last six months.

Next up, Svetlana models the reflex movements during the birthing process. Then, it's our turn. Down on the floor I go into Child's pose with my head tucked under. Slowly I lift my back so it humps up. I reverse and my back sinks as I lift my head. I shift to kneeling with my two arms supporting me and my head straight forward. Now comes the final stages:

I turn, lie on my side waiting to be pushed by mother.

This last step puts me to wondering

How did I get out of that birthing track? Mum was drugged.

She couldn't have been pushing. Well, I am here, and have been for almost seven decades!

For the first time ever, I am interested in the birthing process.

I say to another

If it were still possible for me, I might be interested in having a child.

Quite a change!



It's end of summer. The flat area of Santa Cruz is dry, not the redwood-lined hills I am now driving through. I so appreciate my times with Romilly and Kai on their farm. This weekend I need space and ask Kai, give me a job.

How about weeding the vegetable patch?

Great, and there are results. I feel like Mr. McGregor with my hoe, even though I don't see a rabbit!

Today Kai has a bigger challenge for me

I want to plant a tree by the pond. Would you be willing to dig an opening three feet deep and two feet wide?

Sweating and toiling brings results. I am proud of them.

Rom, Kai and I dragged the fifteen-foot tree to my hole.

The roots fit perfectly, dirt is replaced and watered.

A good day's work. And I am feeling whole!

I go to bed quieter than I have in a long time. Just as I am closing my eyes,  
I am drawn to ask  
What is my soul's deepest desire in life?  
In the middle of the night I awake with a very clear answer  
Help others find their soul's purpose. I take a very deep breath,  
write down the answer and drift back into dreamland.



As I am driving back to San Francisco, out of my grief comes anger.  
I am furious with Mr. Standoff.  
You are a "pill!" Why didn't you follow through with your initial  
positive reaction to me? You are really cruel!  
Yipes! My anger changes tack, focusing on me  
How could I have fallen for the possibility?  
Why is life so cruel? And so many thoughts come tumbling in:  
Why has it taken me so long to understand how holding so much anger  
is holding me back from comprehending what I read? Why do I have  
so many challenges? Why do I have to endure so much pain? Why me?  
I am angry, angry, angry!



The inevitable happens. Oh God, does it ever! I run into Mr. Standoff  
on Union Street. He's with a group of friends, unknown to me.  
I see him first. Gosh, he looks pained and a little stooped. Not like him.  
Then, he recognizes me and says  
Your hair looks wonderful, the gold shines.  
I sense it makes him happy.  
He introduces me to the lady by his side and then quietly shares  
I am seeing her.  
I repeat to myself  
I am seeing her. Yes, I know what he means. I just had to say it again.  
She is hanging onto his arm in that wonderful state of early love,  
vague and vulnerable.

I am stunned. Everything inside me stops.  
I gain enough composure to move into good behavior mode,  
my pleasant self, hoping my shock is masked.  
His lady is distracted by another. Mr. Standoff and I fall into our easy way  
of chatting about nothing for a few brief moments. The undercurrent  
is about everything. His lady turns back to him.  
They leave, he comments, over his shoulder  
Keep in touch.  
I don't know about that, I murmur to myself.  
The facts are before me, he has chosen another.

The fog has intensified. The wind is blowing. The streets are dark,  
even though it is only 6 p.m. I am on automatic pilot driving home.  
Fortunately, a parking space opens up and I dart in.  
I know what I need. A long walk! Layering woolen sweaters and my parka  
to shelter my numb body, I head out into the juicy dense fog.  
Water is dripping, it is so foggy. Up one hill, down another, up another  
hill, down another. I can hardly see the different-colored Victorian houses  
that line the streets, the fog is so intense, and my news is so numbing.  
A street light emerging high above me in the greyness seems like a ghost  
out there to scare me. I pay no attention. I can't be scared tonight.  
The worst has already happened. The truth is out.

I give myself some solace. The way he looks at me tells me he sees deep  
inside me. On some level, he cares deeply about me. Tears start pouring  
down; three hours pass. Finally, I am ready to go home and sleep.



At a Speaking Circles class last night, one of the participants commented  
The heart that breaks is but opening again.  
That may be true but the pain, oh the pain. Grief aches in my body.  
Driving home I sense a reflex correction might help.  
What am I healing? Anger? Rage? Grief? No, my feet tell me  
those are not it! How odd!

Disappointment comes into my thoughts. True enough, I am very disappointed. My feet concur. Yes, emphatically, yes.

How come? Disappointment seems so superficial. Anyone can get over a disappointment. It's no big deal. Okay, I am being directed to develop a goal. Go for it!

As I begin to correct the affected reflexes, my insides start churning. This feeling is new. My power center, third chakra, my digestive system is in turmoil! It takes focus: looking at four reflexes plus the final stage of the birthing process to make the corrections to reach my goal. I am at peace. My God, this correction is huge. I know this is just the beginning. I am tired, climb into bed and sleep the rest of the day.



This afternoon in Berkeley, as I climb up a few stairs to the apartment for my Brain Gym get together, I notice I am short of breath. That's odd, I have been working out regularly.

Later, I drive hurriedly to San Ramon for our monthly Masgutova Method support group meeting. At the break, getting up to visit the lady's room, I become dizzy.

Ann, are you okay?

I think so. That movement correction we did seems to have had an effect.

Later in the evening, back in San Francisco, parking is hard to find, in fact five blocks away from home. I have two very steep hills to traverse by foot. It's grey dark. The street lights give a gentle illumination through the misty fog.

Gosh, why is this hill hard to walk tonight?

I have no choice but to walk slowly.

In fact, I can only walk twenty steps and need to stop. I sit on one door stoop after another, enjoying the view of beautiful Victorian architecture. No one is around, the streets and house lights are soft, and the large trees are gently swaying. Finally, I reach the pinnacle, one downhill and one flat block to go. I am fine. Thank heavens.



Joan is home. I report  
Strange, I have shortness of breath tonight.  
Neither of us give any thought to my comment. I am in such good  
physical shape, it must be a silly aberration!

In the morning, my intuition tells me to check my pulses.  
Goodness me! 30 instead of 70! I call my clinic. Rosemary is not working  
today. I talk with another who recommends  
Go directly to Emergency.  
I head off to St. Francis Hospital in my car, feeling totally calm.  
Nearing the hospital, I call out to the heavens  
Mum, I am healing you as I am healing myself.  
I thought, how odd. No, it's not odd. Both of us have experienced  
agonizing pain and disappointment from men we loved.  
Leaving my car in the hospital garage I notice it has a 7 p.m. curfew.  
No problem. I will be long gone. Slowly, ever so slowly  
I walk to Emergency and share with the admitting attendant  
I have shortness of breath.  
She gets me a chair and takes my pulse.  
It's 30. How did I reach the hospital?  
I drove.  
She is amazed.  
Most people with a slow heart rate can't stand up.  
Oh, I exercise a great deal. She comments  
If ever there is need for a testimony about why someone should exercise,  
this is certainly a good example.

After examining me, the on-call doctor in Emergency says  
I want to prepare you for the fact that you may have to  
have a pacemaker inserted.  
Goodness, I think, as they hook me up to one machine after another.

I am one of the first patients in the newly renovated Emergency Department  
at St. Francis Hospital. The staff is still getting acquainted with all

the new toys/equipment and seem to be enjoying all they have been given. The Emergency Room manager – a tall stately woman – brings order to this newness. She has no truck with inefficiency. I can't help but say You certainly are bossy.

Right, only way to be around here and get done what needs to be done! Lying there, watching all the machines go *blurp, blurp*, I muse on this fact.

This support staff is very much like stage management staff in opera, ready to handle any issue to keep the show on track, in this case, lives. Nurses and doctors step up their pace of visits to my cubicle checking the monitors and installing more. My blood pressure is still reasonable, but my heart rate is 28. I muse on the resident doctor's comment.

A pacemaker!

The white curtain defining my space is pulled back and a relatively young man, Dr. Peter Teng, enters. Introducing himself as a heart surgeon he comes quickly to the issue at hand

Can you describe what has happened in the last 24 hours?

I explain. He responds

It may be that you have a heart block. Simply put, the heart has three parts: top, bottom and middle. The middle acts like an electrical circuit, enabling the top and bottom of the heart to communicate. I think the middle has, for some reason, degenerated over time, resulting in the signal between the top and bottom to operate very slowly.

I think to myself

Well, the top part of my heart is mine and the bottom is Mum's.

I question Dr. Teng, desiring to know a little bit more about him.

I want to feel comfortable with him.

Do you know Dr. Valmassi or Dr. Prieto in the St. Francis Sport Center unit?

Yes, Dr. Prieto. I observed him doing a hip replacement.

It was amazing to see how different it is to operate on a hip from a heart.

I like our discussion, brief as it is. It gives me an insight into Dr. Teng's curiosity and my perception that he is a doctor interested in continuing the process of learning and changing. Now, I feel quite comfortable with him.

He takes the conversation back to the matter at hand,  
confirming I need a pacemaker.  
You are in a very serious condition.  
I feel very calm with this statement. He asks  
Have you contacted anyone?  
No, gosh, I guess I should.  
He confirms  
Let others know what is going on and have them help you  
make a decision.  
He has a caveat  
Don't wait too long.

The nurse gives me my cell. I leave messages for Meredith, Joan  
and my sister Katherine in Canada. Haig and Mary are in Europe.  
The Emergency floor medical staff keeps stopping by, explaining more  
details, underscoring the importance of my making a decision soon.  
Meredith is the first to get back to me  
Ann, I have no experience with pacemakers. Just don't make the decision  
until it feels right.  
That's wise counsel, good advice!

Another doctor comes in and sits by my bed, becoming quite pushy.  
She is responsible for getting me to make a decision. Fortunately,  
Joan calls at that moment. She has remembered that our friend,  
Tom Munn, an opera colleague, has a pacemaker and had telephoned him.  
Ann, he is waiting for your call. Here's his number.  
I scribble it on a piece of paper and dial the number.  
Ann, what is your pulse?  
Between 29 and 31. It has just gone up to 31. I am excited about that.  
Perhaps my heart is correcting itself.  
Have they offered any other solution?  
No.  
See if they think drugs would solve this problem.  
Okay.

At the end of our conversation he says  
Ann, it does sound like you need a pacemaker.  
The supervising doctor is still by my bed, almost tapping her foot,  
awaiting my decision. I ask my few questions and then give the go ahead.

Not long after both Joan and Dr. Teng arrive. He confirms that drugs  
will not alleviate the situation and gives me a few more details  
The pacemaker will be set to 60 heart beats per minute. In all likelihood,  
your battery will only need to be replaced every ten years.  
That seems reasonable. I remember having dinner with Mum and Tom  
the night he had a battery replaced so I gathered it wasn't a big deal.  
You can probably return to yoga in a month. By the way, do you  
want to be awake during the operation?  
Good heavens, *no*.

It's 5 p.m. Joan rushes off to see if she can get in touch with my friends  
joining me at the Opera. My car will just have to stay overnight  
in the parking lot.  
Along comes an amiable man to push my bed to the operating room.  
I feel no anxiety. It's fun being maneuvered down the halls, onto the elevator  
and up to some undetermined floor. I just wish our journey would be  
accompanied by the "Ride of the Valkyries!"  
Emerging from the elevator, we are greeted by four attendants  
in the prescribed green uniforms with masks over their faces.  
Suddenly I remember. I haven't called Meredith back to report.  
My cell is lying beside me. I leave a short message  
I am on my way into surgery.

The surgery room is a great visual disappointment. It feels like  
a basement room, no windows and monochromatic in color. This can't be  
the operating room; it doesn't look like one. It isn't glamorous.  
Talk about being conditioned by the media.  
The attendants are accommodating and matter of fact. Very gently,  
I am switched to the operating table. I see a man, also in green,

working at a long table against a wall. There are an amazing number of surgical instruments about him. My concentration is disrupted by the anesthesiologist introducing himself as he adds some serum into my IV. I am gone, gone, gone!

The next thing I know, I am in the Critical Care Center with a male nurse watching over me. There's a large clock on the wall. It's 8 p.m.

I am missing the simulcast of *Rigoletto*.

I seem fine. Too bad I am not there.

Dr. Teng drops by to see me

The operation went extremely well. I don't anticipate any problems at all. And something rather wonderful happened. By chance, a cosmetology doctor dropped by.

I pondered that statement, interesting to think "drop bys" happen during surgery.

Dr. Teng continues reporting; and then I ask him

Do you have any tips you want to share while I stitch up my patient?

Sure enough, he did! Dr. Teng seemed thrilled. Yes, he is one who loves to learn and grow. How lucky I am that he is my surgeon and heart doctor.

The night in Critical Care is very tedious. I can't sleep much because I am so hungry, and I have a headache. The male nurse has unfortunate news I am sorry the orders say you are not to eat because you must have a sonogram of your liver in the morning. There is some concern you might have hepatitis. One of the blood tests taken earlier in the day gave this indication.

Add my hunger and headache to the usual commotion and chatter of the nurses throughout the night, I hardly sleep.

The day breaks and it's sunny. I am starved and decide to make a fuss. If I can't have the sonogram soon, let me come in on Monday.

To my great delight they agree, and food is delivered:

rubbery scrambled eggs (but hey, protein) a croissant and tons of orange juice. Within ten minutes, my headache is gone. Thank goodness.

Rosemary, my doctor, calls. She has just talked with the doctor on call  
He gave a positive report on your condition.

While I felt that all was in good shape, it was nice to have her  
corroborate my feeling.

Rosemary continues

Let's talk about you. I feel certain you have looked at this situation  
from both an emotional and spiritual point of view.

Yes, I have. Here is where I am at

I learned ten days ago that Mr. Standoff has chosen another.

I thought I was coping quite well until the day before yesterday.

I decided to do a reflex correction and the issue that came up  
for correction was disappointment. I was surprised. It seemed like  
such a surface emotion. Turns out I was wrong. It was very intense.

I continued with my story of how I ended up in the hospital,  
describing how I called out to Mum

I am healing both you and me.

Then I told her about Dr. Teng's simple description of my heart  
and its three sections.

Rosemary, I know Mum's energy was lodged in the bottom  
and mine in the top of my heart.

Together we begin working on this scenario, getting me more clarity.

Rosemary suggests

No doubt when your mother learned your father was no longer  
uniquely hers, she must have experienced deep disappointment.

And you were in her womb. Do you feel your mother's disappointment  
was transferred to you?

Yes, I certainly do.

And I told her a story that my sister Katherine had reported,  
of how Mum stuffed disappointment. When Mum was handling all the  
*sturm und drang* around our father's resignation from the Supreme Court,  
Katherine and she were standing by the stove, cooking Sunday night dinner.

Katherine asked her

Mum, how do you withstand all this?

Mum picked up a lid on a pot and slammed it down, saying  
I stuff it.

Rosemary, I realize not only did she bury her disappointment but also,  
I picked up her behavior of burying disappointment.

Mum was truly heartbroken and now it has happened to me.

Rosemary comments

Perhaps your heart was just not strong enough to handle  
two heartbreaks of such depth.

I feel very calm and quiet as I hear her words. I know she is correct.

And Rosemary, I believe that the near stopping of my heart has finally  
disconnected me energetically from my mother's anger, disappointment,  
frustration, fear, rejection, jealousy, yearning, abandonment,  
and heartbreak. She is gone from the lower part of my heart. That I know.  
I am grateful to have the opportunity to start again.

At the end of our long telephone conversation, Rosemary asks  
Have you given your pacemaker a name?

No.

I go very quiet to feel the pacemaker. Eventually I respond

It is a shiny star. I must say, I feel fortunate that science has a solution  
for my kind of situation.

I am discharged with the admonition not to get the bandage wet  
for a week.

When I get home there is a large bouquet of flowers from  
Susan and Tom Munn. I burst into tears.

My recovery period is quiet and without pain. Yes, the area around  
my pacemaker is tender to touch, but I don't need medication.

My focus is becoming friends with my shiny star.

Each day one of my chums comes to visit, bringing lots of goodies,  
filling the refrigerator and adorning the house with gorgeous flowers.

Mostly, I sleep or reflect. It certainly seems my body asked for a dramatic  
change. And it got it. The upside is an interest in reading. Being so quiet,

imaging seems easier. I have no interest, however, in setting goals and making movement corrections.

My follow-up appointment with Dr. Teng a week later gives me an insight. First to my physical condition. He hooks me up to a machine for a report which says

95% of the time I am relying on the pacemaker.

Goodness, I guess I did need it.

I share with him my heartbreak story which Rosemary had helped me articulate. He listens intently. When I finish, he comments

You are my first patient.

I looked at him quizzically. He explains

*The New York Times* reported a study about a year ago, undertaken at Johns Hopkins University, involving women between the ages of 30 and 90, who suddenly have a heart issue.

Doctors thought it was a heart attack. But no, this study shows that women who had no family history with heart issues, who were in good shape but had an emotional shock resulting in a heart upset, were experiencing a medical heartbreak. I am amazed.

There is documentation for what Rosemary and I found.



My weekly reading sessions with Elisa are on again and going very well.

I am imaging and feeling confident. Elisa's notes say

We ripped through a lot of material. Ann reads with ease and was able to summarize and get the main idea easily. So heartening to see where she has come.

Not long after I realize

It's not about trying to change me. It's about learning skills that enhance what I have, namely a very right-brain-dominated system.

I can image, but it's not top on my agenda.





There still are some reflexes that need correction. Today, my goal is to increase inner peace. One of the suggested corrections is listening to music. I am drawn to Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* featuring Reri Grist.

Ah, I was in love and so happy knowing nothing of the pain of love.

I swore to be true to my beloved and gave him my whole heart.

But how quickly my joy vanished! Separation was my unhappy lot!

And I add

To have loved as deeply as I have is such a gift. I sense I now understand the importance of moving to unconditional love.



ANN FARRIS IN THE BLACK AND WHITE SAN FRANCISCO OPERA ARCHIVE PHOTO GALLERY,  
DIANE B. WILSEY CENTER FOR OPERA, VETERANS BUILDING  
[PHOTO BY JACK SCHAFER, ACT 3 PARTNERS]

# THERE'S A FLOW TO IT ALL



[ 2018 ]

**T**WELVE YEARS HAVE PASSED, and three themes characterize my life: opera, personal growth, and art. My focus on dyslexia/hyperlexia is diminishing. No, I haven't mastered all the issues; I don't suppose I am supposed to. Rather I am accepting, which means I am not overly-focused on improving my reading skills. No, they are not the best, even though I have the skills to image. But you know what, it's a lot of effort and it's a very slow process for me. Twenty years ago, Zoosh stated to me You may learn lots to make reading easier, but the experience will remain. He's right-on. So, rather than fighting this fact, now I go with it and let it take me where it goes. In fact, sometimes, I surprise myself with an ease of comprehension, other times, not.



My spiritual life continues to be an important ingredient. For the last several years the channel Susan Moreschi has connected me to Grace for universal knowledge. Grace, it seems, is aligned in the ether with the Lazaris energy brought through by Jach Pursel. I am also exploring the Lazaris materials and have attended a few workshops. Periodically, I also work with Steve Parrish who brings through Elanor, another energy connected to Lazaris. Why do I continue this exploration? It's fascinating to learn different points of view on how to grow and integrate my life. I do see how my behavior creates my reality on all levels: emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual.

John Moreschi, Susan's husband, has attended each Lazaris workshop since 1974. At the outset, John began to create a kind of dictionary, primarily by topic and based on Lazaris' teachings. Now, forty plus years later this "dictionary" is an amazing compilation of spiritual information. John has graciously allowed me to have a copy. Each morning my routine includes writing in my diary and picking at random, a Lazaris quotation for the day. Recently, this one came to the fore

The nature of the soul is the substance of all being.

I have been somewhat baffled by the role of my soul in my life and didn't realize how core to all aspects of my life is my soul. This statement gave me an important insight. It wants me to unearth why I am here.

Well, I am doing that, but this must be a push to do more.

Another day I chose a Lazaris comment about our Shadow. It said The Shadow holds sacred everything I won't take responsibility for until I am ready to deal with it.

Hmmmm. So, probably it's my Shadow that must be bugging me to do more inner work.

Sometimes I simply don't understand a Lazaris quote, in which case it becomes a topic for Grace during my monthly session.

Recently, I was thinking about my first encounter with a channel. That was 1984 and a time when I was in pursuit of learning what my dyslexia is about. The answer was

Your dyslexia is physically and psychologically based. Somehow this description made sense, then. Now, thirty plus years later, I felt this description might be simplistic. There must be more to it. Well, my hunch was correct. I asked Grace how she would interpret the meaning of the initial channeled reading. She expanded the definition of psychological  
It's a synergetic combination of my intellectual self, my emotional self, my spiritual self and my physical self.

Her comment felt on the mark. Why? Because over these thirty years, I have found the need to learn more about each of these components in order to unravel confusion. I am hypothesizing that my dyslexia and hyperlexia gave me the discomforts so I would have to explore what could be a solution. Well, here's where I am at right now. I am having a life on the planet this time, in part, to learn about rising above my shame, my shortcomings, my disappointments and my belief that there is something wrong with me. These broken parts of myself need and needed to be healed. It is an ongoing challenge, for there are many lives involved. And of course, I am also here to have fun. Yup, I do, a great deal of the time. The combination of them all has turned out to be a full-time job.

During these last thirty years I was often advised to connect with my childhood Anns. It is only in recent years that I have made a concerted effort to do so. My morning routine includes writing in my diary and then checking in with my inner Anns, ages three to thirteen, asking which of them has something to say. Initially, Ann at three, who experienced the incest, needed a lot of support.

In two words she stated her pain as a question

Why me?

A valid question, one that I took up with Grace.

Her response was

Your lifetime on this planet was intended to be one where you are primarily learning lessons.

It seems my soul and my "energy" (me) before birth scheduled this,

you might say. No, the specifics were not stated, but the core reasons, such as learning how to take responsibility for healing my emotions. Of course, these thoughts are not a response for a three-year old. What she needs more of is love and confirmation that I will look out for her. Yes, indeed I do.

We, the inner Anns and I, have evolved a routine. We sit in a circle and each time the formation is different. The characteristics that describe each of the Anns are very delineated. The Ann at thirteen can be thrown off by not feeling good enough. The Ann at ten has become quite feisty since she began moving through the feeling of anxiousness. The Ann at eight is struggling with school because no help is available. No one knows what to do. And so it goes. I am discovering that when we – Ann in present day and Ann in my childhood – join to address an issue, we both feel progress. Healing occurs.

Our morning get-togethers are enriching for other reasons. There are some days when all we want to do is laugh or to draw. And that's what we do. The wonderful fallout of it all is I gain more understanding into myself.

Not long ago, I had an insight into a past behavior. I discovered why I projected an attitude of anger during two interviews in the mid-90s for leadership positions in opera. At the time, I was baffled by my behavior. And I knew after those interviews that those two different prospective employers couldn't have been interested in me; they must have sensed it. Now I know what the anger was about. It was not towards the interviewers, it turns out it was a ruse. Here's how. Unconsciously, I knew I was not qualified for the position because of my lifelong difficulty to comprehend and easily remember what I read. In opera, a person in a top position needs to not only have the creative spark to be a producer and the knowledge of the process of producing opera, but also an intellectual knowledge of both the history and music of this wonderful art form. The latter is a shortcoming for me. My brain hears the information,

but many a time it just floats by because I am unable to image fast enough. Therefore, I can't always count on there being retention. Now I sense the anger I projected during those interviews was my unconscious protection to ensure I didn't get the position. It is now clear to me that my producing talent would have been only a part of the required equation for a leadership position in opera. It was very painful to accept this reality, but slowly I realized that it was intended. While I am not an intellectual, my compensation is I am smart. It has long stood me in good stead.



Perhaps you will recall I was training to become a Brain Gym specialist. I did not follow through with that idea. While I still use their exercises, along with the Masgutova Method, I saw Brain Gym was not my next professional path. In fact, there wasn't another. This recognition opened up my life to new opportunities and it came from working in 2008 on Barak Obama's campaign for the Presidency. I so enjoyed being part of his long-distance team that when he was being sworn in I knew I wanted to pursue more volunteer work.

Two organizations attracted me. Parents Education Network (PEN), an ambitious and emerging undertaking in San Francisco whose focus was helping parents with kids who are challenged with dyslexia/ADHD, intrigued me. Initially, I took tickets at the door before their lecture series. Then, I began listening to the lectures. My memory ability to process linear information comes by writing it down. No instant recall for me, I don't image that fast. So, I began writing up the lectures just to learn. PEN then posted my summaries on their blog, and I added them to my Dyslexia website, [dyslexiadiscovery.com](http://dyslexiadiscovery.com).

I also offered my volunteer services to the San Francisco Symphony (SFS) and San Francisco Opera (SFO). It was 2009, and the time of the financial downturn. I sensed they might have a project that needed attention but was on hold for lack of funds. David Gockley, General Director at the Opera took me up on the offer and asked me to contact Jon Finck,

Director of Communications and Public Affairs. I have no idea what David said to him but for the first time in my life, the person (Jon) that I came to interview with, was standing outside the Stage Door to greet me. Taking me to his cluttered office with two slits of glass for windows, walls plastered with fabulous photos of Maria Callas, and a large desk stacked with periodicals and newspapers, we sat down at a tiny round table, cleared, I am sure, for this interview. He explained The Opera has kept archive materials, some dating back to 1922/1923. They need organization and identification. We are looking for help. Would you be interested in taking the first steps in this process? I mused with myself and then thought, what can I lose? Yes, let's see what needs to be done. It seemed there would be much to gain for me and the opera. I agreed to give three hours a week.

The first day I cased the situation. In the Communications office there was a long string (10) of old grey four-drawer legal sized filing cabinets jammed full of photos and other memorabilia, dating back to 1930. On shelves, I found House Programs – bound in leather casings, thank goodness – and dating back even further to 1923. And there were endless shelves of miscellaneous reading materials in no particular order.

Down the hall and around two corners was the Plotter Room with a huge black machine six feet long and seven high that is used by the Technical Production staff to print stage scenery plans and working drawings. Also in this cramped space were stacks of boxes with photos and excess House Programs and more boxes with outdated press releases and photographs from opening night parties oozing out of them. And there were yet three more four-drawer, grey-brown legal-sized filing cabinets filled with artists' photos. Good heavens, more boxes were stacked on top of them. All fodder for the Archives.

Then, my guide and I set off for Valhalla (in Richard Wagner's *The Ring*, Valhalla is the home of the gods) climbing five flights of stairs to a storage



room on the top floor of the Opera House, behind the standing room area in the Balcony. This was not an elegant large space, but rather one crowded large room with shelves and shelves of boxes upon boxes of artistic memorabilia, Opera Guild materials, press releases, education program materials, opera scores, production books dating forty years back, and more four-drawer filing cabinets of artists information from my time at the Opera – late 60s. And much more, scattered on the floor.

We returned down the stairs on the other side of the Opera House, going back stage again to the fourth floor adjacent to the General Director's office and around the corner from my old office in the early 70s. We walked through what used to be, in my day at the Opera, a conference room, and now houses cubicles for artistic and volunteer artistic staff.

At the back of this space is the Lobster Room. It's so named because the key chain originally had a lobster image on it (and still does). The room, about ten feet wide and twenty-three feet long, was initially intended for an organ (in the 1930s). Now it is grand central storage of 1,255 ten-inch reel-to-reel tapes of the live opera broadcasts from the 1970s and early 80s, along with 226 seven-inch opera reel-to-reel tapes. Add to that, more shelves reaching ten feet up along with drawers housing 4,900 videos and cassettes of opera performances. That's not all. When Terry McEwen retired as General Director from the Opera in 1988, Bernard Osher, a loyal and very generous donor to the Opera, bought from Terry McEwen his personal collection of 8,000 LPs, along with his art and gave it to the Opera. Terry had been a leading Producer for London Records, Decca's classical arm, for over twenty years and had generated many of the best classical recordings during that era. And yes, Terry's art collection is in the corner. Yup, you get the picture, this is a project.

One extraordinary accomplishment by one amazing woman, Kori Lockhart, made this project not quite so daunting. I knew Kori. She joined SFO in the PR Office in 1970 while I was working for Adler. Undertaking several roles in the PR office, including Publications Editor,

during her near forty-year tenure she was known from the day of hire as a lady with extraordinary knowledge of classical music and a temperament. Upon her retirement in 2001, she worked from home, was paid half salary and created this amazing online document using the bound House Programs dating back to 1932 as her resource. This includes a listing of each opera performed in a season along with the cast list, conductors, stage directors, designers, and much more. Here's the link: [archive.sfopera.com](http://archive.sfopera.com).

In 2009, when I came aboard, Kori was still very involved, adding photos where possible. It was amusing to observe the young staff in Jon's office who were challenged with how to deal with the Kori personality. Her bark could be worse than her bite, but sometimes it was hard to know which was which. I began a monthly trek to Kori's home in Kensington, over the Bay Bridge, bringing a stack of photos for her to identify. We renewed our friendship and had many good laughs and stories to share. Her cat Matcha, Kori's companion, decided she liked the box in which the photos were brought because it had a firm edge, great for scratching her neck. However, she consistently sneered at me, until one day she climbed on the table where Kori and I were poring over photos and sat right down in the middle of it all. Yup, she wanted attention and we gave it to her.

With Kori in my back pocket and after observing that the Opera's archive materials were very sketchily identified and organized, I knew my talent of making order out of chaos was a perfect challenge for me. No, I wasn't an archivist and wouldn't pretend to be. But I sensed a beginning could be made.



My first focus was unearthing San Francisco Opera former staff to help identify the memorabilia. As luck would have it, I had dinner that first week with Herbert Scholder, who had been Publicity Director on and off from 1958 to 1978. He seemed delighted to become involved. Identifying artists was one of Herbert's many talents. We were jammed into a small space with the Communications Staff. As he started through files of opera

productions, he discovered many photos of artists who had sung with the Opera, but some of those photos came from productions given at other opera houses – primarily the Metropolitan Opera, but also European opera houses. An important catch. Over the next few months, he pulled those photos, and we stored them in yet more boxes and put them in the Plotter Room. And so it went. Each day brought us a new challenge. Herbert and I were having fun figuring out our first steps.

Herbert kept running into photos of major opera stars during the late 40s that had been most often taken at the SFO stage door. The photographer's name on the back of the photos was Lilian Bauer. We didn't find her name on the official photographer list. Herbert decided to go online and see if he could find more information. Yes, she had written a book. Herbert ordered a copy and read it. There was very little on SFO – more on her current focus, which was dogs and dog shows. Herbert called the publisher for contact information and was given it. At which point he said to me Now you take over.

So, I called her. Yes, Lilian was an usher during the forties at the War Memorial Opera House. After performances, she waited at the stage door and took photos. Some wonderful photos. We also learned that each Opera season the ushers, near the end of the season, had a party where each usher dressed up as a character from one of the Fall Operas. They invited artists – who came! Lilian gave us photos of those events. Over the last ten years she has been a very useful 40s resource for us. When Herbert was stuck in his identification process, we sent a copy to her and often she had the answer.

One day, I dropped by Jon's door and commented  
We will need more former staff, guild members etc. to help  
with the identification.

He wasn't so sure

Why?

I need people who have photo memories as resources. We need the photos identified while former staff and Board members are still around,

walking on Planet Earth.  
And, I sauntered on.  
By the end of the year I am at the Opera for a day a week.  
There's so much work I want to do.

Climbing a Haight Street hill, yes, the famous Hippy street,  
I spied another walking towards me. I said  
I know you. Who are you?  
Stan Dufford. Who are you?  
Ann Farris.  
What are you doing?  
I am volunteering at the Opera evolving their Archives.  
I want to come.  
The two of us were so surprised to see one another. I had lived  
in his house for a few months in 1970. As the two of us have physically  
changed somewhat in these last 50 years, it's not surprising  
there was no instant recall.  
Stan worked at the Opera from 1956 as Wig Master and then later  
Wig and Makeup Master. He left the Company in 1968 because  
the chemistry between him and Mr. Adler was non-existent.  
Moving on to Lyric Opera of Chicago, he remained till 2000.  
Now, our Archive Volunteer Corps totals three. And Jon was losing  
his nervousness. In fact, he was beginning to be intrigued with photos  
that were in our archives. One day I said to him  
I hope you are comfortable with the fact that there may be  
errors in the process of identifying artists.  
He looked at me quizzically  
Why should that be?  
I am learning that no one will be correct 100% of the time. Herbert  
and Stan are often arguing about who is who. Herbert always feels  
he is correct. Stan is not always that sure about the name of a specific  
artist and is willing to dig into the Internet to find other photos  
of these artists and match their faces to the ones he was looking at.  
Very interesting dynamics between those two.

Jon commented

Okay, if we have volunteers who have been involved with the Company it's probably our best opportunity of getting correct identification. And yes, I guess errors will happen.

I countered

I think we can pretty well count on someone seeing the error and telling us. Opera aficionados love to catch that kind of error.

Okay, I get it.

I am beginning to enjoy working with Jon. At first you think he is a quiet sort – until he isn't. With a loud wonderful laugh and many good stories, one is always entertained. More than that, he has made a point in his career at the Opera of knowing its history. And what he doesn't know, he asks. He gives me lots of space to throw ideas at him. Often they begin with one-liners that I drop as I am walking by his office.

As my work progressed, I had lunch with David Gockley and said You must promise me that by the time you retire as General Director you will have found money in the Opera budget for an Archivist. He nodded agreement. He knew why I made that comment. When I left OPERA America fifty years ago, there was a hiatus in finding leadership and ground was lost. He was on the Board and watched. So, I know I can trust him.

Susan Mallot, a very efficient and extremely pleasant Managing Director of the San Francisco Opera Guild, put me in touch with Guild members who had been around in the 60s. Anne Kasanin and Beverly Coughlin, both former Guild Presidents, willingly came in monthly and identified photos. I wrote frantically. Not only was our time together productive, it was informative and loads of fun. Those two waxed on with Guild tales as they identified photos. We accomplished much. Later Jane Hartley, also a past Guild President, joined us.

I enlisted Lotfi Mansouri, former General Director of the Opera. He, Stan and I would lunch monthly in a different restaurant and then spend time in his home office while he identified photos. Again, stories flowed.

Nancy Adler Montgomery joined this process. One afternoon a month I arrive on her doorstep with a box filled with a stash of photos for identification. Her memory for the years 1965-1979 (from the time she married Mr. Adler until the birth of her daughter, Sabrina) is stellar.



[ 2012 ]

Living on the West Coast makes it easy to visit my family. Each Christmas I sojourn up in Canada. Haig and Mary, Katherine and Kit, open their homes to me and we celebrate.



HAIG AND MARY FARRIS



ANN & KATHERINE FARRIS, KIT PEARSON

In 2011, Heather Mackay Shemilt, a second cousin who lives in New York, suggested to Haig that the two of them host a Farris family reunion in Vancouver at the Vancouver Club. Our family came from three brothers: Wallace, Bruce and Wendell and their wives who ventured West to Vancouver from the Maritimes in the 1890s and early 1900s. Starting from scratch, they built for themselves and their families a base that, by 2012, had grown to more than one hundred family members living primarily in Vancouver but also coming from far flung locations: New York, Ottawa, Toronto, Sun Valley, London and more.



WALLACE, BRUCE AND WENDEL FARRIS FAMILY REUNION—2012 [PHOTO BY LAUREN TETRAULT]

It was a wonderful Sunday afternoon event which took place on the main floor of the Vancouver Club. We filled its elegant old wooden-lined room that opened up into a light-filled solarium. Heather had assembled a timeline indicating how all of us interlinked. Quite a feat. It was printed on many large pieces of paper and covered a good portion of the north wall of this large glass-enclosed space. Both my brother Haig and Bruce Houser, a second cousin, offered tales from the past. All of us had a good time, not only renewing friendships or meeting one another for the first time, but also checking out the links that Heather had so meticulously assembled. In the months preceding this event, I decided my part could be creating a CD of photos, starting with the early Wallace Farris family days, to share with this gathering group. It was shown on a large screen continuously during the event and I gave a CD to each family.



Back at the farm, the San Francisco Opera, Maestro Luisotti, the Company's Music Director, had just returned from a successful gig

at Covent Garden and was admonishing Jon saying  
The Opera's backstage hallways looked like any old corporate environment.  
You should see Covent Garden's backstage. History is all over its walls.  
SFO needs to do the same.

Jon's eyes lit up. Yes, it did have to change. David Gockley agreed,  
and we had a new project.

And more importantly, the work we were doing to evolve the Archives  
had a *raison d'être* for the administrative and production staff in  
the Opera House. We were no longer those old people volunteering  
in the Communications Office doing God knows what.

Very amusing.

Jon became curator. He asked for suggestions for photos.

Stan loved this project and was very forthcoming. Herbert did not  
and chose to continue his focus identifying photos.



By now, I am volunteering two days a week and enjoying every bit of it.  
The energy of working in an Opera House is always uplifting, generally  
quite dramatic one way or another, but taken as a total, ever so satisfying.  
And I love being around the music.

We had to accomplish the two hallway galleries on the 4th and 5th floors  
backstage on a shoe string. I went to Cheap Pete's, a frame factory outlet,  
to see what might be possible. Jon felt that their bid for matting and  
framing fit into our non-existent budget, and we sensed they could do  
a credible job. He also brought his staff aboard. Gelane Pearson,  
Communications Assistant, organized the process of getting the photos  
digitized and blown up ready for framing. Micah Standley, Editor of the  
House Programs and Robin Freeman, Communications Manager pitched  
in with suggestions and helped with the installation. Wonderful Julia  
Inouye, Associate Director of Communications, who always can be relied  
upon to come up with something new, channeling ideas in a different  
direction, became active with the project. I love collaborating with her.



We needed one hundred thirty-five photos to accomplish our goal. The theme Jon chose for the 4th floor backstage, where administrative and production staff have offices, was centered around photos honoring the successes of the seven general directors (since 1932). The fifth floor, where the large Chorus Room lives, along with many coaching rooms, each with piano and belonging to the different *maestri* and coaches in the House, was dedicated to the chorus, ballet and special projects. Jon organized a photoshoot of the musicians with the Maestro and that photo has a place of honor at the end of the 5th floor hall, adjacent to the Music Director's office. All of this was being done during the Fall Season. Yup, crazy – but we got it up. And during that time, my inability to remember images came to the fore. There were too many visual details within each photo for my brain to image and remember, not to mention the fact that there were one hundred thirty-five photos. Oh, my goodness, it was such a painful situation. I was unable to give Jon the kind of support he needed. No, I still can't instantly recall which photo is which. You have no idea how frustrating this was/is. But I soldiered on. I knew we had the potential of making a huge difference to the quality of life backstage – and we did.



About this time, I decided, hey, the Archives need their own space. I didn't ask. Herbert, Stan and I just moved our work to the narrow, twenty-three-foot-long and ten-foot-wide "cupboard," the Lobster Room. Lori Harrison, Prop Mistress and her able crew, when they weren't working on the stage, came up to the Lobster Room to squeeze in and set up three tables, chairs and more. Jon finally had the budget for us to have a scanner and got us two computers from Tech Support. Both were such a rich gifts! With dedicated space, I could advertise in the Opera's House Program, given out at each performance, for more volunteers – individuals who knew opera and more particularly, San Francisco Opera, as well as having some computer skills.



And then I took a three-week vacation – an amazing trip to Tanzania. I received an invitation which I couldn't refuse: attend the wedding of Martin Maliyamkono, a former student of mine when I was teaching dyslexics in the early '80s the systems I created to help myself with my dyslexia. Martin's mother, Todo, who lived in Tanzania, and his Aunt Rube who lived in Oakland, had become friends when Todo was in the Bay Area. Now, I was visiting Dar es Salaam, a large city on the Indian Ocean side of Africa and meeting the tribe of ten brothers and sisters and cousins and aunts and uncles for a three-day wedding celebration.

It was an amazing experience. The traditions were so different. One sequence fascinated me. The wedding celebration is hosted by the groom's family on the wedding day and the bride's family are just guests. The Send Off, which happens two or three days earlier is the bride's family celebration. It is full of unusual traditions, including one of the bride's relatives rolling her body towards the groom's family and the groom's family offering a suitcase filled with "goodies" to show that the groom can look after the bride.

After the wedding week, we did several explorative visits in Dar Es Salaam, and side trips that included Bagamoyo, Arusha and a three-day safari, as well as days on the romantic island of Zanzibar. The latter is a truly beautiful island, steeped in architectural history and offering expansive pristine beaches with blue, blue, water. Great swimming!

On my website, [annfarris.com](http://annfarris.com), is a blog detailing my trip to Tanzania, with photos: [annfarris.com/blog/](http://annfarris.com/blog/)



[ 2013 ]

Back to San Francisco and the Opera.

By now, I am volunteering three days a week and still enjoying it.

Richard Sparks, former Subscription Manager, had recently retired.

I had hoped he would join us. No, it was too soon for him. However, he recommended Marianne Welmers, a former staff member. I followed up, for it had become clear that Stan needed an assistant with logging information into Excel on the computer. I knew as soon as I talked with Marianne that she and Stan would take to one another like two ducks to water. They love history, yes opera, but history in general and know it. Marianne was very comfortable with the idea of giving Stan computer support. Hanging out with the two of them, in itself, can be a delightful day's activity, they are so fascinating to listen to.

Nancy Jones took over a Micah Standley project, making a list in Excel of all the articles in the House Program books from 1932 to present day. That was a huge task, and to make matters worse for her, the two of us kept coming up with more research ideas to add to this list, which meant she was going through more than ninety programs, over and over. What a good sport she is.

Finally, Richard Sparks was ready to join our team.

He is a detail man and an important addition. His fascination is unearthing what it took to create auxiliary programs at the Opera – mostly started during the Adler dynasty.

We began with Western Opera Theater (WOT), a project initiated in the mid-60s with a focus on training and touring for emerging opera artists. Not long after Richard's arrival, it became clear that Richard needed an assistant. My tiny announcement in the Opera's House Programs resulted in more interest.

I asked

Richard, would you like to participate with me in interviewing prospective archive volunteers?

Yes, very much so.

Rhonda Robichaud, an Opera subscriber and theatre stage manager, materialized and became the WOT project computer supporter for Richard. Over many years, the two of them have created a well-documented history – through old programs, press releases,

photos of WOT – all describing WOT’s birth in 1966 to its closure in 2002. Rhonda is very proprietary of her and Richard’s materials.

One delightful day, Jon and the Communications Staff told us they would be celebrating the Archive Volunteers with a Christmas party. Julia outdid herself with the cake – huge, chocolate with a frosting of a lobster on the top. This party has become an annual event, which we all look forward to. Lobsters are now the emblem of the Archive Volunteers. And the Stage Door staff always are asking  
How are the Lobsters doing?



LOBSTER CAKE 2017



CHRISTMAS PARTY 2018

Ellen Grinnell, who had begun her opera life at age eight when her father had a Saturday Matinee subscription for the two of them to the Metropolitan Opera, joined us. There wasn't an opera fact she didn't know. I gave her the challenge of creating a listing in Excel of all the reel-to-reel broadcast tapes, beginning in 1970. Oh, what a project. I would pull the tapes from shelves ten feet up and give them to her for chronicling in Excel.

It got to the point where I knew we had to reorganize these tapes into alphabetical order by opera. Ellen suggested that she might be able to talk her daughter Lilly and her friend Seth Coad Douglas, both mad opera

fans and eighteen years old, into helping me on a Saturday, on a non-performance day. Sure enough, one Saturday, these energetic opera enthusiasts arrived, along with Ellen. We took over the artistic suite and lobbies on the fourth floor, removing 1,300 ten-inch reel-to-reel tapes and re-organizing them by opera alphabetically on the floor stretching down two halls. Seth, with one leg slung over the top of an eight-foot ladder, and I then reloaded them onto the shelves in the Lobster Room with Ellen sitting at the computer and checking her list as we restocked. Thank heavens, I had tons of food.

We needed it. By 7 p.m. we were done, exhausted but ever so proud.

Ellen died nearly two years ago (2017). Her devotion to the Archives is so appreciated. Her unusual sense of humor always seemed to lighten the burden of confusion and hard work. Yes, this lovely lady is missed.

Jon reported that David Gockley and the Opera's Board of Directors recently decided to accept an invitation from the War Memorial Administration, which oversees the operations of the Opera House and Veterans Building. The offer: take over the 4th floor (top floor) of the Veterans Building (former home to the Museum of Modern Art) across the Courtyard from the Opera House when the retrofit of the building was complete. The construction work was required because of the damage to the building during the 1989 earthquake. This opportunity would make possible gathering together several of the Opera departments – Development, Education, Marketing, HR – which were scattered in rental properties throughout San Francisco. And not only would there be



ELLEN GRINNELL, LILLY GRINNELL  
SETH COAD DOUGLAS

a huge rehearsal hall/education center, but also a small theatre seating 299 located in what was the Sculpture Court during the SFMOMA days. The Costume Shop, which was located in a dilapidated building a fair distance from the Opera, would have a beautiful new space. Its hundreds of historic and current costumes would live in the large basement of the Veterans Building. Yes, and one plum – God bless David Gockley – there will be an Archive Center. Jon and I were so excited. This was a dream we hadn't counted on when we started this project.

One day Richard Sparks suggested we unearth Rob Robb who had been on the Opera's PR staff and then worked for Amoeba Music Store on the Haight, which has an amazing collection of classical LPs. After much persuasion, Rob joined us. He and Richard, both avid collectors of Opera LPs, decided that on Mondays, for a couple of hours for several weeks, they would tackle the Terry McEwen collection of 7,500 LPs. From it, they culled 500 LPs that they felt were either germane to the San Francisco Opera Archives or important to keep for other historical purposes. The question became what to do with the rest. Jon and I and others explored ideas. We tried giving away a few to staff and there were few takers. Next, we thought of having a sale during the Season – but that would be so much work on top of producing the season. Then, lo and behold, in 2014 there was a *New York Times* article on Zero Freitas in Sao Paulo, Brazil who was collecting LPs. At this point he had five million. I said to Jon

Let's sell this collection in totality minus, of course, the five hundred LPs that Richard and Rob felt should be kept.

He and David Gockley agreed. I got in touch with the Freitas contact, Alan Bastos, in New York. It took time to put this deal together, but on a Friday in late August of 2014, Bastos and two cohorts arrived, boxed up all of these recordings and packed them into two vans. Bastos had also purchased an entire store of LPs in San Jose and all of the LPs were being packed in a container and sent to Sao Paulo. It was a grey, foggy summer afternoon as the two vehicles pulled away. I looked up at the heavens and said to Terry McEwen

Your collection is going to continue its life. I know we have done you a good deed, my friend.

Sure enough, a year later the *Manchester Guardian*, the widely respected British newspaper, had an article on Freitas and his Sao Paulo collection, now totaling seven million LPs. The only individual LP collection in the article that was mentioned was Terry McEwen's. Oh, I was so thrilled. And I venture to guess that the reason they chose this collection was because opera is an international art form. Now, you can see why I just love working on the Archives. There is always a new and different challenge.



ROB ROBB, RHONDA ROBICHAUD, RICHARD SPARKS, STEPHANIE ROGERS,  
BARBARA ROMINSKI AND ANN FARRIS IN THE LOBSTER ROOM

Not long after, Heidi Munzinger showed up with a great curiosity about opera. She worked wonderfully well on her own. I gave her the challenge of figuring out what was housed in Valhalla, the storage space behind the top balcony of the Opera House. The result: a detailed listing of all the boxes, file cabinets, and stuff loaded on shelves. At the same time, she produced a schematic of this space on the computer. Wow, that was

impressive. Along came Lawrence Kim, who began the organization and listing of all the other media sources stored in the Lobster Room. Shelves upon shelves of cassettes, video tapes higgledy-piggledy stored in no order. Over four years, Lawrence changed that. Now nearly 5,000 tapes have a sense of order. I was so amused to discover that a tool I found in a hardware store, a long-stemmed branch with a claw on the end, became his most favorite implement. He could pick up a small cassette tape on a shelf ten feet up and easily transfer it to its new home. He glowed when he was using this rich gift. And sadly, the end of his life came in 2017.

What is so amazing about all the work accomplished by the Archive Volunteers is the fact it is accomplished by very dedicated individuals who care about opera. Some work three hours or four hours a day, some two or three days in the week and some whole days. Whatever, they hang in with us, soldiering on.



In mid-August 2013 enter Jim Nance, who had auditioned for the Merola Opera Training Program many years ago. Not only does he love and know opera, but also he loves a project with detail and working alone. I suggested he take on the challenge of creating a complete listing of all the Opera staff beginning in 1923. The basic core information existed in the SFO House Programs. Oh my God, he became committed, coming in three days a week for three hours a day. Five years later, in Spring 2018, the project was accomplished. What a guy! We would delight in teasing him when he told us that had to take time off to go to Idaho for a haircut!

About this time, Jon said to me

Let's honor those people who have been helping create the San Francisco Opera Archives. Not only was he referring to our volunteers, but also individuals from the Stanford University Music Library. Stan and I had made several treks to Stanford to view archives of former SFO singers and SFO Board member collections. And the San Francisco Public Library Archive staff had been extremely helpful. And of course, Kirsten Tanaka



at the Museum of Performance and Design. They and others were invited to a reception and the opportunity to attend a Dress Rehearsal.



*Back Row:* G.PEARSON, M.STANDLEY, R.FREEMAN, C.CROSBY, S.C.DOUGLAS,  
L.KIM, M.ERVITI, R.HEIGEMEIR, TWO LADIES ON FAR RIGHT, C.MORETTA, Q.BERGER  
*Middle Row:* J.FINCK, S.DUFFORD, M.WELMERS, K.TANAKA, UNKNOWN, J.NANCE, A.FARRIS, N.JONES  
*Front Row:* J.INOUE, E.P.BRABY, A.MCMAHON, S.WRONKIEWICZ, T.UPDIKE,  
E.GRINNELL, N.ADLERMONTGOMERY, D.GOCKLEY

Jon's instincts on when celebration is important is not only very much appreciated but encouraging to those in the trenches. The SFO Archive Volunteers have really bonded with the work, the friends they have made and a wonderful sense of accomplishment.

Delightful and very informed, Stephanie Rogers responded to our ad in the House Program. The daughter of Glynn Ross who founded the Seattle Opera, Stephanie grew up in an "Opera House." An extraordinary source she is: She knows the operatic repertoire and the people. Just as she joined us, we receive a packet of telegrams (perhaps 100) sent to the family of Peter Conley, former manager of San Francisco Opera. In 1938, very suddenly, he died. Clearly, he had great respect from many people. His relatives wondered if we wanted these telegrams. I decided we best go through them to see if some came from Board Members or people involved in an early SFO group called Friends. That program was initiated

in the 1920s and continued well into the 1930s as an opera support group. Anyone who donated \$25 and up could be a Friend. Stephanie was an ideal person to do this job since her husband's family had been involved with the Opera in its early days. Stephanie knew the families. Several months later she had a fascinating Excel spreadsheet of the names of people who were involved at that time and their volunteer roles at the Opera. This was a very laborious undertaking and done thoroughly. We kept about fifty of those telegrams.

Susan Storch answered my call for help. In fact, it was her husband who read the announcement in the House Program and told her to apply. She was the closest individual we had in our group to actually being an archivist and gave us some good advice. Her professional business is creating indexes, those useful lists at the end of a book. And she had a great sense of humor to boot. A wonderful addition. We were amazed to learn that their season Opera tickets were first row on the main floor, over to House Right by the timpani. That's what they liked!

Karen Baumer replied to our ad. She had a career with a flexible work schedule. At the end of each year, she and Marianne were in competition about who had seen the most opera performances in a year. As Karen travels constantly to see opera, she won. It was amusing to watch this competition. Not long after, we interviewed Helen Chin. I wasn't sure whether bringing her aboard made sense because she had limited knowledge of opera. To Richard, yes, he felt her computer skills compensated. And sure enough she is still with us, given the difficult challenges we've had. Guess what, she has also become a devoted opera fan. Peter Felleman is another gem. He will take on any project given him and knows the art form.

And one night in the summer of 2016, I attend a lecture on the upcoming opera season. Sitting next to me was Phil Grisier. He was just retiring and wanted a project. I sold him on the Archives and in he came, offering upscale computer skills and his knowledge of opera. We were ever so fortunate. Sadly, Phil succumbed to cancer in 2018.

One day, a young woman, Nora White, applied to be an Archive Volunteer. We were surprised to have her interested until we learned the reason. She had recently concluded her studies in art in England. However, when she returned home, she answered the call of the family. Learn the family nut business. They grow various kinds of nuts in the Central Valley. The trade-off for accepting this responsibility was her having time to keep connected to the arts by volunteering for us. She is a very skilled lady on the computer and every project she takes on is done thoroughly.

Carol Buonagario came for an interview just at the time the Communications Office was needing someone to organize press clippings. Voila, a solution. She loved the work. Her face shone when I dropped by her desk. Sadly, in this last year, her health has kept her away. Susan Warble, a quiet, reliable lady and already on our team, willingly took over the press clippings organizational challenge in the Communications office. Then along came Mary Seastrand, a nurse, now retired, who had a subscription to the Opera. Richard and I knew she could be a welcomed assistant to the work we were doing: collecting opera memories from former staff. She soldiers on with us.

Marcy Bastiani is a recent acquisition. She was a long-term employee of SF Opera, working in the Box Office. And during these last ten years she kept saying to me: Ann, I am coming to work in the Archives when I retire. And sure enough, she's now on the team. Her career began in 1979 as Assistant Box Office Treasurer. Then in 2007, she became the Medallion Society Concierge Manager and remained in this position until 2016. From the get-go, when she indicated her interest years ago, I said We have the perfect project for you. Photo identification of the attendees to cast parties and other Opera events. She knows the faces of patrons and performers for the past thirty years and loves her non-paying job.

Throughout these years, Jon kept reminding me San Francisco Opera will be celebrating its 100th birthday in 2022/23

and we will need much detail on the Company's history.  
It will be important resource material for preparing hard and digital copy for this important celebration.  
I assured him  
Indeed, we know this. The Archive volunteers, now numbering sixteen, are hard at it.



I guess you can see we were – and are – having fun.  
Nobody grouched about the close quarters.  
In 2014 Jon offered  
I think it's time we paid you.  
I was so taken aback, I said  
Why?  
It confused me. I am a volunteer.  
The next day I agreed. Better to be paid a pittance than not at all.



Jon talked David Gockley into the idea of another photo gallery project in the new Wilsey Center for Opera. In fact, two galleries. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in the 30s had need of long hallways to hang art. Now, they would contain historic SFO photos.  
At the outset, I said to Jon  
I can't take this project on. The stress of trying to remember images is too much.  
He convinced me  
Ann, you will do the organizational side.  
Somehow, I couldn't turn him down. He is so much fun to work with because he is always coming up with good ideas that need fleshing out. And he's very open to other ideas. Yes, he can be moody, but his brilliance compensates. We play off each other wonderfully well.  
So, of course, I wanted a part of it.  
I invited a friend, Annette Schutz, whom I met while volunteering

for Parents Education Network, to check out our backstage galleries in the Opera House. She co-owns an art gallery, Arthaus, on Townsend and 4th with her business partner, James Bacchi. I wanted them to see what we had accomplished with the 4th and 5th floor backstage photos in the Opera House. I was hoping they would give us advice on how to do a better job in the 4th floor of the Veteran's Building now named the Diane B. Wilsey Center for Opera (so named for the lead donor on this project). Annette and James liked the concept of the backstage galleries but not the execution, and gave me the name of Rick Stone at Michael Thompson Framing in San Francisco to approach for the framing. They felt the quote would be within our budget. And it was. The results were stellar.



A few days before Memorial Day, 2013, I had an urge to take an art class. I thought it would be fun and looked to see what workshop might exist over the weekend. Sure enough, Mendocino Art Center on the coastline north of San Francisco had a two-day watercolor class and there was an opening. I rushed to Flax Art Store on Market and told this wise, older man who obviously had been with the company for years I need art supplies for a watercolor class in Mendocino but have no idea what they might be. This is an experiment, so I am not looking to spend a lot of money. Please suggest what I need. We had great fun. And I left – armed.

The next morning, I was on the road by 5 a.m. and in Mendocino by 10 – the start time. I had two wonderful days just playing. And when they put a bouquet of flowers in front of the class to paint, I knew that was impossible. So, I picked one flower and came up with a product I loved – and still do. I was hooked. I wanted to learn more, so I began signing up for extension classes at the San Francisco Art Institute.

One teacher, Pamela Lanza, and I connected. She helped me evolve a little bit of skill. And in my classes I met two new friends, Jana (now Ezawa)

and Eva Enriquez. Both from Europe, both accomplished artists, both in their forties and making life happen. We have flourishing friendships.



*Left: ANN FARRIS AND EVA ENRIQUEZ / Right: MIKA AND JANA EZAWA*  
SOUND BOX PRODUCED BY THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY



[ 2015 ]

Jon and I were given the go-ahead to start the process of interviewing archivists. David Gockley would retire in a year, and he was holding true to his agreement with me, made seven or more years ago. Jon and I did a lot of research on what an archivist does and after about six months we had a job description. After it was posted, in the first six months we had lots of responses, interviewed several and found only one that interested us. She declined because the commute from San Jose where she lived was too great. We were very sad.

I called my brother Haig for ideas. He was on the University of British Columbia Library Committee and very interested in archives. He gave me two names to approach for advice. One in Canada, one in the US. Carol Moore, head of the Library System at the University of Toronto said

Not surprising you haven't found the right candidate. You have a very special job to offer that only a few can fill. It will take you a year. She truly helped us take the stress away from the search. Catherine Quin at UCLA put me in touch with Susan Luftsche, who gave me specifics about the job description that needed correction. And we started again.

One Saturday morning at the cleaners Jon ran into a SFMOMA colleague, who has a similar position to him at the Opera. He asked Does your organization have an Archivist?

Yes.

We are looking for an archivist and need advice.

She promised to send the information. Well, the Opera was about to start Fall Season and in all the craziness that it brings to the Press Office, we forgot that she forgot to send it along. A couple of months went by and those two again ran into each other at the cleaners.

This time the information came.

We took the Archivist, Barbara Rominski, to lunch, described the job and asked if she knew any candidates.

Yes, three: myself and two others.

We interviewed her, were very impressed with what she had accomplished at SFMOMA, establishing and growing their archive into an amazing resource.

The rest is history. She needed four months to finish up at SFMOMA, moving them into their new space, the newly designed SFMOMA.



Meantime, we had two galleries to prepare, as well as a move from the Lobster Room to the new Archive Center, which has two good-sized rooms: one for public research and the other for storage of many boxes of files, along with working tables, etc. And there's an office for the Archivist. My now sixteen very able and hardworking volunteers gave a hand as we prepared to move. We just had to get it all done. Around this time, the Opera's Development Office had a very good piece of news.

They had found a sponsor for the Archives, Edward Paul Braby, who was willing to make a major donation to support the SFO Archives Center. Yup, we sure are legit now.



One of the big challenges with the photo galleries was finding a technology which would give us high quality digital copies of the photos Jon wanted to have on the walls. Some of the originals were lost but the photos were found in old Souvenir Books that had been produced by Herbert Scholder and others in the 60s and 70s. How to do this?

I asked the Opera's photographer, Corey Weaver

Can you take acceptable photos from souvenir books of the past?

No. See if you can find a company or individuals who do drumming – a technique not unlike scanning, but there are many scans over the same photo.

I called our contact at the Computer Museum in Silicon Valley. She said

No, I haven't used the technique, but I hear Levi's in San Francisco has.

I called Levi's archive department and they gave me a contact.

Enter Act3 Partners: Jack Schaeffer and Jeff Hurn.

My contact was Jack, who explained

Jeff is a digital artist and has evolved a technique of producing high quality photos from lousy originals – e.g. magazines like your old souvenir magazines.

How do you do it?

We will bring our computer and large screen and demonstrate.

I had a hard time convincing Jon that it was worth his time to meet this team. The Opera was two weeks away from opening the Fall 2016 Season and he was busy. I warned our guests that it may only be me.

To ameliorate the situation, I booked the Conference Room next to Jon's office to ensure he would show up.

It was a sunny day, which augured well. Jack and Jeff set up and showed me the results. It looked impressive. I had the Souvenir Books for them to see, the photographic quality of which was very poor.



They seemed undaunted.

So, I went next door to Jon to convince him to join us

You have to take a few moments. The results are stellar.

Within a half-hour he was impressed. Of course, he worried about what it would cost but...

Within a couple of weeks, the details were worked out.

Meantime, some of the Archive volunteers: Stan, Richard, Marianne, Nancy, Ellen, Heidi and Stephanie pulled photos that they thought ought to be considered for the galleries. In fact, this group hosted a lunch in the large Conference Room to make their presentations. Jon was deeply touched and included two of the photos.



[ 2016 ]

January came and the furniture arrived for the Archive Center.

We had done a good job with our selections. It was very satisfying to see.

I began picking up and/or ordering all the supplies we needed. I wanted the Center to be ready for our Archivist by the second week of February.

During January, a team of our volunteers and I packed up 50 boxes of production files from the Communications Office and odds and sods from the Lobster Room. Valentina Simi, Assistant to the Music Director, let us store these archive materials in Maestro Luisoti's office (he was off-site). The boxes filled with archive material and two baby grand pianos became good bedfellows.

Meantime, Jon, our digitizing team, Jack and Jeff – now affectionally referred to by us and the Stage Door guards as J & J – and I were focused on content for the two photo galleries. One gallery would have black and white photos only, the other color. My issue of not remembering images came to the fore very fast. To Jon's credit, he did not hassle me about this issue. But I know he sure could have used better help.

The Friday before the beginning of February was moving day into the Archive Center. All hands on deck, yes again driven by our wonderful volunteers, The boxes were being moved from the Maestro's office and transferred by truck around the corner to the Veterans Building and upstairs to the Archive Center. God bless Richard Sparks. He gladly took on the challenge of figuring out how to shelve all of those boxes in the large middle room of the Archive Office. I was quite distressed because the ladder we (the Opera's Technical Production Office staff and I) had ordered was subsequently rejected twice by the Production Staff: "damaged in transport." At the very last moment as we were loading our boxes into the trucks, the Opera's Property Mistress, Lori Harrison, came flying into the Archive Center saying the ladder that we had ordered had finally arrived undamaged. There was a loud cheer.



A.FARRIS, N.JONES, R.SPARKS, M.WELMERS, K.SCHRODER, H.CHIN, S.DUFFORD



February came and the arrival of Barbara Rominski. All of us on the Archive Team were thrilled. The volunteers were great in sharing their projects, and very quickly Barbara knew what first steps to take: Re-organize the Production files into an archive system. Barbara is a workaholic and undertook this whole task by herself – working day

and night. I was relieved I no longer had the day-to-day running of the Archives. I was now up for less responsibility.



My focus continued on the Galleries.

As we were hanging the Black and White Gallery of fifty plus photos, I looked up at the lighting system and realized the bar by which they were attached was sagging. This resulted in creating uneven shadows at the bottom of the photos where the plaques with the details of each photo were intended to be installed. Never a dull moment. The lighting company who had created and manufactured the system for this project had a new challenge, and eventually they reached a good solution. Finally, at the end of February the Black and White Gallery photos were hung. Thanks to Teresa Concepcion, Communications Associate in Jon Finck's office, the labelling of each photo was both accurate and attractively presented. The digitizing and the framing quality were and are top drawer. Yes, the final product looked very professional – even though and not unexpected, individuals found errors in identification. It is ever thus.



ANN FARRIS, JULIA INOUYE, TERESA CONCEPCION, JON FINCK AND BARBARA ROMINSKI  
[PHOTO BY SCOTT WALL]



[ MARCH 2016 ]

I knew I had to have some rest. Yup, I was plain exhausted, and we still had the color gallery to complete. With some time off, I was back at it and we completed the color gallery.

Now it is late spring. I said to Barbara  
I am going to take three weeks off in August, then come back  
in September for a month. In October I am going back to being  
a volunteer, working one day a week doing projects – building SFO  
histories of yore. Please do not tell Jon until I do.

Eventually the moment came. The conversation went very well.  
No, he wasn't pleased, but he understood. His only question was  
Why didn't Barbara tell me?  
Because I asked her not to.



Now, I have my personal life back. After four days a week at the Opera,  
this change was very welcomed. I rented a tiny space in Art Explosion, a  
huge warehouse in the area where the dotcoms hang out in San Francisco.  
I began exploring who I am artistically with forty-nine other artists doing  
the same in their cubicles. It is wonderful to have this magical environment  
with others – all much more evolved artists than I. I soldier on.

As to any romance: nope. One man intrigued me until I realized he has  
that Don Giovanni energy: a rogue in the quest of women – certainly not  
a relationship. There is a very famous aria in the opera *Don Giovanni*, sung  
by Leporello, the Don's henchman. He outlines the hundreds of women who  
have come and gone in Don Giovanni's life. While I first saw *Don Giovanni*  
in 1958 during the Vancouver International Festival, (Joan Sutherland  
in the cast) it took me more than fifty years to finally accept, during my  
attendance at a recent *Don Giovanni* performance in San Francisco, that

this behavior was zero-sum, as David Neenan would say. Boy, it takes a lot to grow up. Certainly, it is time to let go of that fascination.



[ FEBRUARY 2017 ]

I woke up one morning with another decision: I was going to move out of San Francisco. I was tired of the cold, grey fog and having no summer. I don't like feeling chilled. I need the warmth of the sun to keep me healthy. Later that very day, Joan Arhelger, my housemate and owner of the flat in San Francisco where I was living, shared that she is going into semi-retirement from being a stage lighting professor at San Francisco State University and will probably renovate the apartment.

Is it not amazing that these two events happened on one day? Well, I was prepared for this announcement. She gave me ten months advance notice. Certainly generous! I toyed with moving south, first to Los Angeles, (too much traffic), then San Diego, a possibility and finally Encinitas (on the Coastline). The latter really attracted me – felt like living in Hawaii.



JOAN ARHELGER

However, I decided not to leave the Bay Area and my friends. As soon as I took that decision, out of the blue came a suggestion: Vallejo, a tiny town at the tip of San Francisco Bay, just south of Napa and the wine country. I was immediately attracted. It has a charming historic district where I was lucky to find an apartment with a garden (for pots). By December, I was moved in. And all my personal belongings now could come from Canada and storage in San Francisco. What makes me happiest after the lovely weather is

the fact that I have beautiful/majestic art on my walls created primarily by two artists: my sister Katherine and my oldest friend, Sherrard Grauer. Thanks to Annette Schutz and her colleague, Bonnie McGregor, both oozing talent for positioning art, these “old friends” and more are now up on walls for me to enjoy.

My sister’s painting, *Land of Home*, is the cover of this book.



ANNETTE SCHUTZ AND SHERRARD GRAUER’S FRONT HALL ARRANGEMENT

I can imagine you are wondering what’s with the commute to San Francisco. Well, there’s a delightful ferry which takes an hour, or I drive when I need my car.

Now, I am near to finishing my autobiography. Recently I was surprised to discover that there is a common theme between this book and my first book, *The Other Side of Dyslexia*. When I was writing my dyslexia book, the approach I used to uncover a way of expressing my thoughts employed the five senses: see, hear, taste, touch and smell. In the last while, I have learned through Grace that there is an extension of these well-known

senses. They are titled unfamiliar senses. When Grace described their characteristics, I realized I have been employing these naturally all my life.

When we say “hear” it refers to sound. The unfamiliar is “voice”: a sense of what is really being said. This experience is one that I became skilled at from a very young age. Whenever I walked into a room, I knew what was going on with each person. I am amazed that this talent has a name. When we say “smell”, it’s the fragrance we are referring to. The unfamiliar sense is movement: The air is static or almost dead, or conversely something is tingling with a life force energy. And so it continues with the other unfamiliar senses. I find this all quite exciting. Exploring beyond what is the conventional, I enjoy.

Recently, I was feeling overwhelmed with the amount of work I have created for myself. My commitment to the Opera and my desire to give more time to finish this book, my autobiography, were at odds. In tandem with this situation, I was noticing that my thumbs, which have been dancing with the idea of becoming arthritic despite my exercises and cream, were feeling quite painful. I mentioned all of this to Grace during my monthly chat. She asked what is the emotion that is most prevalent for you right now? I thought a moment and said

Anxious.

Yes.

Grace concurred, saying

She felt this anxiousness began at age ten when I was unable to keep up with the demands of two teachers.

I felt she was right on the mark.

Now, my homework was to work with my inner child, Ann at age ten, to release this pain and confusion. The next morning my left thumb was very painful from the arthritis. I suddenly had the idea that my anxiousness was locked in my thumb. This gave me the impetus to see if I could energetically pull this painful energy out. So, I began by holding my right hand over my left hand and just pulled the pain out.

Oh, my goodness, it worked. I had never done anything like that before. I was so amazed.

My ongoing commitment into investigating what is or was going on emotionally at any given moment in this life or past lives continues. I know they can have a negative or positive physical impact on me as I live my daily life. I am beginning to also wonder if the confusion I often felt – and still do at times – was my way to cover my anxiety. Perhaps my determination as a ten-year-old of not being viewed as “lesser than” was a factor. Could I, Ann, at ten years old, have chosen confusion, relegating anxiousness into the background? I am going to keep exploring to see what I can unearth.

Here’s a quote I have kept for many years. It comes from *The Nature of Personal Reality*, a book channeled by Jane Roberts. One can change one’s experience by altering beliefs about yourself and your physical existence. It’s such encouragement.





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Helen Chin	Monte Jacobson
Teresa Concepcion	Tom Joyce
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Emily Porter  
Trixie Postoff  
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