Waynnessence, the literary magazine of The University of Akron Wayne College, is published for the campus community to provide an audience for aspiring writers and artists. All materials are published with consent of the contributors, who accept full credit for their work. All rights to the writing and artwork presented here are retained by the author/artists. Artists, photographers, and writers have produced their own work independently. Their proximity in Waynnessence does not necessarily reflect the intentions of authors or artists.

Each fall, all writing submitted to Waynnessence is entered into our writing contest. In the spring, awards are given for the artwork or photographs that appear on the spring Waynnessence front and back covers.
NOTES

CO-ADVISOR’S NOTE
Greetings readers! Our spring edition of Waynessence combines the artistic and literary talents of students, faculty, and community members. In addition to enchanting photography and highly creative artwork, this issue offers poetry on love, lilies, and reflections on the moon, as well as essays on topics from an unusual Viking maiden and a comic opera singer to an inspirational baseball experience and the pitfalls of early 20th century well drilling. Whether you are new to Waynessence or a returning reader, please consider submitting your essay, poem, original artwork or photography to future editions.

– Scot Long, Ph.D.

CO-ADVISOR’S NOTE
I am delighted to be a new co-editor of Waynessence. It is obvious that the arts are alive and flourishing in the campus community. My particular interest is in the area of poetry and creative writing. I look forward to reading future submissions.

– Joanne Lehman, MFA
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Jessica Palmer / Elizabeth Simkanin / Katie Simkanin

**SPECIAL THANKS**
A special thank you to everyone who submitted to the Spring 2019 Waynessence and the hard-working Word Processing team.

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The Waynessence staff reserves the right to choose and edit written submissions as well as art and photography based on length, technical accuracy, and audience considerations.
After Thursday’s stint as timer for a candidates’ night,
Friday evening’s lecture by Sanjay Gupta and
after hosting Saturday afternoon’s meet-and-greet
for a municipal court judge candidate,
and witnessing the private marriage of gay friends,
followed by Saturday evening’s fund-raising event—
for which we didn’t costume ourselves,
I encountered my long-deceased father
Sunday morning as I stood in my usual place,
four pews from the front,
holding a bulletin insert for the hymn
*Children of the Heavenly Father*
or the name he’d recognize
Tryggara Kan Ingen Vara, a Swedish melody.
He squeezed my hand,
then raised his lovely tenor voice
to sing, “in his mighty arms he bears them,”
and smiled at this daughter
singing his favorite hymn.
Up first popped the Stone Age men
Inventing fire and living in dens
They were the first civilization
From there people spread around and began to form nations

Ancient Egyptians built the pyramids by hand
Moving heavy tons of stone, working in the desert sand
The code of Hammurabi determined what’s wrong and right
When people should live at peace, or take their weapons and fight

Next come the Hebrews; wandering desert nomads
They established Judaism through God’s ten commands
Then along came the Greeks, so curious and so smart
Influencers of math, philosophy, religion, and art

The Romans pour from their city, holding sword and shield
Fearlessly conquering a world while their enemies yield
Julius Caesar led the Romans to numerous victories
Ensuring that Rome would forever be in history

Into this world a little boy was born
For centuries the baby’s birth, the prophets had warned
Jesus walked the earth, telling all He was God’s son
That He came to save, ensuring victory over death would be won

As Christianity spread, hostility began to grow
So Christians headed out, their seeds of Jesus they sowed
As people declared that Jesus was their Lord,
Roman Constantine united Rome under Jesus so all would be of one accord

The Goths poured in, sacking Rome to bits
The once-powerful empire underground sits
The mighty, fallen empire gave way to discord
As out from the steppes, fierce tribespeople poured
The Dark Ages was an era of repression
With ceaseless violence, poverty, and endless oppression
The Church grew corrupt, its overseers became rich
While peasants lived in filthy mud huts and ditches

Enter the savage Vikings, treasure on their minds
They looted monasteries and convents, leaving devastation behind
Nations began to organize and split
Kings, countries, and governments established little bit by bit

Castles and noblemen dotted the land
While serfs worked the fields, sickle and scythe in hand
The bloody crusaders thought they did right
While the Black Plague’s victims’ deaths were caused by a rat bite

The Renaissance sparked change in Europe all over
The Reformation started as Luther nailed his theses to the door under night’s cover
Catholics and Protestants bitterly fought
Their bloody ways and wars nothing like Jesus taught

Now comes the time of great exploration and conquistadors
As Spain’s Inquisition expelled Jews, Protestants, and Moors
Columbus discovered America on a trip to the Far East
Explorers flocked to the Americas, treating the natives worse than beasts

Settling in the New World became the new norm
As the Pilgrims survived the deadly winter storms
Britain and America for control of the country fought
No way the Americans could win, the British once thought

The Industrial Revolution changed Europe’s economy
Then came the advances in technology, physics and astronomy
Over in America, they fought the Civil War
Because of slavery, apart families tore

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8
Peace had hardly come when World War One broke out
All of the dead and fighting, hear the victims’ cries and shouts
The Great Depression slammed America hard in the face
While a vengeful Germany suffered in disgrace

Hitler rose to power, thinking he could win
He caused a world war and genocide, now he’s paying for his sins
The Communists rose to imminent power
While American and Russian relationships grew sour

Then the hippies came, practicing peace and love
The Berlin Wall came crashing down—a miracle from above
The Internet suddenly, gloriously appeared
And contemporary music quickly became quite weird

How greatly humans have affected the world
And now the story continues to unfurl
Of terrorism, of immigration, of sexual scandals
It’s about all we can handle

Because this is our history, the story of our world
and the tale is not yet all quite told
There is so much more
If only we begin to unlock the door...
I was never a power hitter in baseball. Sure, I was able to get on base fairly often, but not by the long ball.

When I was a junior and playing left field, we were visiting a local high school near Sullivan, Ohio. The sky was a vivid blue and a slight wind blew toward right field. A great day for baseball. As I was warming up in the on-deck batter’s circle, I heard a voice.

“On the third pitch, swing as hard as you can and you will hit a home run!”

I looked around to see who had spoken, and no one was apparent.

“Well,” I thought, “what do I have to lose?”

The first two pitches were a ball and then a strike, and on the third pitch I swung, hard. Out to right-centerfield the ball flew. As I was running to second base I could see that the opposing outfielder hadn’t even reached the ball yet, so I hurried to third. Nearing that base, I looked to see that he was just picking up the ball, so I headed home. As I was running down the baseline, I again heard the voice with the same instructions for the next hitter.

Patrick, the player waiting to bat next, shook my hand after I had crossed home plate, and I relayed what I had just heard.

“Swing at the third pitch; you’ll hit a home run, too.” He looked at me in a quizzical way, but just nodded affirmatively.

On the third pitch, he swung hard – and hit a homer as well!

We scored over 20 runs to win the game, but for me the back-to-back home runs told the real story of the contest. In that one magical moment, I managed to hit a towering home run. It was the only one I would ever hit during my entire scholastic baseball career.

Nearly 30 years later, Patrick and I met.

“How did you know to swing on the third pitch?” he asked. I wondered aloud, “I just had a thought...”
Country Sunrise, Atalanta Kelsey
Blue Fragmented Light, Nicolette Kaiser
I go to the lilies, not in want, but in need, and I am needed.
For the food has not been cooked and the dinner table has not been set for my family.

I go to the lilies, in my youth, with neither ache nor pain.
There is not a wrinkle to be seen and my hair is dark, my eyes the brightest.

I go to the lilies, where they stand, not just in rows and columns.
They stand as a family, in bunches, against anything that comes their way.

I go to the lilies, to join the ones that left before me.
As the dinner has only been started and is not yet perfect in my eyes.

I go to the lilies, with my Lord walking beside me.
For I have things to say and a promise to keep, stories untold.

I go to the lilies, full of love, heartbreak.
Knowing, that it is time, time for goodbyes, and celebrations.

I've gone to the lilies, not as a dream or nightmare.
You'll wake, and I'll be waiting.
You'll wake after seeing my face, in your dreams.
I've gone to the lilies, and I'm waiting for you.
I sat, rolling my eyes in the front of the loud, dusty truck. My dad and younger sister, Riley, sat beside me. Crammed into this mess of a rental vehicle, I thought, this entire trip is all about my sister. As we pulled up to the house overgrown with vegetation, I sighed. I knew that this was a trip I would have to get through — it’s not every day that you get a Native American tipi. But then, we weren’t quite like everyone else.

My family has always been different. In 2017, my sister was diagnosed with the neurological disorder of autism. She has always been unique, and sees things a bit differently. Growing up with her has been challenging at times. She has difficulty reasoning with people. Compromise doesn’t often happen, even on small things. She always thinks she is right and words often make things worse. Talking to other people is unnaturally difficult for her. She is considered high-functioning, meaning that she does not rock or mumble. She can do almost anything that a neurotypical (normal) kid can do. She dresses normally and is otherwise mostly average, with some exceptions.

She became fascinated with the Native American culture two years ago and began to learn as much as she could about them. Riley has a respect for their ways, people, and traditions that could only be matched by scholars or historians. So it was only natural for her to want to get a tipi.

Personally, I thought it was a ridiculous thing to get, but I wasn’t going to say as much. So here we were, driving in a rented truck, to pick up some 18-foot-long tipi poles. We turned onto a road called Prosperity Drive. It looked about the furthest from the name on the road sign. There were overgrown weeds, barking dogs, and it was in what I would generally consider to be a rough area.

After paying for the tipi poles, my dad and I loaded them into the truck. I felt my initial boredom and frustration slip away, and couldn’t help but smile as I saw the excitement in my sister’s eyes. As frustrating as she could be, I was happy to see her so excited about this tipi. Riley’s passions are everything to her. She isn’t always the best student. She has few friends. But what she does love, she finds exciting, and it becomes her world. She has been through a lot, battling depression and feelings of loneliness. I do not know what it’s like to have autism. I never will.
Most people who don’t have someone in their family with autism would not be able to relate to the amazing burden it can have on the family. There are times that I just want to escape. Sometimes, I just want to shirk the responsibility of being the older brother.

I can try, but at the end of the day, I know I cannot. For better or worse, I am Riley’s older brother. I have a responsibility to support her, to teach her, and be there for her. There are days when I don’t want to have to be responsible. But, as it has been written so eloquently in Luke 12:48, to whom much is given, much is required.

Growing up with a sister who has autism is perhaps the best thing I could have experienced in my childhood. It has taught me many things. I have developed a great deal of patience and I am able to tolerate many different types of personalities. I have learned to be less critical. We may never know what someone is dealing with. Until we do, one cannot fairly make assumptions. We learn it is better to be understanding than to be right. And sometimes, one has to put up with a few tipi poles.

To be different is not a bad thing. It is not a thing to be ashamed of. The most beautiful things in this life are the things that stand out among a bleak background. Whatever makes a person different is not necessarily a liability, but can be an asset. It simply takes time to discover how it can be used as an advantage. To be able to see another person’s point of view, one must go to where he or she stands, even if it means looking out at life through the flap of a tipi.
Mother and Child, Nicolette Kaiser
**THIS LOVE INSIDE OF ME**
by Nina Schultz

The love I have felt inside is love abounding;
   It is divine and glorious,
And it has made my cup overflow.

This love burning from my soul excels beyond my capabilities;
   It will burn me holy and burn me clean,
And I know that I cannot turn my back on it.

This love will guide me home;
   It will show me who I need to be,
My path is shining gold for me, because of this love inside of me.

**TELL ME HOW TO LOVE**
by Nina Schultz

tell me how to love;
tell me if it’s something I can touch with my fingers
   or tell me that’s in my head.
is it something I can feel
   in my bones or my soul;
where does it go/where does it start?
tell me, do I place my heart here?
on my sleeve or over there;
tell me, does it go on a stone pedestal?
do I give it a pillow or do I give it nothing,
is it something worth that;
do I give it compassion/do I turn my back on it?
tell me what good my soul is for,
a moral compass with no cardinal directions;
tell me, does that piece matter?
do I give it a length of rope + tell it to create;
what will it do, or won’t see,
will it swing from rafters; noosed/will it give me a flower; knotted?
Anxiety sets in
It is the time of return
To these great halls
Hit the books
And head to class
The road of knowledge
Is just before you ahead
★ Stormy Night, Atalanta Kelsey
Ever since I was a little girl, the lure of valiant battle tempted me. The fire within me ravenously burned, calling me to adventure, as I hoped for a chance to engage in battle with the men of our village.

As a newly-married Viking woman, I, Tora Rourke, was expected to remain in the village and mind my home while my husband left for battle to engage in glorious Viking acts of raiding, burning, and pillaging. He would return a warrior-hero, hailed as brave and courageous, his bloody sword venerated by all. Secretly, I desired to battle with my people. Why could I not accompany him? I barely knew the man, despite the fact that he was my husband. Perhaps raiding together would give us a chance to truly fall in love, since the bond and blood of warriors ran thicker than brothers.

Unfortunately, I had to conform to expectations of my people and watch Skarde sail away with the other warriors, preparing to battle for glory and treasure. But a plan started to formulate in my mind.

It was the night before the raid on an exiled nobleman’s fortress, packed full of unimaginable treasures and goods. All of the men, including my husband of one week, Skarde, stayed in the ceremonial warrior’s longhouse with their weapons and provisions for the raid, ready to leave in the morning.

Sneakily, I left my family’s longhouse and snuck through the camp, dodging sleeping dogs and grazing sheep. All was quiet. The full moon had risen, casting an illuminating shadow over my path as I scurried toward the longhouse. I wore a tunic, a wolf skin cloak, a pair of soft cloth pants, and a steel helmet. I stuffed my long, blonde hair inside of the helmet. I darkened my face with ashes, and carried a large shield and sword, with an axe tucked into my belt.

I was about to fulfill my dream. Dressed as a man, I prepared to accompany my people to battle. I planned to quietly assimilate into their midst, talking, acting, and fighting like them. I was confident in myself and in my abilities to fight and survive. Although I was a secret shield maiden, I was a shield maiden in my own right.

Most of all, I wanted to see Skarde in battle. I wanted a chance to fall in love with him by fighting alongside him. I decided that this would be the best way to achieve my purpose. I wanted to witness him as a warrior, enabling me to draw my own conclusions about him. Our culture emphasized bravery and ruthlessness, and I hoped Skarde would display those qualities.

I prayed to Thor, the Norse god of thunder and war, before entering the longhouse. Only a few men were awake, softly murmuring, plotting battle strategies.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24
I nodded at them before finding an empty place in
the corner to lay down. All of the men nearby were
snoring loudly; they must have drunk too much ale.

Across the shelter I searched for Skarde. When
I saw him, I wanted to run to him and announce
my plan to accompany him, but I restrained myself.
Excited, nervous, and slightly terrified, I drifted
into a deep sleep, dreaming of conquest, glory, and
returning a hero, holding a chalice full of gold and
my blood-stained sword high overhead. Would my
people not applaud my bravery?

The next morning, the chief’s ceremonial battle
song floated through the tent. We offered Thor
a sacrifice of a kid goat to ensure victory for our
raiding party. So far, no one had paid much attention
to me. I acted like the others and they treated me
as one of them. As we divided into groups of 50 to
haul our fearsome boats to the river, I stood across
from Skarde.

“I'm Felman, who are you?”

“Skarde Rourke. Nice to meet you.” Skarde
cordially nodded, watching me as I hoisted the
weight of the boat on my shoulder. “You are strong.
How come I don’t know you, yet you look familiar?”

That scared me. “I prefer to keep to myself,
that’s why.”

When we arrived at the river’s edge, about 50
men sat in each boat. Four boats constituted our
raiding party, each helm decorated with a fierce
dragon’s head.

Skarde and I sat next to one another in the boat.
I was extremely careful to ensure that none of my
blonde waves escaped their helmet prison.

The sky, a misty gray, and the black river flecked
with minuscule pieces of ice, gave me the feel of
being among stealthy adventurers conducting a
sneak attack.

As our boats snaked down the coast, Skarde
and I discussed thoughts about the battle and the
treasure we hoped to bring home to our village. I
noticed that he talked of his new wife he left behind,
and how he hoped to please her with a fantastic
prize, such as a golden goblet or an embroidered
tapestry from the nobleman’s house.

Touched and flattered that Skarde talked about
me, I rambled on about how this was my first battle
and how I anticipated using my sword. After all, I
was a true Viking warrior by blood and by spirit.
My femininity would wash away as I held my sword
and shield—battling like a man and yet a secret
shield maiden.

We sailed down the river the entire day until
reaching a rocky point. The river broke into several
vectors, and our chief called, “Let’s unload here!”

I followed the example of the Viking men as they
jumped into the waist-deep water and carried the
boats closer to shore, tying them to trees to prevent
the vessels from floating away. I laid my oar in my
seat and shivered from the freezing water.

We crouched down, a small incline hiding us
from view. Up ahead stood a small fortress—the
noblemen’s house. We had heard tales and lore of
the treasure that the fortress housed, and we were
intent on confiscating all of it. The unsuspecting
victims lay just within reach, treasure at
our fingertips.

Editor’s note: Shield Maiden: Part II will be continued with the Fall 2019 issue of Waynessence.
Point Arena Lighthouse, Southern California, Scot Long
TO THE MOON ALICE
by Nicholette Kaiser

To the moon Alice to the moon
The man in the moon waits for me there
On his planet of loneliness
Waiting for someone like him
To console his frozen core
And bring the brimstone of life
Back in to his eyes.

MOON & I
by Nicholette Kaiser

Oh moon, you and I are so much alike
We are both the odd ball out
In this world of stars
But we burn brightest in the night
Where they least expect us
So will you be my sun at night
And I your moon in the day
We could be so much more happy together
Than in two worlds apart.
I've known Raymond,
All my life.
In his childhood,
He dealt with strife.
He lived with his Dad,
On a small farm.
Milking cows and
planting crops,
His farm work was a charm.
Oh, it was hard work,
It'd get hot and dry.
When he was fourteen,
His father died.
Then he lived with his Uncle,
And learned to do new things,
Played a drum in the band
Livin' like a king.
His Uncle died,
When he was seventeen,
When it rains, it pours,
If you know what I mean.
Since he was a minor,
He lived with another family,
Just across the road,
Till he joined the Army.
While in the Army,
Driving the Tank he had,
Low and behold,
His instructor was my Dad.
Yes, he was old enough
for the Army,
Where he put in his time
and tarried,
But on a leave,
He was not old enough
to get married.
Over in the “Hoosier” state,
Getting married they could not,
So he came home and
got permission,
Then went back and
tied the knot.
Both Raymond and my Dad,
Served two years in the Army,
Since both where married,
They started their own family.
Raymond went to Bible School,
Preached in Kentucky
and Ohio,
Also became a good salesman,
Could sell ice to an Eskimo.
First he got a job in Lima,
Working on busses and such,
I don’t know how
much he made,
But being a Fuller Brush Man
made twice as much.
God said to be fruitful,
In our family there is four,
So in their family are two,
But three have gone before.
Now we’re grown up,
With families of our own,
Raymond and Bradley,
What seeds you have sown.
Nine grandkids between them,
What can I say,
Eight great grandkids,
And more on the way.
Raymond was not
a truck driver,
But became a Chaplain at TFC,
Then one day at the library,
He called me.
He asked me to be a Chaplain,
Cause I had helped him some,
Walk the lot and
listen to truckers
Maybe once a month I’d come.
I went to the Chapels with him,
Till his health started
to decline,
He didn’t want to over-do-it,
Didn’t want his “tach”
to redline.
A few times he went with me,
To the Pilot-second chance,
To the truckers he would
lend an ear,
Then tell them of Jesus.
Wayne College is the Place to Be: A Tribute to a Great Place
by Bruce Crissinger

At 8 a.m. on a mid-February day against a landscape resembling a scene from Dr. Zhivago, with my penguin-like waddle I made my way through an accumulation of snow that should have justified a Snow Day. Laden down with book bags and food bags that in some cultures would have constituted the equivalent of one’s total worldly possessions, when the door opened and a young woman called out, “Do you need any help?”

And she certainly looked like she was up to the job.

Of course, one demurs and says, “No I can manage” when any relationship between my fingers and my brain had become purely conjectural.

At other campuses how often had I been struggling, being passed and pushed off the path by individuals who looked like former East German weightlifters, and the guys were just as bad, who could have carried my load with one finger. But not...

This small incident brings to mind again the wonders of Wayne College where, as in Tevye’s Ukranian Anatevka, “I know everyone I meet.” And I am embarrassed thinking that some of you would like to meet me less often.
WHY DO WE LOVE LITERATURE
AND THE OTHER ARTS

by Bruce Crissinger

A student recently presented a paper with a fascinating, thought provoking premise suggesting that reading literature can serve as a form of therapy. This is an idea I want to continue to pursue seriously. Broadening her thesis, I would suggest that the other arts have this capacity as well, leading to the question as stated above and asking as a corollary “what” function, in what role do the arts and the humanities have in our lives? For me classical music, language, and literature have been central to my life, indeed the point of being alive, which I must leave ere long. For like Richard II, “I wasted time, and now doth time waste me.”

However, my impression is that according to theory, a work of literature presents a self-contained unity apart from the author, the culture, and most especially from the subjective experience of the (lowly) reader.

Beware the Heresy of the Affective Fallacy

But rather I came to literature because of its abilities to give joy, meaningful companionship, and understanding as others have experienced analogous situations or otherwise being able to fully identify with a central character. Most particularly, I was the isolated Harry Haller in Herman Hesse’s novel *Steppenwolf*. I was the solitary Gustav von Ashenbach in Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice* obsessed by the perfection of beauty, which he as an artist could not surpass or even equal. I was Gregor Samsa in Kafka’s “Die Verwandlung,” the “Transformation” who when confronted with impossible family demands became transformed, but still could not escape.

Furthermore, I was Othello remorseful unto death, “If heaven would make me such another world.” Except I had no need for an Iago.

I was indecisive, but in point of fact, Hamlet is not indecisive. When he see the opportunity, he stabs Polonius behind the arras (tapestry) without a moment’s intellectualization and dispatches his schoolfellows R & G (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) with the stroke of a pen (probably a feather quill) and a royal seal. As for the classic question: “Why does Hamlet delay?” Shakespeare wanted to give Richard Burbage a meaty role to reward him for the success of Richard III.

On the question of “Why does Hamlet delay?” decades ago in a classroom in Kolbe Hall I spent a protracted amount of time going over the play line by line, word by word as Dr. Parr had done for me *(see Waynessence Fall 2018)*. After about three weeks of this detailed reading and discussing the Freudian theories I addressed the class like the defense/prosecutor before the jury and asked the central question: “Why does Hamlet delay?” (think Spencer Tracy in “Inherit the Wind”). But I digress.

The rest was silence, except for a soft, but inquisitive voice from the crowd: “Why does Hamlet delay what?” I was never Macbeth. Never had any ambition. Now I am the raging Lear waiting for Frank Sinatra’s final curtain, mumbling, incoherent, but with no need of a fool beyond himself. Lear doesn’t understand how he lost his kingdom. I can’t even figure out what I did with my pen, phone, book bag…that I had in my hand 5 minutes ago.

The arts as therapy is a research question I want to pursue. For now, though, this concludes my summation of the joys and benefits of the humanities, except to say we must continue to believe in their value and strive to preserve them. After all:

Old adjuncts never die. They just grade away.
On a cool April morning the old wooden bridge groaned under the weight of the steam-powered drilling rig fitted on the back of their 1932 half-ton Dodge pickup truck. The two men glanced knowingly at one another as the timbers on the structure began to snap and fray.

“Jump!” Albert yelled loudly and the workmen bounded from the running boards on each side of the cab into the water below.

Originally from Pennsylvania, John Combs worked the nascent oil well industry in the western part of the Keystone State during the late 1880s that would take him to southeastern Ohio a decade later. By the early 1900s the shallow oil wells in the Appalachian region were mostly played out, although by then he had worked virtually every job on a rig, from roustabout to foreman. During that era, big oil production had moved to Texas and Oklahoma. Not wanting to relocate with his family, John used his mobile steam-powered rig to begin drilling water wells instead.

Going to work meant harnessing up his team of four Percheron draft horses to the heavy steam drill and rig on a sturdy wagon. John went into business with Albert Denton who had been installing farm and residential water wells for several years. Often customers wanted a well in a particular location regardless of the likelihood of a shallow aquifer below.

“Gonna need the well right here, b’tween the barn and the house.”

“If we put it over on that there ridge, we’ll probably have a better chance of hitting water the first 60 feet,” John explained. “But it’s your farm. The deeper the hole, the more it’ll cost.”

The farmer pondered awhile and finally agreed on the nearby ridge for a drilling site. Over the next three days with the help of an older teenage boy, the crew drilled carefully through topsoil, clay, and finally sandstone bedrock before reaching the aquifer some 45 feet below. Albert sampled the water, which had an agreeable mineral taste, and then gave a bucket to each of the horses.

On some jobs, the water table was quite shallow and well-meaning yet miserly homeowners wanted the men to stop drilling as soon as they found water.

“We gotta get down below outhouse depth,” John explained, sometimes using the more expletive term. He and Albert agreed it was not worth setting up the rig just to drill down 10 feet or so.

“The better quality water is a little deeper down,” Albert added. “And besides, it’ll be less likely to run dry.”

John delighted in working outdoors and would often stop to rest the horses while listening to the soft trickling of a nearby brook and melodies of meadowlark or Carolina wren. Although he and Albert usually drilled three or four wells a month, they never felt too rushed in completing a job.

Then came the mid-1920s and the opportunity to put the rig on the back of a Ford Model-T pickup truck. John still hitched up the Percherons for Sunday drives around the countryside near his small farm, but using the truck meant getting to the jobsite a little earlier and getting a few more wells drilled each month. After all, he and Albert needed to stay current with Ferrell Drilling, a company that had modernized a few years earlier. Representing
the only real competition in the rolling hills of Fairfield and Hocking counties, Elmer Ferrell later bought an even bigger and newer steam drill in 1931 thereby gaining a reputation for putting in less expensive water wells that went deeper in a shorter amount of time.

“By golly, we gotta compete,” Albert reasoned. “If we’re not careful, Ferrell’s gonna run us out of business.” With the Great Depression on, a major mistake in business could mean the bread lines.

“I suppose you’re right,” John agreed. So over the next few years they invested in a newer steam engine with nearly twice the horsepower and built a bigger drilling rig, all mounted on the back of a fairly new Dodge pickup. With an overall height of around 11 feet, the crew sometimes had to take a detour if a railroad overpass was too low. They had only run the new rig about a month before the fateful day of the bridge accident.

The overworked Dodge engine sputtered and wheezed along a dirt road until reaching the old bridge. About halfway across and with only a few moments warning, one of the main beams beneath the structure collapsed with a tremendous crack! John managed to jump clear of the wreckage. Albert was not as lucky and perished during the accident.

After the funeral John continued in the drilling business as a sole proprietor and went back to using the smaller rig and steam engine. By the early 1940s he decided to retire at age 72, sell his beloved Percherons, and move to town in the south of Lancaster.

It was there, in town with neighbors close by, that John had become an anachronism. He almost always wore a blue and white pinstripe cap and matching overalls that gave the impression that he might have been an engineer on a railroad. He was a gentle soul who managed a genuine smile that crinkled all the way to his temples with a pleasant chuckle to match.

Of all his pastimes, John most enjoyed listening to the radio, which he often did after supper. Even his radio was an antique with oversize tubes and an invasive directional receiver that somehow managed to disturb TV signals throughout the neighborhood during the 1950s and 1960s, an era when broadcast television was still a fairly new phenomenon.

“Darn those television fanatics anyway,” he often complained. And most evenings John would turn up the radio volume and neighbors trying to watch a family sitcom would see zigzag lines running through an episode of Bonanza. This meant that someone in the neighborhood, usually a kid, would pay him a visit with a friendly reminder to turn down his radio.

Old Mr. Combs always started his day with a couple of donuts and coffee, a habit that went back to decades of working on the drilling rig. John’s round, yet robust physique reflected his passion for the deep fried, sugary desserts. There was also seldom a day when he wasn’t wearing bib overalls, chewing his tobacco, and making his way around the neighborhood to visit and swap stories in his folksy 19th century manner.

John liked to spin tall tales with the neighborhood youngsters. He told jokes that were mostly one-liners and sometimes conjured up a whopper of a lie, such as a talking mule that refused to eat corn on the cob unless it was buttered and salted. Or the time that John and his teenage friends jumped a freight train and then stowed away on a steamboat until the captain caught them and put them to work in the boiler room, where he first learned to tinker with steam engines. He never seemed to lose his zest for life and became among the few members of his generation to reach 100 years of age.
The Rocky Path, Jessica Palmer
I don’t remember precisely when I became a Wagnerian, a combination of genetic predisposition and exposure, in a household consciousness of things German: most delightfully Nürnberger lebkuchen, most seriously Hitler and the war, for the elder generation literature (Goethe and Schiller), and music, especially Wagner, who had also been Hitler’s favorite composer. That generation had heard all the great singers live, from Emma Calvé, friend of Oscar Wilde, to Kirsten Flagstad (my favorite), Dorothy Kirsten and beyond, and on the radio as well as orchestral music. But I digress to lay the groundwork, so to speak.

Anna Russell (1911-2006) was a British-trained opera singer who found her fame in abandoning serious performing and turning to humor and parody, much like what her contemporary Victor Borge (1919-2000) did for the piano.

Though a child, I was already well acquainted with the details when I first heard Anna Russell and her analysis of Der Ring des Nibelung. Here she successfully compressed what might take 20 hours to perform, not counting meals, bathroom breaks and occasional sleep, apart from in the theatre, into about 20 minutes including her own singing of each role and while accompanying herself on the piano. Those 20 minutes, repeated often, were the best 20 minutes of my life, at least that I can discuss here.

Despite having heard it multiple times and knowing it nearly by memory, I roar with laughter each time, even now writing this and thinking about it. Of course, most of her cultural references are dated (the danger of being too contemporary is to be too soon dated*) and thus become obscure and require a footnote. She describes the heroic but not always too bright Siegfried as “a regular Lil Abner,” and the Rhine maidens as “an aquatic Andrews sister.” You see, I haven’t heard this for more than 10 years but I can quote it verbatim.

All this detailed explanation culminates in her signature line and title of her autobiography: “I’m not making this up, you know.”

In 1983 and later, she made what she called her first farewell tour parodying the divas such as the Australian Nellie Melba who would announce their retirement from the stage and then continue performing for as long as possible. (For Downton Abby fans, all too briefly the New Zealand singer Kiri Te Kanawa played Nelle Melba in one episode, but I digress, again).

Anna Russell’s various routines were recorded on what were then called LP albums in the 1950’s. But alas she was not well served by video recording until the aforementioned “Farewell Tour” when her voice was past its prime, but her energy remained intact, amazingly so. But humor, like beauty, cannot be explained in words, but must be experienced. Go to YouTube and experience the “laugh of a lifetime” as I have been doing for well more than half a century.

* Author’s Note: I tried to find the exact quote, I think by Oscar Wilde in reference to writing dialogue in a comedy, but with google got innumerable references to Online dating. Perhaps on a second try I would have come up with Carbon 14 dating, which at my age suits me much better.
Bon Jovi became my favorite rock musician upon first hearing his music back in the refugee camp. I had never heard of him before, or any other rock musician. In my family’s home there was no electricity and consequently no access to music and most importantly no radio that might bring in news from the outside world. Some people did have old cassette players that ran on batteries, but that was rare, and batteries were expensive, even if you could find them. But that is only one example of the hard times and harsh conditions under which we lived, except for party members.

When I finished high school my father told me to get out: “There is nothing for you here.” This meant leaving everything I had known for my entire life with no assurance that I would ever see my family again in exchange for the uncertainly of waiting out years of my young life in a refugee camp until some western country granted me refugee status.

That is why music became so important to me. It has the power to make us happy even when our lives give us no reason to be, or sad when we consider how much we have lost in life and so little chance in the future.

In the camp, when I heard Bon Jovi sing: “And there’s nothing left but goodbyes / We’ll just turn and walk away,” I learned of the power of music to describe my situation exactly. I too had to “just turn and walk away,” but in this case it was through the jungle, by foot, with the army patrolling the area and nothing to eat but what I could find along the way or carry on my back. In those situations we had to cook our rice in bamboo over a fire, but couldn’t let the fire be too bright or the army patrols would see us and kill us.

I was on the run not from a person but from my own country. Any love between this government and the people had long since died, ever since the military takeover that overthrew a parliamentary democracy, decades before I was born. Many of the older people who could remember, longed for the days of colonial rule when, ironically, their lives were so much freer.
Bon Jovi says, “Without a gun.” No one has any guns except the military and officials of the government, or I should call it the self-appointed government, and those are used to keep the people down with the threat of prison and death for the slightest opposition or attempt at free speech. Walking through the jungle I had no gun and no way to protect myself from animal or human. Poisonous snakes were everywhere, and with absolutely no access to medical care, one bite would mean certain, painful death.

Bon Jovi sings about lost dreams. I had had no chance to have any kind of dream. Life was a constant struggle. I knew I had to be careful, constantly listening, stepping cautiously, but so much depended on chance or I too would have been just another victim of the night. I know that Bon Jovi was thinking about love, not a boy struggling to survive, being afraid every moment for his life, and yet it’s ironic how his words applied to me in a totally different context.

It should now be obvious why this song has continued to be meaningful to me since I first heard it in the refugee camp, living in a bamboo hut with strangers, and depending for food on UNICEF, some kilos of rice, beans, chili, oil, always the same in greater or lesser amounts. Sometimes, the words of the text along with the tones of the instruments in the orchestra make me feel upset and full of a broken heart, thinking about being separated from my family and my lover. Usually, when I listen to this kind of music, I am alone on a quiet night under the moon. The song is more to my taste and meaningful to my heart at night. I know I will have to start again and develop a new life and find a new love. Finally Bon Jovi’s voice helps me to relax and I can sleep.
Sometimes it feels as if the world’s crashing down
So much responsibility and turmoil
The weight is slowly crushing my back
I’m just hoping I can make it through

I want people to hear the story that I want to tell
But I’d rather hide inside my shell
Sometimes I dream that I’ll wake up
in a different place
With a different name and a different face

I’m about done, I’ve had enough
It takes a toll on me to be so tough
The fire within me burns bright
Turning the dark velvet sky light

I want to be my own person
With thoughts and feelings and a soul
But can I do it? Can I be me?
I’ll have to take the chance and see

Something within me called me, whispered “come”
Come to a place to find yourself
Where you can learn who you are
Where you can feel and not remain numb

Come away with me and see
The big wide world—from mountain to sea
See the places where you can go
Don’t place limits on myself

Explore my surroundings, explore the world
Explore the life that I have to live
Explore what I can take, explore what I can give
Explore my own soul, learn what’s inside

Just what is inside my soul?
A desire to be loved and to love
To pursue my passions with spirit so bold
To cool those who are hot and
warm those who are cold

To be kind, loving, gentle and true
To be a friend to you
To do acts of greatness to help the world
To travel the globe, seeing sights untold

Because I am a person too
And I know that I can do better
I know that I will learn to be me
Because everyone deserves a chance to see

Through my trials I have learned to be tough
To stand up for myself and not give up
Find your own destiny and fulfill it
Because you can
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