



The SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society
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Verna Ellen Levensalor's Poetry and Essays



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This issue of the Conserver marks a break from our normal practice of mixing pieces from various authors. We recently received from our friend Carolyn Amos a collection of poems and essays from her friend Verna Ellen Levensalor. We enjoyed them so much, we decided to share some of our favorites with you. We hope you enjoy them as much as we have.



Verna Ellen Levensalor was born in Dover-Foxcroft on June 8, 1927. Her parents were Leon Vintson Levensalor, born July 25, 1904 in Dexter and died April 9, 1990 in Dover-Foxcroft. Leon married Eliza Ethena Brooker on October 19, 1927. Eliza was born in Limestone, Maine on March 23, 1907 and died in Dover-Foxcroft on January 17, 1993. Both parents are buried in the Gray Cemetery, Row 21, Lot 21.

Verna grew up in our town and graduated from Foxcroft Academy in the Class of 1945. She was a busy girl during her school years, a member of softball, volleyball, basketball teams; a member of the orchestra, Junior and Senior plays, speech training, commercial club, editor-in-chief of the Pony and Academy Review Editor. In the yearbook is written "*Verna's the bard of the class – if you want a laugh, she'll write you a humorous poem – but if you want a serious thought poetically expressed she still can do it for you. She's done a lot of typing to get our annual to press on time. Verna's always going somewhere in a hurry, perhaps that was her that just dashed by.*"

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society

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It's all Relevant

When I was younger, I was told,
"Time goes faster when you're old."
Now, I'm older and I know
Time's the same, but I am slow.

"Yonder"

And Indefinite Part of Speech

"Yonder" means – quite far away.
Just how far, is hard to say.
Neither, does it tell us where.
"Yonder" just means – over there.

Your Aching Back!

For aching backs, the Doctors say,
Try diathermy, ev'ry day,
For twenty minutes at a time.
In twenty days, you'll feel just fine.
No longer will you feel so ill.
That is, until you get the bill.



Flying Flowers

I was just a little child
And watched the pansies die.
Grandma tried to comfort me
As I began to cry.

Then she sat me on her lap,
She hugged me close and said
"Pansies droop and petals fall,
But they're not really dead.

Notice how the butterflies
Have colors bright and gay,
They are wilted pansies, dear,
The ones that got away."

Now, my pansy bed is filled
With deep exotic hues,
Yellow, purple, rust and bronze,
Mahogany and blues.

Vibrant colors, trimmed with black,
Their scent is ev'rywhere.
Sunshine yellow on them all,
Their fragrance fills the air.

Rippled by the summer breeze,
They're nodding in the sun.
A dark and somber little face
Peers out from ev'ry one.

Wistfully, they try to speak,
And each one seems to say,
"How much longer will it be
Before I fly away?"

I'm bound to earth by stem and roots
My days are passing by.
How much longer must I wait
To be a butterfly?"

Verna Thornton

(Verna Ellen Levensalor, Esq., continued from page 1)

Verna had three siblings and speaks of them in some of the following writings. Shirley Mae was her older sister, born in 1925 and died in 2013. Then after Verna came her brother, Thomas A. born in 1930 and died in 1987. Finally came the Margaret Ann born in 1933 and died in 2013.

Verna married Ronald W. Crockett (1926-1976) on June 28, 1947 and had one child, Medody Ann. Sometime after Ronald's passing she married Francis John Thornton, Jr. (1920-2013). Verna recently passed in Florida on April 21, 2017.

From a short bio written by Verna: "Verna Thornton divides her time between Zepherhills, Florida and Corinth, Maine. Her poetry and stories have been published in Echoes, Thought and Afterthoughts, Heart of Maine Writers Chapbook, Pencils Up and Betmar Writers Anthologies. She received first prize from Maine Poets Society in 2000 for her poem, "Rose of Friendship" and has been awarded the Silver Poets Certificate by World of Poetry. She is a member of Florida State Poets Association, New River Poets, Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance, and Maine Poets' Society."



Grandpa Tom
by Verna Thornton

Before we begin this short story, a little background on Grampa Tom. His name was Thomas H. Levensalor, born in Sebec on July 27, 1862 and died in Dover-Foxcroft on April 23, 1947 and is buried in the Sebec Village Cemetery. Tom married Mary Farris (1872-1895) about 1889 and had three children: William Arden (1890-1983); Eva M. (1892-1959); and Harold T. (1894-1934). After his wife's death he married Mary E. Partridge (1875-1939) in Sebec on January 16, 1898. They had two children: Vesta E. (1902-1991) and Leon Vintson (1904-1990), the author's father. According to Leon's obituary he was a very talented man. He was a gatekeeper for the Maine Central Railroad in Dover and Fairfield. He also worked as a watchman and fireman at the Mayo and Brown Mills, the Dunbarton Mill in Dexter, and retired from Pride Manufacturing. He was a well known inventor, especially for developing a motorized kicksled in 1931. This was published in Popular Mechanics. He enjoyed listening to music. Now for the story, written by Tom's granddaughter in 2003.

My Grandpa Tom always smelled like sweat and tobacco, but in my childish mind it was a wonderful smell. It was Grandpa, and he loved me. I relished climbing on his lap and inhaling his scent, combined with the woolen smell of his old cardigan sweater. His full, handlebar mustache tickled me when he kissed me, and his piercing brown eyes danced with devilry as he bounced me on his knee, sang to me and told me stories.

I never grew tired of hearing the story he told about my brown eyes. He would chuckle, jiggle me up and down and ask, "Do you know how you got those big, brown eyes? No? Well, I'll tell you how. When you were just a tiny baby, I spit tobacco juice in them so they'd be the same color as mine." I knew that made me special.

He wore an old, felt dress hat and seldom removed it. Grammy insisted he take it off before he came to the dinner table, just as she insisted he should eat with his fork, not his knife. She won the hat deal but lost the knife situation. He was an expert with that knife. He could balance lots of peas on it, lift it slowly to his mouth, while staring at Gram with defiant eyes, and suck those peas through his mustache faster than a suction pump.

Continued on Page 4

(Grandpa Tom, continued from page 3)

Grampa was a tall, slender, silver-haired man whose face and bearing reflected his Indian heritage. I only remember seeing him in dress clothes once. He always wore a gray shirt and work pants, yellow suspenders and a felt vest that matched his dingy hat.

He was a self-employed handyman who utilized his garage as a workshop. He spent most of his days in his shop, which he had equipped with tools he did for work and when.

In the back corner of his shop, stood a chemical toilet and a small kitchen sink containing a washbasin and a bucket of cold water. I loved to play with the roller towel that hung on the wall beside the sink. I liked the dirty section of the towel because I could see pictures in the black spots so I always spun the clean section out of sight and played with the soiled linen, a real healthy pastime.

It's a good thing he had his shop because Gram confined him to the kitchen. His old, swivel desk chair sat just inside the backdoor entrance to the kitchen, and I don't remember seeing him anywhere else in the house except the kitchen table for meals, that is, if he removed his hat.

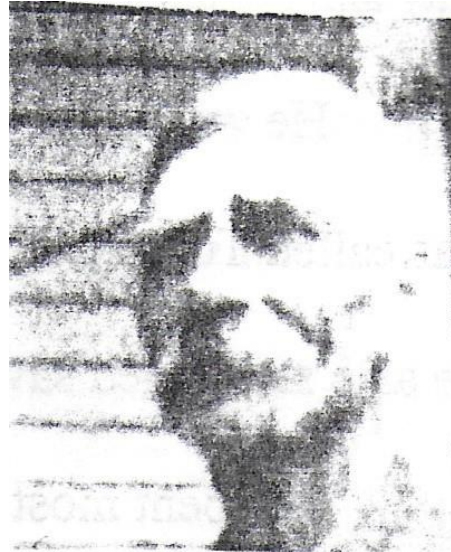
The wood box was about three yards from his chair, beside the back door. It had a backboard on it that covered the wall for about sixteen inches above the box, and he could aim, spit and hit the backboard every time. I thought that was wonderful but Gram didn't. How she sputtered, and how he spattered!

The wood-burning cook stove was beside the wood box. It had two small warming ovens at the top, which Grammy never used, but Grandpa did. She insisted he get rid of his cud of tobacco before coming to the table. She meant, throw it away. He hid it in the warming ovens so it would stay warm and pliable, ready for re-chewing. After she discovered his hiding place, he used the bottom of the stovepipe that ran from the wall to the cook stove. Sometimes he stuck those juicy cuds to the bottom to the copper water heater, which was behind the stove.

He played a lively fiddle and sang funny little ditties, but all of this performing was done from the kitchen corner. For some reason, Grammy didn't like the words he sang because she would often say, "Tom, Tom, not in front of the child."

He could peel an apple without breaking the peeling. It all came off in one curly piece. He used the same jackknife to peel the apple that he used to cut his new chews of tobacco, then he would cut off apple slices for me, and we would share. Those apples were the best I've ever eaten. Perhaps it was the tobacco flavor, or maybe it was the love and attention that went with every slice.

A sweat and tobacco odor doesn't sound too attractive, does it? When I was a child, I thought it was heavenly.



Reflections

Verna wrote the following poem using two separate forms.

May 2003

She writes "I just finished this poem after six weeks of thought and research. I studied the pictures in *When I am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple*, edited by Sandra Halderman Martz, Copyright 1987 Papier Mache Press. Those pictures of wrinkled faces tell a story of conflicting emotions and portray character paths that inspired me to write my poem, "Reflections".

Continued on Page 5)

(Reflections, continued from page 4)

I have always preferred rhymed poetry with meter to free verse but realize the modern trend is free verse, so I thought I would give it a fair try. I wrote my thoughts with no thought of rhyme or meter, and then I rewrote the poem using both.-I made an amazing discovery, which probably free verse writers are aware of. It is so much easier to write free verse, and I am not hampered by structure as I do so. The words and thoughts flow without interruption of form.I will admit it is an open, freer style and allows more expression; however, I still prefer the rhymed, rhythmic poetry.” Here are the two versions –

Free verse -

A wrinkled face is like a broken mirror
Reflecting shattered dreams,
But a glimmer of hope shines through
The shards and splinters.

Time worn tissues tell a tale
Of woe and happiness.
Smiles have formed those upward crinkles,
Frowns have carved those downward furrows.

Traces of tragedy and remnants of joy
Have etched their messages in flesh.
Skin like crushed linen and broken glass
Is a roadmap of success and failure,
Joy and disappointment, anger and patience.
Wrinkles are a mirror of life.

Rhymed -

A broken mirror, like a wrinkled face
Reflects our shattered images and dreams,
Yet through the splintered cracks and crevices,
Persistently, a ray of hope still gleams.

Thin, timeworn tissues tell a tale of woe
Of happiness and patient love and care,
Abundant smiles have formed those upward
lines,
And frowns have caused the downward wear
and tear.

A trace of tragedy and chips of joy
Have firmly etched their messages in flesh,
A roadmap for the waiting world to see:
Elation, sorrow, failure and success.
Crushed linen skin imprinted like a book
With pleasure, humor, disappointment too.
Our wrinkles are reflections of our lives
Embedded in the face for all to view.

Which is your favorite??

My prayer for Reincarnation

To be a blonde – blue-eyed – petite,
Just five feet two. That would be neat!
Please, God, do not make me a man
I'd rather stay the way I am.

This is Verna's first prize winner -

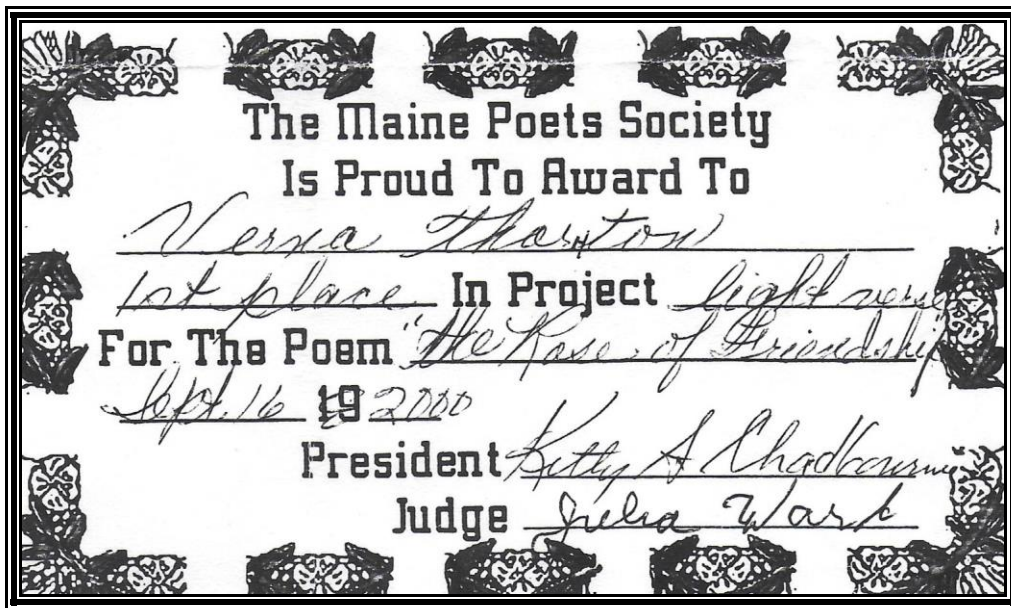
THE ROSE OF FRIENDSHIP

Verna Thornton
September 16, 2000

The fragile, fragrant roses
Have glory unsurpassed.
How sad, their scent and beauty
Cannot forever last.

But, roses, just like people,
Enjoy their slated span,
For they are ruled by One above,
Who's greater far than man.

May we, too, while here on earth,
Before our sojourn ends,
Feel, that we, just like the rose,
Brought pleasure to our friends.



LAMENTATIONS
BY Verna Thornton
1995

(On Ronald Reagan's death, Verna composed these poems and sent them to Nancy Reagan)

LAMENTATIONS
BY Verna Thornton
1995

The Caregiver's Lament (Abandoned)

You've gone away, I know not where.
Immobile, silent, unaware.
If you could only press my hand
To tell me that you understand.
Our house no longer feels like home.
Oh, God! I feel – so all alone!
Where is the friendship we once had
That comforted when I was sad?
Where is the joy that we once knew,
The happiness I shared with you?
You are withdrawn and quite apart,
Am I no longer in your heart?
I'm reaching out, but you're not there,
You've gone away. I know not where.

The Patient's Lament (Trapped)

I have not gone, and I do care.
My mind is trapped, but I'm aware.
If I could move, I'd squeeze your hand
To tell you that I understand.
When you are here, our house *is* home.
I'm listening. You're not alone.
I miss the comradeship we had,
I'm still your friend. Please don't be sad.
I also prize the joy we knew,
The happiness I shared with you.
I am withdrawn and quite apart,
But you are always in my heart.
I am still here. I have not gone.
Oh God, If I could but respond!

OFFICE OF NANCY REAGAN

December 11, 2002

Dear Mrs. Thornton:

On behalf of Mrs. Reagan, thank you very much for your forwarding a copy of your poems, *The Caregiver's Lament (Abandoned)* and *The Patient's Lament (Trapped)*. They so eloquently describe both the patient's and the caregiver's feelings in dealing with this illness. It is evident that you understand how devastating this disease can be.

Mrs. Reagan would like to convey her appreciation for thinking of both her and her husband, along with her best wishes for success in your endeavors.

Sincerely,



Cindy Crowe
Assistant to Mrs. Reagan

Mrs. Verna Thornton
36929 Grace Avenue
Zephyrhills, Florida 33542

Potential Criminals

by Verna Thornton

How do we define stealing? We all have our own definition. Have I ever stolen? Have you ever stolen? Of course we have. All of us have although we don't all admit it.

Have you ever kept a pen at the doctor's office or any registration office, either on purpose or because you said to yourself "Hey, there are lots of pens in that container; it was probably given to them as advertising. It didn't cost them anything."

Maybe you really forgot to replace it, but did you return it?

Have you ever sample a candy or cookie at the grocery store without depositing the required coin?

Sure! We all have!

When I was 16 and a junior in high school, I was debating the issue of shoplifting with two of my close friends, and I arrogantly stated, "I could walk right into J.J. Newberry's and walk right out with whatever I wanted to take. They couldn't catch me. It's all in the planning."

Margie asked, "How would you do that? Think what would happen if you got caught." Her eyes widened with disbelief and horror. Mona possessed a lot more longing for adventure and challenge than Margie, and she asked, "*How* would you do it? I don't think you can. Prove it!" "Okay", I answered, "I will give this some serious thought, as I am sure all successful criminals have to do, and tomorrow after school, if you will both go with me, I will show you how it can be done." *Wow, I thought, what have I gotten myself into?*

As we left the schoolyard the next afternoon, the three of us strolled toward the Five and Ten, otherwise known as Newberry's. They were suddenly timid, but I wasn't about to launch into my life of crime all alone, so I told them, "Either you're with me or we don't do it. Chickens!" I had spent most of my sleeping time the previous night plotting this endeavor.

I whipped a blue kerchief out of my jacket pocket, put it on my head, tied it under my chin, entered the store, and ambled casually up and down the aisles, followed by my reluctant challengers. When we came to the display of colorful kerchiefs, all folded and piled neatly on the counter, I stopped and lifted and fingered them all as if undecided as to which brilliant shade and size I was interested in. My two frightened friends wandered away from me pretending to look at other items on that accessory counter.

I boldly untied the scarf from my head, smoothed it out, folded it, placed it on the counter, and proceeded to try on several. I spent a great deal of time deliberating, placed my old headgear at the bottom of the colorful new kerchiefs, removed the price tag from a beautiful pale blue creation, placed it on my head, tied it under my chin, frowned in a disappointed manner that said, "No, I guess I can't find one I like," and strolled from the store.

Continue on Page 10

Annual Dues

Many thanks to all those who have sent in their Historical Society dues for 2019. We really appreciate having you as a member. If you haven't sent in your dues yet, please do so now so you can continue to enjoy all of the benefits of membership in the Historical Society, including receiving copies of the *Conserver*.

The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society – Membership Application Form

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Street: _____ City/State/Zip _____

E-Mail: _____

Annual dues are \$10 per person and \$7.00 for senior memberships. Please make checks payable to: Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society, 874 West Main Street, Dover-Foxcroft, ME 04426. Dues cover January to December. If you are giving a gift membership, please include the name and address and we'll gladly notify the recipient of your gift.

(Potential Criminals, cont'd from page 9)

My so-called friends, wanting no part of my down-fall, were already outside, expecting to see me led out in handcuffs.

Now what do you think I did? I strolled back into the store, repeated my performance, trying on scarves and frowning with disapproval as I did so, then replaced the one I had borrowed, tied my own scarf around my head and sauntered outside to inform my friends. "You see, I didn't really become a thief because I put it back. I just wanted to prove my point."

I only wished to be considered daring, clever and resourceful. From such goals, do criminals emerge.

How do we define stealing?

Scars

by Verna Thornton

I have seven incision scars from surgeries and several more from childhood accidents, but my most traumatic scars are the emotional ones – not visible on the skin, but the most damaging and long lasting of any.

Loss of a loved one, abuse by a loved one, betrayal by a friend, an unloved childhood or an abusive marriage are all weapons that scar.

When "scar" is mentioned, our first thought is "damage" to our skin or property, but bodily scars fade in time. Emotional scars do not heal and fade as easily.

We should all tread carefully and try to cause no emotional pain or physical pain for others. I would not want to be called a "Scar maker"

Message from Mary -

The end of another summer. It was a busy one and it seems a short one. My favorite time of year is on the horizon followed by a not so favorite time. It's now time for our Thursdays at the museum to be devoted to cataloging all the wonderful items that came our way this summer. The community is wonderful at sharing. Many folks allow us to scan photos and documents so we can share. Then they can take them home for their family records. We so appreciate it.

Our new exhibits were well received by visitors, especially the exhibit of artifacts found in the river by Dennis Allen. It's amazing what has been found. And the spring floods will bring a whole new batch!

Enjoy the Fall, and if you have spare time this winter we'd love to have you come down to help on Thursdays!

Our Corporate Sponsors

A grateful thank you to the following businesses whose funds support the Society and its efforts to preserve our history. When you shop or see these folks, please tell them 'thank you' for their support!

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Thank you all!

Items Available

Glass Christmas ornaments: \$6.00 each (add \$4.00 for shipping)

2008 – Blacksmith Shop
2009 – Observer Building
2010 – Central Hall
2011 – Thompson Free Library
2012 – Foxcroft Academy
2013 – The Blethen House
2014 – Pleasant Street School
2015 – Mayo's Mill
2016 – Piscataquis County Court House
2017 – Brown Mills
2018 – (Old) Mayo Hospital
2019 – The Opera House

DVD's : Glimpses of Dover and Foxcroft - \$10.00 (add \$3.00 for shipping)

Memories of Central Hall/Lou Stevens - \$15.00 (add \$3.00 for shipping)

Dover-Foxcroft throws: \$40.00 (add \$8.00 for shipping)

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