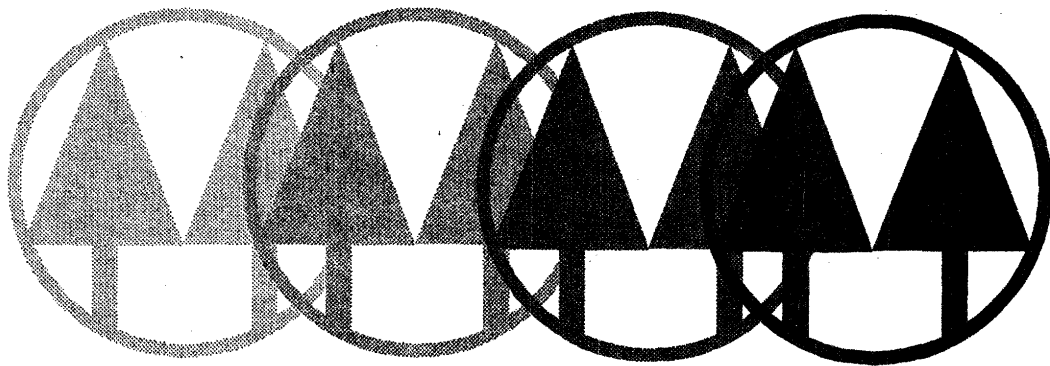


Selections
from

THE LITERARY JOURNAL
OF THE AMALGAMATED/PARK RESERVOIR COMMUNITY

CO-OP VOICES



UNITE, UNITE

Flora Gordon

With knapsacks on our backs and fifteen dollars between us, we arrived in Detroit in September, 1932. Not by pullman, but on our thumbs hitch-hiking. It took seven days to get there.

Ben had gotten a job teaching Yiddish. This was a secular school where the Yiddish language and culture were taught. Sholem Aleichem was interspersed with the class struggle. It was hardly what Ben was dreaming of doing in the motor capital of the world, where Henry Ford was czar and labor was flexing its muscles. But it was Detroit where all the action was and he was paid twelve dollars a week when money was there.

When we arrived, the effects of the Ford Hunger March still filled the air. This was a bloody confrontation where the Ford Motor Company guards and the police killed five hunger marchers. It was known as the Dearborn Massacre. Wherever we turned we found joblessness, hunger and injustice, and we were there to storm the heavens and set it right.

We were welcomed and housed with an active unemployed automobile worker's family, where we paid ten a week for room and board.

The following morning after our arrival we were taken to the Oakland Workers' Club and introduced as two New York activists ready to join the fray.

Those were heady days. The Briggs automobile plant which was part of the Ford dynasty was being unionized. We joined the picket line at six o'clock in the morning to meet the first shift with our flyers that we had prepared the night before. We marched, sang and composed our own songs and slogans. I stayed on to early afternoon and then went back to the club to plan strategy for the next day. Ben reluctantly went back to his job as a Yiddish teacher.

Our numbers grew, including the Ford agents. But we never faltered and our zealotness increased with every challenge.

The day before Thanksgiving we were awakened in the early morning hours by a loud persistent knocking, and we knew we were needed for an important action. A family of six had been evicted for non-payment of rent. Their furniture and belongings were on the street and members of the Unemployed Council were going to the Home Relief Bureau to demand that the furniture be put back and the family be given welfare immediately. We brought our clients along: two adults and four children, ages four to twelve. I was the only woman, and I was chosen to be the speaker.

The Bureau was crowded, teeming with angry, frustrated unemployed, all with tales to tell. I asked for the supervisor, but was ignored. So I jumped up on one of the benches and started to shout. "STOP ALL EVICTIONS! FURNITURE SHOULD BE RETURNED TO THE HOME! WE DEMAND WELFARE FOR THIS FAMILY AND ALL UNEMPLOYED!"

The people started surging toward me and I was now speaking for all of them. Suddenly I saw the police dispersing the crowd with their clubs. My four fellow members tried to protect me. But the police pulled me down from the bench and arrested all five of us. The men were taken to the Men's House of Detention and I was pushed into another paddy wagon with plainclothes men and police who fired questions and accusations at me.



I was accused of stepping on the American flag a month ago. I innocently said that I was not in Detroit at that time. "Where were you? Stirring up trouble elsewhere?" "I was in New York and never stepped on the American flag." "Oh, so we have a New York agitator here!"

I arrived at the Women's House of Detention where I was fingerprinted and put into solitary confinement, in a tiny cell with a window too high to look out of. The cell had no bars, but a heavy wooden door with an opening at the bottom where food was shoved in. All belongings were taken from me, including my shoelaces. So there I was, spending Thanksgiving Eve in my private little hole in the wall, an enemy of society.

There I sat, thoughtful and lonely, when I heard voices and shuffling feet coming down the corridor. Something was happening. The matron partly opened my door and told me that since it was Thanksgiving Eve, I had the privilege of going to church with the other inmates. I answered arrogantly, quoting Karl Marx, "Religion is the opiate of the people!" I remained true to my principles and did not cringe before the enemy.

The matron looked at me as though I was crazy. The door was left ajar and I heard the singing of hymns. Soon the women were coming back. Many young women passed my door and one asked me what I was in for. I told her and she looked quizzically at me and said, "You didn't do anything really bad." I tried to indoctrinate her but gave up. When I asked her what she was in for, she answered, "Hustling."

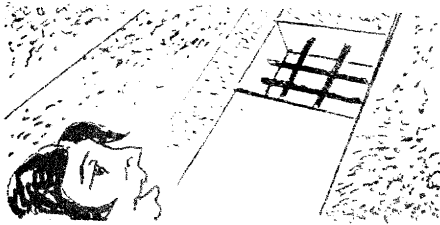
"Hustling?" I asked, not understanding. To me, hustling had only one meaning.

My mother, uncles, aunts were all clothing workers. The sentence after, "Hello," was always, "Oi, did I hustle today." I was baffled. My whole family did not go to jail. They were all hustlers. Tante Minnie, Uncle Hershel, Cousin Raisel. They just looked tired. Tired hustlers. I asked her again. She was impatient but finally explained how the plainclothesman came into her room, performed

his pleasant duty. When she took his two dollars, he arrested her. She ended her story with "That son of a bitch!"

So it finally dawned on me. Everybody hustles to make a living. HUSTLERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

I was taken to court. I got a three month suspended sentence for disturbing the peace and an editorial in The Detroit Times. The headline read: "New York Agitators Infiltrate Detroit!"



Two Memoirs by Lou Garbus

* * * * *

My Fifteen Minutes

Where were you in the Spring of 1936? I know where I was. I was reading the want-ads on the bulletin board of the C.C.N.Y. employment office. There it was: a shining beacon on a rocky shore-- "Post Office Exam for Clerk or Carrier. Start at sixty-five cents an hour as substitute." It was a message from God: "I know you're not religious, but I'll give you a break. Take the exam." Then God said: "Take the carrier's exam, not the clerk's. Those boys at City College are very, very smart. And what boy wants to come home from work in a letter carrier's uniform for the whole neighborhood to notice?"

I got a 92 on my exam. I got the job.

The job in the post office saved my life. I paid the family's rent, sent my brother to an out-of-town college, bought a car and started to go with girls--all on forty dollars a week.

As the years went by, I paid a price. My unemployed peers had now become doctors or engineers or wealthy executives. I carried the mail. During the Vietnam War, my children were storming the Pentagon. I carried the mail. All around me, opportunities

for easy financial success in the private sector were abounding. I carried the mail.

But in 1970, something happened to change my life. We postal employees were having a tough time supporting our families. Congress was reluctant to raise our pay. There were rumors that we were going out on strike, despite the fact that never in the history of the United States had there been a strike against the government.

A mass meeting was called to debate the question of a national strike. I made my way to the rostrum in this very crowded hall. There I was, banging on the table, haranguing the audience to go out on strike, in the tradition of Eugene V. Debs. During my fifteen minute speech, the crowd roared intermittently.

That was thirty years ago.

Now I look for someone, anyone, to tell my story to once more. My wife, my children, even my grandchildren, all claim they've got a receipt for having heard the story.

"Hey, Mister! Do you have minute?"

Confessions of a New Yorker

It all started at the end of World War II. I was a Second Lieutenant stationed on board a battered Army Transport, bringing weary troops back to the States from the war in Europe. We had to pull into the Cherbourg, France, for needed repairs and supplies before we loaded up with about three hundred G.I.s to head for home.

I was free at last after months at sea--to walk the streets of Cherbourg. Somehow or other I soon became involved with a young woman who ran the local saloon all by herself.

She ran a place similar to the ones on Broadway and 231st Street--with even less ambience. We hit it off almost immediately. I helped her close the place at night after the last customers left. Then we walked together to her home through the dark narrow streets of Cherbourg. We talked.

But then she told me that she had never been to Paris. I exploded, "The most beautiful city in the world,

only two hours away and you've never been to Paris?"

To make a long story very short, I had lost my cool and she had lost her heat.

Try to picture this lonely soldier, head down, shuffling toward the waterfront to walk up the gangplank of his battered empty troopship.

Fifty years later, I'm asking a similar question in a small town in Maine where I live in the summertime. Whomever I meet I ask, "Ever been to New York?" Almost always the answer is no.

"How can you live a full life without having been to New York? Great colleges, Central Park, Statue of Liberty, Rockefeller Center, Wall Street, Chinatown. Become an actor, banker, artist, anything you want to be--the city of opportunity!"

And then the answers: "Have you ever seen the sunrise in Baxter State Park?" "Have you ever landed a ten pound salmon after a ten minute fight?" "To catch sight of a moose on the heath?" "To leave your front

door unlocked?" "To attend a funeral of a neighbor where at least two hundred people will attend?" "To grow all your own food?"

The other day I received a letter from my daughter, who is doing a year's service as a nurse in a small

hospital in Kenya. She just raved about this beautiful spot in Africa. She closed her letter with this message:

"Dad, you must come here! Do you think you can live a full life without having seen Kenya?"

* * * * *

Five Poems by Rose Smeenk

Change of Mood

A rainy day chills me
fills me with foreboding.

A sudden burst of sunshine
chases all the clouds away.
It lifts my sadness.
I greet the day.

Innocence

When I was young and green
with all the world as yet unseen,
every new discovery stood out.

About bright new deeds I'd gloat;
to button my own shoes,
to brush my hair,
to climb fences if I dare.
To meet a friend out in the park
gave the day an extra spark.

My innocence was like a rose,
not yet full grown, a bud that glows
awaiting development, maturity,
enclosed in nature's purity.

As far as I can see -- not a soul.
Along on an empty path in the woods,
a light breeze stirs my hair.
Essence of pine in the air,
needles carpet the ground
softening my retreat to silence.

Green shadows play tricks
they float away from the sun beams.
Birdsong rises -- transcends earthly presence

Love

Is the hearth that warms the heart
the embrace that comforts and
gives ease to sorrow or to discontent?
Love lightens one's load, cushioning
the way to wearisome tasks.
It's the incentive to do for another,
to give of yourself, to reach out further
- to bask in the glow of faith in each other.

The Last of Autumn

Leaves scurry about - wind blown,
tossed into disheveled piles.
They blanket still green lawns -
patchwork of russets, browns and golds.
Children shuffle through the leaves
arousing woodsy odors, scattering
leaves over pavement and road.
With each draft more trees are stripped.
As their leafy raiments disappear
Revealing skeletal and twisted limbs,
with only tatters that hang on.
The pomp of Autumn's colorful array
awaits transformation, to be clad
by Winter in a snowy sheath.

Naked and Free

A hidden pond
sparkles like a mirror.
Its surface is unrippled,
reflecting sky, clouds, and trees,
enticing me to follow my reflection.

Narcissus-like I submerge
diving into nothingness.
I float naked and free
without thought, care or sorrow.

BYGONE DAYS IN THE AMALGAMATED
By Bertha Oestreich

I am ninety-three years old. I live in the same apartment for fifty-five years. It's a lovely apartment -- sunny and airy. The Amalgamated has been a great part of my life, since I was only thirty-eight years old when I moved here with my husband and two small children. My children lived here until after they were married. They attended college in New York City, so they did not have to leave home. My grandson, now a Harvard-educated dentist, spent the first eight months of his life with his parents in an Amalgamated apartment in the Eleventh Building.

There were woods where the Fourteenth Building now stands at 92 Van Cortlandt Park South. When it rained, the ground became soggy and my young son, Hilary, who loved to play in the woods, came home covered with mud. I remember in winter the children bellywhopping on their sleds, down a hill in the park near the present playground.

At the time of my son's Bar Mitzvah construction on the Fourteenth Building was going on. Because the Amalgamated was pressed for time, the men were working on Saturday and I was afraid that the noise would drown out the services. The synagogue was nearby on Gouverneur Avenue between the present Thirteenth and Fourteenth Buildings where that beautiful lawn now greets my gaze when I look out of my bedroom window.

The synagogue was housed in a large frame house on that land which now belongs to the Amalgamated. The synagogue services and Hebrew School classes were held there, also.

A famous dancer, Ruth St. Denis, owned a beautiful home on Sedgwick Avenue. She taught dancing there for an affordable fee to some of our children. I went to see her perform there. It was quite informal. We sat in a circle in her living room. I could have reached out and touched her as she danced in the center of the circle. She was in her seventies at the time. I was surprised to see that she was tall and large-boned, since I was of the impression that dancers were rather petite. Her lover and partner, Ted Shawn, accompanied her on the piano.

My mother lived in the Seventh Building. She and her friend used to walk to Tibbetts Brook Park and back. My mother died at the Workmen's Circle Home for the Aged at the age of 110.

We once had a genuine hurricane. It rained very hard and there were gale-force winds. When it was over, the young trees were lying on the ground on Gouverneur Avenue, all the way to the corner of Van Cortlandt Park South. The workmen put the trees back in place and held them up by attaching wire from each tree to the ground, and miracle of miracles -- they grew back again. They stand tall and majestic, reaching toward the sky. They not only give us shade in summer, but provide a sanctuary for the birds and squirrels. I lie on my bed and watch them cavorting among the branches -- and I am at peace!

HITCHHIKING TO THE AMALGAMATED
Etta Goldbaum

When I graduated from Hunter in the early 1940's, Alice, a college friend and I decided to celebrate by hitchhiking through the New England states and Canada before taking our first full-time jobs. We had never strayed far from the South Bronx.

We couldn't get past our families without telling the big lie, so we packed our knapsacks into valises and told them that we were going to get summer jobs in the Catskills. My mother told me to find a nice husband there.

We accepted hitches only from women drivers, from one male or a male/female couple to minimize danger. We bought dungaree work clothing and wore our hair in pigtails to present the wholesome adult girl scout image. We joined the American Youth Hostel which provided modest houses or unused barns for hikers and bikers for 25 cents a night. Food was anything cheap or free.

A few of the many adventures follow: We managed to get ourselves invited to spend an afternoon in a coal mine and were taught how to use a pickaxe. When we saw wooden beams propping up the narrow passages to prevent collapse, we felt the panic all miners just feel.

When we reached Lake George, we saw a sign, "No Dogs and Jews Allowed." We kicked that sign, and the pain is with us still.

Since our "boys" were serving in World War II, The New Hampshire Employment Service welcomed us as the first women to apply as farm hands in the State and gave us jobs. A photographer for the local paper snapped our picture pitching hay. We soon discovered that the six-year-old son of the farmer knew much more than we did about getting 50 cows back to the barn. He also lectured us about the facts of life pertaining to cows, bulls and babies. When asked to weed the strawberry patch, we were slow in telling plants from weeds. When we pitched hay, we were able to struggle through it but couldn't avoid a pitchfork in my buttock as the hay went flying. But it happened only once. The highlight of each day was getting to sit with the other farmhands, all men, at long tables piled high with food brought by the farmer's wife and her helpers. We stayed on the job for a week.

In Montreal, we had to rely on our high school French with pathetic results. We were greeted as oddities in a country less accustomed to knapsack-carrying muscle-women. We were interviewed and photographed for several local papers. The trip was most successful, mishaps and all, and we resolved to do it again next summer.

In September, I went to work for a large accounting firm (my major in college). Alice, who was a history major found a job in the Research Department of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. Sidney Hillman was President then, and a highly respected labor leader. That's why a street was named after him in our cooperative. The following summer we took only a month (mostly without pay) and hitched as far as Duluth, Minnesota. By then we were old hands at the game. When we returned, Alice was asked to research the number and location of men's clothing factories in the South which had never been organized. Most of them were non-union, and most workers there didn't know that there was a union anxious to sign them up. We formulated an idea, a wild scheme, which we hoped the Union would accept. We would offer to distribute leaflets all over the South, wherever there was a non-union shop, describing the benefits of joining the Amalgamated Union.

The Research Department thought it was an idea worth trying and I was hired. I resigned from my accounting job.

We sent 10,000 leaflets to General Delivery in the towns where the factories were located, picked them up when we arrived, distributed them to the workers at the factory gates, and moved on to the next town on the list. We hitched from town to town. The Union saved on transportation costs but paid us \$6 a day for food and lodging. In one town, as we were giving out leaflets in front of a factory, the boss stood behind a garbage pail. As a worker took a leaflet, the boss pointed to the pail and most workers threw their leaflets in unread.

There was great animosity between workers and bosses about wages and dangerous working conditions. My story takes place at a time when organizers were in danger of bodily harm. Workers were fired if they showed too much interest in forming a union. We covered dozens of towns until we reached Atlanta, where the Amalgamated had an office. The New York local asked us to stay in Atlanta and help them organize. Alice and I were separated. She helped organize a factory in Atlanta and I was assigned to one in a little town called Rome where a small percentage of workers had quietly signed up with the union but were far from the needed majority.

Together with local workers, I visited homes each evening and talked myself into a frenzy but still could not get the necessary membership. My New York accent gave me away. One woman asked me if I was one of those New York Jews. I pretended that I didn't hear the question. When we told New York of the stalemate, they asked us to give it up. Others had also tried and failed. I read in the New York Times that 20 years after my failure, the factory had finally been organized.

I was assigned to Passaic, New Jersey, to help organize the huge Botany plant. I worked with five sophisticated organizers. They taught me the tricks of the trade, and also how to smoke, drink and do crossword puzzles. We were up at 5 a.m. in the bitter cold; distributing leaflets round the clock. Evenings we visited the homes and signed up enough people to win the election. Optimism reigned. There were dreams those days of improving the lot of workers in sweatshops, and the dreams were becoming reality.

My return to New York netted me important union benefits--a marriage contract and fringe benefits--two daughters in quick succession. Finding housing after the war was a heartache. We were living in honeymoon quarters in a single studio room when maternity struck. We added a crib and then another. We heard that the Amalgamated had built additional housing. We were able to get a two-bedroom apartment in the newly-built 14th building in 1949, and have not moved since.

We had moved to Utopia. Looking back 43 years, I remember joy, friendships, beauty and cleanliness. I lived "cooperation." There was no Major Deegan or Van Cortlandt playground as yet. We made the park itself the village green. The only place to buy food was a small Coop supermarket in the basement of the first building. There was also a tea room gathering place sharing space with a small nursery. Herman Liebman, idealist/activist arranged concerts, educational and social events. He had set the tone for the educational life of the coop. Another tone-setter was Abraham Kazan, the president and manager, who had a dream that coop housing could work. And work it did and still does.

We have democratic self-government, clubs, nursery, summer camp workshops, art events, concerts, parties and street fairs, a credit union and security patrols. We are not nameless. Our Community News lists newcomers so that we may welcome them and lists those who died so that we may mourn them.

We're working at keeping the cooperative dream alive. We hope to live out our days in our modest village atmosphere.

But just when we could share rides, save gas, keep the air pure--isn't it a shame--hitchhiking has become history.

REFLECTIONS AT MY WINDOW
by Estelle Hagerty

How shall I take possession of my view,
these airy unholdable holdings -
The drifting clouds
are always changing shape
and the messages of seagulls
disappear in space,
their calligraphy eluding recollection.

What can I do to make this landscape mine?
Recording what I can of what I see,
I dive into the tops of trees
whose fountains spout green leaves
into my air;
Then drop some more
to gaze upon the reservoir
whose public waters glance at me
and turn away,
untouchable - a life inexorably
bound up in granite -
its stream of movement stopped.
Beneath my eyes,
within those measured depths,
alien shadows meet ...

Can I, amidst images of absence, make my home?
A thought as cold as fear
turns me toward the bridge
that rises from the rooftops
like a rainbow from a mist,
to span my changing view
with immutable form -
a promise that continues
although its world is gone -
falling from pillars of air...

I search the sky through my window,
hoping to find you there.

Two Poems and a story
by Mary Lukomnik



I Saw a Tree

The old oak tree lies on the ground.
Roots, entrails, naked before my eyes.
A flock of grey birds
Circling overhead
Salute the grounded tree
And fly to bluer skies.

Who mourns the death of this old tree?
Years transformed into tree rings
Do neighbor trees mutter to the wind,
"He must have sinned mightily,
Struck down in all his glory."
Or "Better he than me."
Do some oaks murmur with a sigh,
"Poor old oak tree."

The falling oak fifty feet tall
Splintered younger trees.
Yet a sapling, thin, waiflike
Stands waiting.
Seasons will pass.
Time will thicken its trunk
And it too shall be
An old oak tree.

My Mother's Voice

I, two years old, crawl behind Baby
My knees move fast, arms in rhythm.
My feet in brown high-laced shoes
Go soosh, soosh along the floor.

Baby is slower, falls on her tummy,
She raises her buttocks, tries again
But I, I don't stop,
I scoot round and round the room the room.
Baby crows with delight at our game.
I answer with joyous laughter.

"Stop crawling. Stand up,
Get off the floor. You're a big girl now".
My mother's voice, clear, demanding.
I stand,
I leave a piece of childhood on that floor.

Mother
Revolutionary
Czarist prisoner
Hunger strike organizer
Suffragette
Hunter student
Lab technician
Baby nurse
Widow, grandmother
Community leader
Five hundred mourners at her funeral.

Mother,
Did you know
Forty years after your death,
I still must not crawl, must stand tall?

But, Mother mine,
It's so hard to be a big girl.

* * * * *

Emma

Emma, three years old, didn't understand all the fuss. Mommy had shown her a new dress and a stick with a star. The dress was white with little shiny things on it and a big pink sash bow. Mommy put the dress on her, tied the bow, gave her the stick and took her to show Daddy. Mommy and Daddy held hands, looked at her, smiled, and Daddy said, "You beautiful fairy, you."
Emma didn't like that Daddy forgot her name and called her, "Fairy." "I'm Emma." Mommy and

Daddy laughed and laughed, kissed and hugged her. They said something, "Halloween Party." Emma thought and thought "Party." Whose birthday was it? Not Daddy's nor Mommy's. She didn't get a dress and a stick with a star for their parties. She didn't want to ask because they laughed. She liked being hugged and kissed when they laughed but she didn't like their laughing.

It was hard being little all the time. She was allowed only one candy a day but Mommy could eat as many as she wanted. Emma wasn't allowed coffee. Mommy and Daddy always said, "When your're bigger, you'll drink coffee." She couldn't see over counters in stores. Even when Daddy and Mommy lifted her to see, pretty soon they'd say, "I have to put you down; you're such a big girl now." But she, Emma, knew she wasn't big. She couldn't reach the wall telephone nor the light switch in her bedroom.

Today Mommy said, "We're making doughnuts for the party." Mommy took eggs from the refrigerator and flour from the closet. Mommy showed Emma the flour sifter and let Emma pull the sifter handle to make little flour hills. It was hard to pull. Soon Emma didn't want to make any more hills. She wandered out of the kitchen. After a little while, when Emma wandered back, Mommy was rolling out dough. "Would you like to cut out doughnuts, while I heat the oil?"

Emma had a wonderful time cutting into the

yellow puffy dough. Mommy showed her how to make dough sticks with the little left over pieces. Then Mommy put the cut-out yellow puffy dough pieces into the big pot. There was a funny plop=plop and sizzle noise. Mommy took the pieces out. They were different, brown crispy looking.

Emma was thinking, maybe Mommy would lift her to look into the big pot so she could see what changed the yellow dough into crispy brown doughnuts. The telephone rang and Mommy went to answer it. Emma knew that Mommy would talk a long time. Emma wanted to know. Emma could not wait. She would look into the pot. Emma reached up, up for the handle of the big pot. She couldn't reach it. She stood on tippy-toes. She reached it. Now she will see what's inside the pot. She pulled the pot down towards herself.

Many years later, Emma Ross, Ph.D. was awarded an honorary degree at Columbia University. She had gained international fame for development of a particle field theory. The science editor of the N.Y. Times asked her, "Why did you choose to specialize in physics, such a difficult field for women?". Emma waved her scarred right hand casually as she answered, "As a kid I was into everything. I guess I just stayed curious all my life."

* * * * *

Seven Haiku by Bill Woolfson

Bill Woolfson was an Amalgamated Board member and community activist for many years. We honor his memory by printing some of the haiku he wrote.

Pines stand straight and tall.
The lake is dancing.
So lives my spirit today.
*
Blue is the water,
White the summer clouds.
Oh that the world would know peace.
*
Summer air is soft.
Azure water pure.
So should man's thoughts be today.

The summer night falls.
The full moon soars free.
A pine cone drums on the roof.
*
My mind is sun-drenched.
My heart trouble-free.
Life is so good when one loves.
*
Spring is a birdsong.
The road to a friends garden
is never too long.
*
Spring rise grows in files
so friendship waxes stronger
in the warmth of smiles.