

## Haikus about Members of My First Grade Class by Susan Rattner

Miss Margaret Graham -  
(Miss Melanie Unger's friend)  
I never miss you.

Dear Linda Walker,  
Your home seemed very modern.  
So unlike my own.

Young Denny Calvert,  
I loved to swing on your swing...  
My head upside-down.

Hi there, Holly Ford.  
I so liked your pocketbook!  
Black patent, fake fruits.

Marsha Abelson -  
We explored a haunted house,  
Got scared, ran away.

Patrick Callahan -  
You always looked up to me...  
Because you were short.

Little David Kulp -  
The Altoona Bible Church  
Was run by your dad.

Hello, Brian Goldberg!  
We carpooled to Sunday School.  
Our parents were friends.

It's Terry Goldstein!  
You married Molly Bushnell  
And got born again.

Ah, Joel. In college we  
Dated a bit. You were nice,  
But then I dumped you.

**“A Lifetime of Words” by David Stoller**

A lifetime of words,  
few now spoken,  
and those half-drawn,  
bundled, broken;  
mustered soldiers,  
wearied command,  
left to moulder  
where they stand.  
sometimes flushed,  
burst out loud;  
sometimes drizzled,  
misted in cloud.  
yet somewhere —  
all those words make sense,  
fully-formed in present tense;  
uttered once, forever fair,  
none are lost, all are there.

## **“If I Could Make a Day” by David Stoller**

If I could make a day  
[she would say]  
It would be a day like today  
of color and geometry and  
river-rippled sunlight and  
birdsong call and response  
[and what would you take  
from this day and she would say]  
I would take all that was offered  
and make something that was mine  
and I would distill every sensation  
to a truth I could speak  
and I would listen to my desire  
say my name

## **My First Kaddish by Abraham Leibson**



Mother died 30 years ago  
Father followed 15 years later  
their bodies shipped and buried in the Holy Land  
ready and waiting for the Messiah

My hardened heart would not consider

a trip to Israel  
lest I confront my unforgiving nature  
but time is short  
and foolishness should not go on

Now a long overdue re-connection  
in circumstances I control  
no longer risking rejection

Arriving with my daughter  
whom Mother never saw  
at an expanse of endless stone boxes  
covering rolling hills

I recited the Kaddish  
leaving behind small stone reminders  
that I  
and through me my progeny  
finally made an appearance

A sunny day

Abraham Leibson  
joined with tears and lifted  
heart  
now softened



## Strudel State of Mind by Abraham Leibson

Sweet, sweet aroma  
filled my childhood home.  
Sweetened further by the ritual  
of rolling hot, sticky strudel  
in sugar crystal coating.

Then lovingly stored in  
gallon glass containers—  
former pickle jars,  
cleansed, repurposed.  
Releasing anew  
that fresh-baked bouquet—  
permeating the air  
each time I unscrewed the lid.

My little fingers fit  
over the thin rolled dough coil  
encasing dried fruits, nuts  
and moist cinnamon apples  
in what I later learned  
to be phyllo layers.

Mommy's little helper too,  
rolling, stretching,  
filling, coating, sectioning,  
licking, and smelling—  
an intoxicating aroma  
which I still recall,  
in which I can still  
bathe today.

## **The Book of Life by Lynn Levin**

They say the book's been open these ten days  
and that's when God inscribes us good or ill.  
I say the book of life is open always  
and in it I write according to my will—  
composing or reworking, in control  
of every nicely done or faulty line.  
I'm never satisfied, but on the whole  
I know each chapter scratched or scribbled's mine  
until some interruption comes. A mind?  
a senseless accident? will jog my pen  
and force upon my work a cruel or kind  
new twist: a loss, a gift, a shocking end.  
When careful plan and fate fall out of sync  
hold tight the pen, but change the ink.

"The Book of Life" has been published several times, in slightly different forms. The poem was first published in *Moments of Transcendence: A Devotional Commentary on the High Holiday Mahzor* (Vol. I), Dov Peretz Elkins, ed. (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson, 1992) under the title "Sonnet for the New Year." The poem was reprinted as "Sonnet on the Book of Life" in *Poetica* (2005 and 2011), and in *Covenant of the Generations: New Prayers, Poems, and Meditations* (New York: Women of Reform Judaism, 2013).

## **Delicatessen by Lynn Levin**

For at Hymie's the half-sours and garlic dills  
are heaped high at the pickle bar  
and you may have as much as you want of salt and sting.

For at Ben & Irv's you must beg for your vinegar  
and, even then, you get no more  
than a shrunken little 'gator with your tuna sandwich.

For at Hymie's they have the Yellby—a kind of French dip—  
fresh-sliced brisket with melted provolone on a rustique roll  
a cup of hot au jus plus French fries.

*C'est si bon.*

For at Ben & Irv's they have the L8—  
a roast beef melt with Havarti cheese, tomato,  
purple onion, and chipotle mayo wrapped in a grilled tortilla.  
*Es muy rico.* Every bit as tasty as the Yellby.

For at Hymie's many things are sort of French.

For at Ben & Irv's they are going Latino.

For at Hymie's when a customer walks in  
the diners look up  
from their soup to see if the person looks Jewish

and if the person looks Jewish  
the diners flip  
through their mental Filofaxes asking themselves,  
*Do I know this person? And if I do not, should I?*

For at Ben & Irv's people do the same thing.

For at Ben & Irv's I read the placemats:  
Phyllis Berger wants to sell my house.  
Goldstein's wants to bury me.

Dr. Michelangelo wants to sculpt my sagging flesh.

For at Hymie's they have no placemats  
but a display of rotten ruined china  
from the Andrea Doria wreck.

For neither place is remotely kosher.  
But since I read *The Forward's* report on labor violations  
at the kosher meat processing plant in Iowa  
I see no mitzvah in eating kosher.  
Though I solemnly reject pork—  
except when it might be in hot and sour soup.  
In which case, I shall remain stupid about it.

For at Hymie's I am a stranger in a strange restaurant  
and seen as such, though not unkindly.

But at Ben & Irv's I am a regular  
and glance up  
from my soup like everyone else  
when a new customer walks in

checking not for the fabled beak  
but the catch in the eye  
the antsy quality, the wariness weary of wariness.  
If I find it, so be it.  
If I do not, I return to myself unseen.

“Delicatessen” first appeared in *Washington Square Review*.



## **You Knew Who I Was**

**A poem by Yehuda HaLevi, translated by Eve Grubin**

You knew who I was before making me.

Now, a kernel of your spirit lies inside, protecting.

If you pushed me, could I stand?<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

If you blocked me, could I move forward?

What can I say when my thought is in your hand?

What can I do if you don't help?<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

I begged you. Please answer. Cloak me.

Please stir me.<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

Wake me to bless your name.

## **Goodbye by Eve Grubin**

There is no word for it in Hebrew, and it's never used in the Bible except when someone says, "Go towards peace."

If I must go or if someone must leave me, I say, "See you later" or "We'll talk soon" or "Email me."

Israelis either say, "lahitraot," meaning "see you later" or they say "shalom," which more often means "hello" and "peace." If they have to say it, they use a string of three languages-Hebrew, Arabic, English- as if to not claim any of them: "Oz, yalla, bye."

Jacob thought his son, Joseph, had been killed by an animal.

Joseph said goodbye to his father with a coat drenched with his red life. How does one tell Jacob-who had been living for twenty years with the taste of metal in his throat- that his son is still alive?

Jacob's grand-daughter sings to him the almost too sweet news  
slant playing the harp, its wire strings pressing dents into her  
strong fingers, her voice, almost silent in its depth, dazzles the  
impossible story gradually, un-doing the violent goodbye: *your  
son's still breathing body...*