

Tor House Newsletter



Spring 2020

A Letter to the Tor House Community from Elliot Ruchowitz-Roberts, President

I hope you and your loved ones are in good health, finding joy in each day as you shelter in place.

All is in good order at Tor House. Even though we have essentially closed down, life continues.

Looking out from the President's office on the second floor of the East Wing, I see, from left to right, Hawk Tower, the Pacific, Tor House, and the south side of the East Wing. Yesterday, a red-tailed hawk was perched on the eaves of Tor House, looking out over the now-grown wild western section of the property-- sweet alyssum, wild lilac, rosemary, sour grass and other flowers in bloom. Quail in the yard, on the garden walls, on the roof:

"And hark the quail," Jeffers wrote in "The Last Conservative," "running on the low roof's worn cedar shingles./Their little feet patter like raindrops."

What I can no longer see are the four eucalyptus trees—all, given their size, most certainly planted by Jeffers—that have been taken down from the property to the south of Tor House. Despite their loss, Jeffers, I think, would have admired the work of the tree cutter, held aloft by ropes; securing with rope and pulley and then cutting ten-foot sections of the trees with his chain saw. Of course, words from Jeffers's poetry come to mind:

If you should look for this place after a handful of lifetimes:
Perhaps of my planted forest a few
May stand yet, dark-leaved Australians or the coast cypress, haggard
With storm-drift; but fire and the axe are devils....

("Tor House")

As you know, we have suspended all tours and cancelled the Garden Party. We are grateful to those who chose to donate the tour fees to the Foundation.

Several weeks ago, before we were all aware of the gravity of the pandemic, the Foundation was considering a fund-raising drive to cover the income lost from suspension of tours and cancellation of the Garden Party. That was several weeks ago. Now, since there are so many organizations in our community dealing directly with the pandemic and its effects that need financial support, and since the Foundation is, for the immediate future, financially secure, we encourage you to donate to those organizations during this challenging time.

Please, however, maintain your memberships. They are vital to sustaining the Tor House community as well as an important source of income.

This is a time for our community to come together and support each other.

I look forward to the time when we can gather once again in the gardens of Tor House, experience the beauty of "rock, wind and sea," stand at the top of Hawk Tower, "gazing at the boundaries of granite and spray, the established sea marks....," and experiencing "the immense beauty of the world."

Letting Go: for Marina Romani

Marina Romani, a former fellow docent at Tor House and a dear friend, died on February 17 at the age of 81. She led a remarkable life, too rich and complex to chronicle here, but during her association with Tor House, she brought her intelligence, her talents, her love of poetry, of the poetry of Robinson Jeffers, and of Tor House to all she did, whether leading tours or designing programs for our poetry readings, whether re-editing, updating and reformatting the Docent Source Book or coordinating the poetry readings at Tor House. She was a strong and steady presence at Tor House.

Several years ago, on the occasion of my 80th birthday, she sent me a long note. Her own words, I think, give a forceful sense of her intelligence and compassion, and they are especially relevant today.

“I never thought much about which one of us was older than the other. Now that I know which birthday you’re approaching I realize that we belong to the same generation. We’ve shared time on this, our planet. We’ve run and danced and flown through our years, through our joys and our sorrows, and now we walk on, or trudge on if trudge we must, as long as we’re able. I heard you speak, in a recent poem of yours, of the fickleness of human experience, of the awareness that losses *will* occur, expected or not—that each moment of joy should be lived fully, acknowledged fully. I can’t think of a better thought to conclude with.”

Nor I, but I would like to include this postscript, an elegy, written after I visited Marina two days before her death:

For Marina, Near Death

gnarled— misshapen by arthritis—
your hand—the softness—the smooth skin—the warmth—
caught me by surprise—I by your bed
in the darkened room—as did your smile—
the glow of your eyes—the joy—the love—
so fully in the moment—you drew
me there, too—just joy—just love—
holding your hand—letting go

~*Elliot Ruchowitz-Roberts*



And here another tribute to Marina from another poet, former fellow docent and trustee **George Lober**
PERFECT

~*for Marina*

A winter sky the day of your funeral,
you inside a wooden coffin
inside a small wooden church.

This was your choice, and yet we have
all come to stand two deep
along the walls, encircling you

in our silence, each holding a candle
to guide us in grasping the darkness
of your loss, each of us drifting

in memory, the air heavy with incense
the chant and response of priest
and choir, the air graying with candle

fumes until your daughter-in-law
cracked a window and laughter
from children in the park entered

like small birds on the trace
of a breeze, and an infant cried
behind the choir screen.

Tor House Secrets, 1950
by Peter Serchuk

Una's dying and she knows it. That's her secret.
The cancer's a wildfire no hope can tame racing up
her spine. She wills a smile through a ravaged face
so that the poet by her bed, whose own smile went
missing long ago, might continue grieving for the world
instead. Cradled in his arms, she drifts away then circles back
and talks of days ahead. But Robin knows days
are short for the doctors told him all. He made them vow to
seal the facts inside a cheery vault. So Una's none the wiser as
far as he can know. He reads her favorite poems
and speaks of castles in the glen. Her own tower bears
its darkness draped in fog of what's to come; while inside their
house of stone each keeps their secrets from
the other, lovers to the end.

[Peter Serchuk, a Tor House Docent, writes of his poem: "I had heard a rumor that when Una was dying with cancer in 1950, both she and Robin knew the facts but each kept the actual facts from the other."]

* * * * *

Tor House
by Daniel Williams of Wawona, California

Never mind the labor
of marrying stone to stone
all the way up to the second story
the work it had to take
to make the Tor household work
the log fires needed to warm
stone walls wooden ceilings
the constant damp of wind
and sea as *Una* played piano
as *Robin* rehearsed his words.

Groceries brought in from the village
doctors rushed when children were sick

the demands of suspicious neighbors
the strictures of unsympathetic bureaucracy

Hardly worth it
you may think
with your central heat your electric power
hardly worth it
but for the quiet constant beauty
the power of every day love
but for the verbal heights of *Hawk Tower*
whereon perched the unstoppable blind hawk
of poetry.

* * * * *

Two poems from 2017 by Laura C. Newmark of Carmel

Piccadilly Park, Carmel

A pocket park on a village street
offers shade to passersby
beneath a live oak's oval leaves
embroidered on the sky.

Summer Garden

Golden abelia smolders
beneath a foggy sky,
then flames in bright sunlight
beside the cooler glow
of agapanthus blossoms
in a long purple row.

NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERSHIPS (December 2019 – March 2020)

PATRON MEMBERSHIPS (\$250)

Peter Serchuk

SPONSOR MEMBERSHIPS (\$100)

Eric Bolt & Georgia Hughes

Bruce & Laurie Bosley

Art & Betsy Fowler

George Galakatos

Michael Green

Julius & Peggy Guccione

Christine Hunsley

Tim & Susan Hunt

Carolyn Kleefeld

Roland & Martha Mace

Robert & Diane Reid

Florence Snyder-Speck

Alan Stacy/Deborah Russell

INDIVIDUAL, DOCENT AND SENIOR MEMBERSHIPS

Barbara Babcock

Lucas Blok/Barbara Ruzicka

David & Carole Brooks

John & Barbara Comer

Stuart & Letty Crymes

Dale Ditsler

Diana Dunn

Carole Erickson

Cynthia Folkmann

Albert & Barbara Gelpi

Don & Estjer Goodhue

Charles Greifenstein/Alison Hicks

Susan Groff

Jerry Huling

Lindsay & Myoung Jeffers

Robert Kaler

Frank & Barbara Keith

Suzanne LaHaye

Michael & Camille Liscinsky

James & Christine Maguire

Thomas McGovern

Esther Medina

Paule Missud

James & Linda Paul

Margaret Purchase

Boyd & Lois Repsher

Marina Romani

David Rutgers

John Sanders

Ray & Amy Sims

James B. Snyder

David Stanley/Elizabeth Holliday

Richard Stanley

Charles Stewart

Katherine Stoner/Michelle Welsh

Frank Takacs/Amy Essick

Peter & Donna Thomas

Christopher & Susan Williams

Debra Wincott

Lynn Yaghoubian

Carol Young

CONTRIBUTIONS (December 2019– March 2020)

Contribution (\$7,500)

Anonymous gift in support of the Tor House Gardens

Contribution (\$1,000 to \$5,000)

Lacy Buck

Flavin Family Trust

Alice Phelan

Don & Laura Newmark

Deborah Sharp

Contributions (\$500 to \$999)

Anonymous in honor of Vince Huth

James & Paula Karman

Community Foundation of Monterey County

Al Mears

Contributions (\$100-\$499)

Robert & Melinda Armstead

Rob Kafka

Carolyn Kleefeld

Charles Rodewald

Tim & Jane Sanders in Honor of Mary Jane Dziedzic

Frank Takacs & Amy Essick

Fran Vardamis in memory of Alex Vardamis

Contributions (to \$99)

Elizabeth Anderson

Bob Archer

Gregor & Diane Cailliet

Phillip Carey/Koji Kamuma

Ryan Chavez

Greg Donovan

Dr. & Mrs Guccione

Mack A. Gunther

Susan LaHaye

Esther Medina

The Petersons, In Memory of Denis Van Dam

Marina Romani

John Spoden

Lynn Yaghoubian

[Please note: listings reflect only those memberships received since the last issue of the *Newsletter*]

Footprints

As noted, the Foundation mourns the passing of **Marina Romani** (1939-2020). Hers was a truly remarkable life. The daughter of Russian émigrés, she was born in Shanghai, China during the Japanese occupation, and, during the Chinese Communist Revolution, fled first to the Philippines, then to Australia, and eventually to the United States where her parents taught Russian at the Defense Language Institute. She grew up in Pacific Grove, married a career army officer and continued her travels all over world, from Thailand to West Point. Along the way, she managed a degree in English Literature. Back in California she taught at DLI and wrote two volumes of poetry and reminiscences including *Child Interwoven* and *Chiaroscuro Eye*, both of which are available on Amazon. Her poetry has appeared in *Monterey Poetry Review* and on these pages.

The Foundation also mourns the passing of Tor House retired Trustee **Mel Blevins** (1932-2020). An architect and navy veteran, he also served on the Board of the Salvation Army.

Zoe Caldwell, who died in Pound Ridge, NY in February of 2020, is mourned and remembered for her 1982 Tony-winning performance in Jeffers' *Medea* on Broadway. Born in Melbourne, Australia in 1933, her *I Will Be Cleopatra* is a memoir of her early years. She was an Honorary Lifetime member and Distinguished Fellow of the Tor House Foundation and participated on a panel at the 5th annual Tor House (Fall) Festival in 1983.

This winter two familiar Tor House Trustees assumed new jobs, and a new face joined the team.

Vince Huth left the presidency after serving for ten years. As able leader, he was a hands-on administrator, always ready to “get under the hood,” to solve a problem, whether a flooded library or a failing boiler. Fortunately, in these times, he left behind a solid “rainy day fund,” as it was called before we knew the meaning of a “rainy” day. Vince at his departure from the presidency, was presented with the Hawk Award for his many years of loyal service. He will remain on the Board.

We welcome **Elliot Ruchowitz-Roberts** as president. Elliot is known to the Jeffers community as scholar, able leader, enthusiastic docent, and the long-time director of the annual Tor House Prize for Poetry. A retired professor of English and a talented poet himself, he is the author of *Bowing to Receive the Mountain* and *White Fire*. We welcome the innovation and excitement he's sure to bring to the organization.

The new presence in the office is **Melinda Manlin** who, in January, replaced **Erin Carey** as Administrative Assistant. A long-time resident of Monterey, Melinda spent her career working for CTB/McGraw-Hill, developing quality assessments that measured reading and language arts skills. Most recently, she has worked as an Office Administrator for the law firm of Welsh and Schmidt. She comes with the highest of recommendations from that firm. We welcome her time and talent. Although our public outreach is on hold, Melinda is the office Monday-Wednesday from 9-1 and Thursday from 9-12.

We are excited to share the news that, with a 4.58-star rating and 50 reviews, the Foundation has received the 2019 "People Love Us on Yelp" sticker, which is only awarded to the most highly rated and best reviewed businesses on Yelp for great service to the community.

Docent **Elizabeth Stacey** reports two recent Jeffers sightings. The October issue of the *Sierra Club* magazine tells how Doug and Kris Tompkins purchased over a million acres of wilderness in Patagonia and then donated it to the Chilean government to create national parks, adding that “Tompkins liked to quote the poet Robinson Jeffers: The greatest beauty is organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe.” Also, in the fall issue of *Lapham's Quarterly* is an anthology of writings on the subject of climate. Page 154 features the poem “Star-Swirls” accompanied by a few lines about Jeffers with a quote in which he advocates for “a shifting of emphasis and significance from man to not-man ...”

News and Notes: From the Editor:

While we shelter in place waiting for the world to return to “normal,” there are so many books and ideas to read and digest, so many journals and poems to write.

First, for us, the poems of Jeffers. Try <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/robinson-jeffers> for Jeffers’ poetry, from “Orca” to “Fire,” as they appeared in *Poetry Magazine*, or move on to the Academy of American Poets’ website at <https://poets.org/poet/robinson-jeffers>, with fewer poems but an excellent biography and bibliography. Prefer hardcopy? Amazon will deliver most of Jeffers primary and secondary material. So will the Tor House bookstore, at www.torhouse.org with a link to the Tor House Press and its most recent volume of Jeffers scholarship, *The Atom to be Split*, essays by Robert Zaller. If you choose to “talk” Jeffers, go to the Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation group on Facebook and join in the conversation, along the way enjoying a marvelous collection of photos: the Tower from dawn to dusk; the Easter Bunny in the garden. Yes, that, too, is there. And if, thus inspired, you want to record this moment in verse, there is information, both on the website and on the Facebook link, for entering next year’s Poetry Contest. You are, of course, invited, at any time, via this Newsletter, to share with the Jeffers community what you have written.

Would like to read the books that Jeffers read? Start with the works of Thomas Hardy, the novels that, rumor has it, the poet read aloud on long and chilly winter nights, his wife, Una, and his sons listening with rapt attention. The novels of George Moore were Una’s favorites. And then there is William Butler Yeats. One cannot think of Jeffers without giving a nod to his much-admired near contemporary, far away from Hawk Tower, in his own Thoor Ballylee in Galway. The books, the towers are all referenced and photographed on the internet and available, of course, on Amazon.



At times, especially in the world of CNN, it might seem that what we, as a generation, are experiencing is unique. Hardly. In modern times we imagine we are invincible to disease, but, in fact, pandemics are a most common feature of human history. Athens fell in the aftermath of a plague in the early 400s BCE. Check out the contemporary account by Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Later, the devastating epidemics of the 3rd century AD did more than the barbarian invasions to seal Rome’s fate.

The pandemic of all pandemics was, in more “recent” times, the Black Death. Arriving probably in 1347 from a merchant ship anchored in Sicily, it quickly spread across medieval Europe, from Spain to the most northern reaches of the British Isles and Scandinavia. Over a million lives were lost. The middle ages came to an end. But in its place blossomed the Renaissance. Among those who lived through the Black Death – because even in the worst of epidemics, not everyone dies – was Giovanni Boccaccio. He ushered in that Renaissance, and in the process created the Italian language, with his cycle of stories shared by a group of Italian young people “sheltering in place” on a country estate and entertaining themselves – because in the 15th century there was no television – by telling tales. *Decameron* (available free on Project Gutenberg), inspired plague-based stories, as history or symbol, including Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, Daniel Defoe’s 18th century novel *The Journal of A Plague Year*, and, in the 20th century, Sigrid Undset’s medieval trilogy *Kristin Lavrensdatter*, Camus’ *The Plague*, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez’ *Love in the Time of Cholera*. And film? We must not forget film, and especially Ingmar Bergman’s “The Seventh Seal,” (1957) with English subtitles and available, in your sequestration, on Amazon Prime for rental at under \$4.

The Last Word from Robinson Jeffers

The Purse-Seine

Our sardine fishermen work at night in the dark of the moon; daylight or moonlight
They could not tell where to spread the net, unable to see the phosphorescence of the shoals of
fish.
They work northward from Monterey, coasting Santa Cruz; off New Year's Point or off
Pigeon Point
The look-out man will see some lakes of milk-color light on the sea's night-purple; he points,
and the helmsman
Turns the dark prow, the motorboat circles the gleaming shoal and drifts out her seine-net. They
close the circle
And purse the bottom of the net, then with great labor haul it in.

I cannot tell you
How beautiful the scene is, and a little terrible, then, when the crowded fish
Know they are caught, and wildly beat from one wall to the other of their closing destiny the
phosphorescent
Water to a pool of flame, each beautiful slender body sheeted with flame, like a live rocket
A comet's tail wake of clear yellow flame; while outside the narrowing
Floats and cordage of the net great sea-lions come up to watch, sighing in the dark; the vast walls
of night
Stand erect to the stars.

Lately I was looking from a night mountain-top
On a wide city, the colored splendor, galaxies of light: how could I help but recall the seine-net
Gathering the luminous fish? I cannot tell you how beautiful the city appeared, and a little
terrible.
I thought, We have geared the machines and locked all together into interdependence; we have
built the great cities; now
There is no escape. We have gathered vast populations incapable of free survival, insulated
From the strong earth, each person in himself helpless, on all dependent. The circle is closed,
and the net
Is being hauled in. They hardly feel the cords drawing, yet they shine already. The inevitable
mass-disasters
Will not come in our time nor in our children's, but we and our children
Must watch the net draw narrower, government take all powers – or revolution, and the new
government
Take more than all, add to kept bodies kept souls – or anarchy, the mass-disasters.

These things are Progress:
Do you marvel our verse is troubled or frowning, while it keeps its reason? Or it lets go, lets the
mood flow
In the manner of the recent young men into mere hysteria, splintered gleams, crackled laughter.
But they are quite wrong.
There is no reason for amazement: surely one always knew that cultures decay, and life's end is
death.

from *Such Counsels You Gave To Me* (1937) Hunt II, 517



**Robinson Jeffers
Tor House Foundation**
P.O. Box 2713 • CARMEL, CA 93921

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Office Open Mon.-Wed. 9-1; Thurs. 9-12

Spring 2020

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please check one:

- Full-time student/TH Docent \$15.00
- Senior 25.00
- Individual 40.00
- Couple 50.00
- Sponsor 100.00
- Patron 250.00
- Lifetime 1000.00

My payment for \$_____ is enclosed.

Name: _____

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Please make check payable to:
TOR HOUSE FOUNDATION
Mail to: PO Box 2713, Carmel, CA 93921
Consult Website for on-line payment

Your contribution assists in the preservation of the unique home of the poet, Robinson Jeffers, and in community outreach programs.

Membership benefits include:

- ◆ Free tours of Tor House
- ◆ 10% discount on merchandise
- ◆ Advance invitations to coming events
- ◆ Quarterly newsletter

**ROBINSON JEFFERS
TOR HOUSE FOUNDATION**

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