

## JOHN A. VALENTI 3RD

John Valenti is a nine-time Pulitzer Prize-nominated and national award-winning journalist who has worked for *Newsday* since 1981 and appeared on hundreds of radio and TV shows, including *NPR* and *Good Morning America*. He headed the 1997 *Newsday* investigation into New York Islanders owner John Spano, resulting in a federal fraud conviction, earning First Place in the Associated Press Sports Editors national competition for Best Investigative Reporting and inspiring the Emmy Award-winning *ESPN 30-for-30* episode *Big Shot*. Author of the critically acclaimed *Swee'pea* (Simon & Schuster / Atria Books) about New York City playground basketball star Lloyd (Swee'pea) Daniels, Valenti was part of a two-man team whose investigation of the University of Nevada-Las Vegas led to the resignation of coach Jerry Tarkanian — and a death-penalty ban from the NCAA Tournament. Honored multiple times by The Society of the Silurians, Valenti once posed as a limo driver to get a story, was threatened by a mob associate out of *Wise Guy* and has interviewed a wide array of subjects, including Michael Jordan, Mike Tyson, Mario Andretti, Wayne Gretzky, Steffi Graf, Pele and the first two men to walk on the Moon, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin. A traveler, he's been to 45 states and more than 20 countries. A candidate for the NASA Journalist in Space Project and graduate of Oceanside (N.Y.) High School and Hofstra University, he has been writing poetry most of his life.

# It's Us, Not Them

The latest one began like this:  
with meteoric rhetoric about former satellite nations,  
about how they'd done the unconscionable,  
turned their backs on the Mother who'd loved them;  
the rest of the free world, awash in bravado,  
saying don't dare punish those you call your children  
or we'll soon anger, shame you with contempt

In the blink of an eye it'd become  
the slaughter of innocents, the slaughter of innocence  
One more statesman having guaranteed peace;  
one more bad man beating on a drum

And the victims put on a brave face,  
pledging they'd forever stand strong, persevere,  
ever-steadfast in their conviction,  
as cities fell to ruin, laid waste; missiles and bombs,  
the barrage of bullets and of artillery shells,  
the rumble of armor and the mumble of soldiers,  
dancing in time to the bombast of a madman  
— a madman gone madder still

And the world stood idle by, all talk;  
its ideological argument for reason,  
its plea for humanity, for civility, for end, disregarded  
as wave after wave after wave unfurled

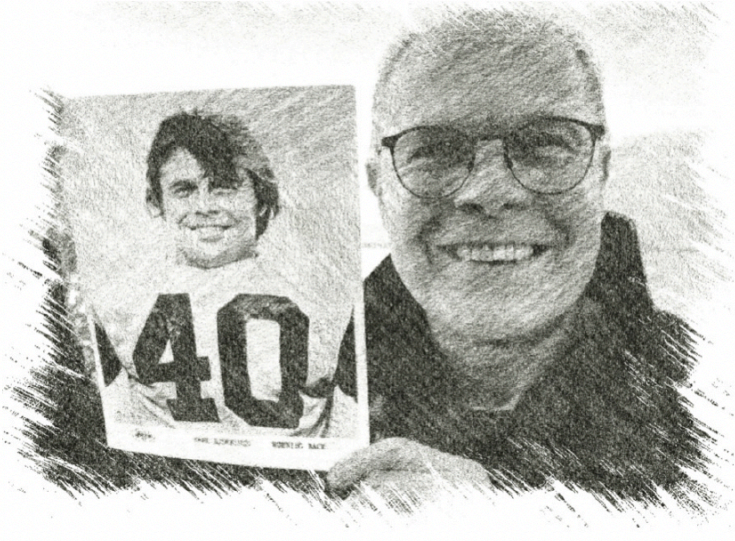
And for the countless it continued, onrush, as it always does,  
as it always has: in despair, in ruin, in death;  
body counts for the victors, blood loss for the losers,  
the shaking of heads, of those barking from the sidelines, dogs,  
saying too bad no one listened, saying too bad, what a shame,  
not any of the one understanding history always repeats itself  
That we're its enablers and its moralizers, on and on, *ad infinitum*  
For we are hunters disguised as gatherers,  
are warmongers disguised as peacemakers and as diplomats  
For we are bystanders and admirers when we need be apostates  
For we claim to be knowing of the future,  
while we remain oh so illiterate of the past  
For we are flawed. For we are mankind

## On the Platform

On the platform I stand  
Early morning, New York City  
Watching it all go by, waiting on a train  
And I see the faces of the world  
Of places distant, of lives forever unseen  
And I think of how I'd always hoped  
to one day hit the lottery  
To have more, to have opportunities;  
have things I don't now have, haven't had  
And I look harder, watch longer  
and I see the places where  
dreams never take root, are snuffed  
Where they die little deaths each day,  
hard to the realities of barren, scorched earth  
and ruthless, unflinching circumstance  
of losing bets, of un-winnable hands  
And I realize, in this moment,  
I've had my ticket, within grasp, all along

## I'm Tired

I'm tired  
Tired of working my life away  
Tired of not having enough of what I want or need  
Tired of nonsense and of broken promises  
Tired of customer service reps claiming they're here to help  
Tired of the fact their service is all lip, nothing more  
I'm tired of politics and politicians  
— and not just the ones you don't like  
I'm tired of them all  
I'm tired of fighting battles I can't win  
I'm tired of fighting them, anyway  
I'm tired of incompetence, of people who don't care enough  
Tired of ignorance and unwillingness to learn  
Tired of the disregard for hard-fought freedom  
Tired of the lack of consideration  
Tired of the fact there's never enough time  
Tired of the lack of simple human kindness  
I'm tired



## HANK BJORKLUND

Hank Bjorklund played football for Princeton University and the New York Jets and began writing poetry as a way of coping with a chronic brain condition possibly caused by repetitive head hits he experienced in tackle football, from Pop Warner to the NFL. After retiring from football, Bjorklund graduated from Hofstra University Law, becoming a business attorney in New York City. After years of practice, he earned an MS degree and became an educator and coach. He also appeared in numerous television commercials and print ads and completed the acting program at the New Actors Workshop in NYC. After hospitalization in 2016 due to his brain condition, he experienced dysautonomia — i.e., severe disruption of his autonomic nervous system. Thanks to intensive physical and neuropsychological therapy, his systems now appear to be stabilizing. An inductee into the Nassau County High School Athletic Hall of Fame, an All-Long Island football player and runner-up for the Thorp Award as the best football player in Nassau at North Shore High, Bjorklund is the author of *Head Hits / Remember: My Brain, Dysautonomia and Football* (2023).

## **My Dearest Self**

Your life is a roller coaster:  
arduous ascents, stomach-churning descents,  
centrifugal turns that threaten to derail  
and send you plummeting to hard cement  
Yet, there are stretches where the track  
is flat and you dream of a silk-smooth ride  
Your life is a warm blanket cuddling you in love,  
soft as velvet and babies' fleece  
There is peace and permanence under its covers,  
and your hands clutch and grasp its edges  
to keep the miracle alive  
— her breath, her voice, her touch here, now  
But nothing is forever and the harder you hold  
the more it feels like sand slipping through your fingers  
Your life is a long watch on the mirador  
seeking God's face, listening for His voice,  
waiting for those moments when you hear  
nature's cries, see signals from the skies  
that tell you something in you never dies

## **No Place Like Here**

You dreamed you grabbed a comet's tail,  
shook it hard to feel the rattle  
Rode it to the edge of time,  
where galaxies did battle  
No longer were you laden  
with heavy pull of Earth  
You soared among the stars to see  
heavens' giving birth  
You dreamed you surfed a tidal wave  
on shoulders of a whale,  
and briny's deepest canyons  
were well within your pale  
You breathed beneath the waters,  
fleet-finned as any fish,  
and Poseidon, King of Oceans,  
would grant you any wish  
Then morning sun pierced your eyes,  
brought you back to ground

Heard her breathing next to you,  
smiled softly at the sound  
There's nowhere else you'd rather be  
than right here in your world  
Another day, another way,  
life's miracles unfurled

## **He Swears This to Be True**

My friend told me this story and swears it to be true:  
A man had lost his wife of 60 years and felt an emptiness  
that had no bottom, a grief more constant  
and intense than any physical pain  
He was lost beyond finding and had no will to hope  
He and his wife had loved to walk the beaches  
on the South Shore of Long Island  
She loved to wander among the flotsam and jetsam,  
searching for shells and sea glass  
Her dream was to find a bottle with a message inside,  
a message that reached beyond time, she would say  
On every walk, she brought a bottle containing her message  
of love and hope. He would cast it into the sea,  
throwing it beyond the breakers  
She always wrote the same message:  
"Love, there is hope in tomorrow"  
And she would always write her initials at the bottom,  
as if somehow, the finder would know who the sender was  
He had not walked the beach since her death three years ago  
But there he was, walking. Bereft, he harbored the notion  
that he would enter the water and swim to beyond the horizon  
Alone on the shore, he stopped to face the sea  
He felt something beneath his foot  
It was a bottle, like the empty cinnamon bottles  
she would use to carry her messages  
His hand trembled as he reached down to grasp it,  
fumbled as he struggled to unscrew the top  
Inside was her message and her initials  
But there was something else;  
something he had never seen before  
She also had written: "I am with you"  
He fell to his knees and wept tears  
that came from the depths of his being  
He would never take that swim to beyond the horizon



## VICTORIA BJORKLUND

Victoria B. Bjorklund is a retired partner at the international law firm Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, where she founded and for 30 years headed the Firm's Exempt Organizations Group advising nonprofits, their boards, and donors. She taught The Law of Nonprofits at Harvard Law School and is co-author of the treatise *New York Nonprofit Law and Practice* — the treatise most-cited by New York State Courts. In 1989, Victoria helped found Doctors Without Borders USA as its first U.S. volunteer and continues as Chair of its Board of Advisors. She is a long-time director of the Robin Hood Foundation, leading the COVID-19, Superstorm Sandy and 9/11 Relief Funds, and serves on the boards of The Institute for Advanced Study, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, Friends of Fondation de France — and, until recently, The Louvre Endowment in Paris, American Friends of the Louvre, Princeton University and Nutrition Science Initiative. She also volunteers with the Concussion Legacy Foundation. Victoria was in the first class of women at Princeton, graduated in three years, was Princeton's first women's basketball player and was among the first women elected to Phi Beta Kappa. She earned her Ph.D. in Medieval Studies from Yale and J.D. from Columbia School of Law. A specialist in manuscripts of the little-studied Anglo-Norman dialect spoken by Viking invaders in Norman France, Victoria learned through DNA and genealogical research she is, in fact, a descendent of Vikings who spoke Anglo-Norman.

## The Red Nun and Her Lover

Hear the red nun  
clanking in the dark,  
her buoy bell in chamber  
rocking to and fro,  
tethered to the sand  
by umbilical cord  
of iron links

What was left of Horace  
was scattered at her base,  
his dust drifting downward to  
the silt, the sand,  
so that he could forever  
be with her, his love;  
to hear her song of warning:  
*Stay right! Stay right!*  
Red, right, returning;  
morning, noon, and night

## Sally has the Last Laugh

Enslaved maidservant  
and sister-in-law to Thomas Jefferson,  
Sally Hemings,  
was good enough  
to bear him six children  
But,  
the master hypocrite  
was not good enough  
to acknowledge them  
as his children  
— until his  
pesky Y-chromosome  
did the talking  
for him





## GLADYS THOMPSON ROTH

Born to Russian immigrants in 1923, Gladys Thompson Roth did not attend kindergarten because her mother thought it “frivolous,” instead starting school in first grade. She graduated Samuel J. Tilden High School and Brooklyn College, where she majored in early childhood education, then took postgraduate courses at Queens College en route to earning a Master’s Degree in special education from New York University. In the 1940s, she sang “bawdy ballads” in a New Hampshire cocktail lounge, teaching archery and fencing by day to teenaged girls. She later worked for the New York City Board of Education in a variety of roles, from kindergarten teacher to evaluator of children in need of special services — including work as a reading consultant at New York City hospitals. Thompson Roth also served for years as a local director for the feminist organization *Womanspace*. A renowned sculptor working in a range of mediums, among them soapstone, cola-bola wood, onyx, clay, bronze and alabaster, her exhibition *A Journey in Stone and Wood* (2010) was shown in metro-area libraries, universities and galleries — including the Queensborough Community College Art Gallery. Author of two poetry collections, *Sculpted Words* (2016) and *Who I Am* (2022), Thompson Roth was struck in the face by a stray bullet as a child in the Catskills, the gunshot piercing the arm of a boy standing next to her. Eight decades later, the mother of two and grandmother of one even wrote a poem about the experience.

## Portrait of a Young Girl

I just created a little girl  
She is very shy  
Her head tilts to the right  
Her arms are folded politely  
She is made of wood

Recalcitrant and resistant,  
growing up was difficult  
Evidence of sharp edges and knots  
began to emerge  
Taming her was a challenge

With gentle patience,  
and careful attention,  
her edges were smoothed;  
her scars, made invisible

The end result  
was sealed, stained  
and dressed in new, shiny clothes  
She was ready  
to face the world

## The World is Too Much with Us

The news of the world is otherworldly  
The words integrity, honor and compassion,  
have lost their meaning  
No one is immune. Infants, as well as  
old persons are all vulnerable  
Is there some solution to the ills of the world?  
Wars, tornadoes, buildings collapsing  
and fires are more prevalent  
and devastating than ever  
Although, miracles *do* happen: four children,  
ages thirteen, nine, four and one  
— found alive forty days after a Colombian plane crash  
If this poem makes no sense, it is because  
I have not been able to make sense  
of the world



## **LILA EDELKIND**

Lila Edelkind is a true New Yorker: born, bred and educated in New York City schools and Brooklyn College, her career as an educator spanning 34 years in the public school system. An early childhood teacher, Edelkind incorporated the British Infant School model and literacy approach into her methodology, connecting art and language. Recognized by the United Teachers Federation for “Write to Read,” a program she developed to teach reading and writing skills by having students write, illustrate, and construct books to add to their class library, Edelkind became a workshop presenter for the New York City Writing Project at Lehman College. Later, she expanded work as a staff and curriculum developer, serving as director of programs for gifted and talented children, as well as administrator of grant-funded programs. She coordinated implementation of The Reading Recovery Program and was recognized by the NYU Teacher Training Staff. Career highlights included serving with the NYC Ballet and NYC Opera Education Advisory Committees and working with The Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth. Upon retirement, Edelkind took voice and acting lessons at Astoria ArtHouse and joined Theatre By The Bay NY — designing stage sets, crafting props, serving as administrator of its website and performing in a myriad of musicals. During the pandemic, Edelkind immersed herself in virtual learning — taking film, literature, knitting and Yiddish classes and writing poetry with Evelyn Kandel.

## **I'm in a State**

I am in a frenzied state  
for which I will just  
state my case:

A state of confusion  
about our Union  
A state of consternation  
about our Nation

A state of despair  
for those who don't care  
A state of emergency  
for the lack of urgency

A state of anxiety  
for those who spout piety  
A state of concern  
for those who won't learn

A state of mind  
in which someday I'll find  
a state of being  
— to enlighten my seeing

A rational state  
will return to negate  
The state of decay  
that has eaten away  
the state of happiness  
that was once my largess

## **Into the Wild**

When I share poems  
is there a standing sentry  
guarding my intent?  
Or do readers have free rein  
astride wild galloping minds?



## JOHN LANGE

John Lange was born in Chicago in 1931. Primarily, he has been a professional philosopher — that, having debated whether to become an Assyriologist. While acknowledging the thrills of deciphering cuneiform tablets having to do with grain deliveries to temples, philosophy won out. Lange has been a radio and film writer, the films with Photographic Productions, a unit connected with the University of Nebraska. He was also a Sergeant in the Army of the United States; a story analyst with Warner Brothers Motion Pictures; a technical editor and special materials writer in the rocket-engine industry with Rocketdyne, a Division of North American Aviation; and, eventually, a teacher of philosophy — first at Hamilton College in upstate New York, later at Queens College in the City University of New York. In college, Lange knew Dick Carson, brother of then-future *Tonight Show* legend Johnny Carson, and once spent an afternoon and evening with Johnny, who was working for station *KFAB* in Omaha, Nebraska. Among other things, Johnny Carson was a magician and ventriloquist — and he showed Lange tips on ventriloquism. Another time, Lange had a brush with Buster Keaton when the silent screen star happened in, secretly and unannounced, for a showing of *The General* on campus at the University of Southern California. As Lange recalled: “As I left the theater I passed Mr. Keaton, within an arm’s reach. It is quite likely Mr. Keaton would not remember this, but I never forgot.” A baseball pitcher, Lange once had a tryout with the Chicago White Sox. Told to put on 20 pounds and come back, Lange said recently: “I’m still working on that.”

## Litany in Praise of Ideology

You are the straitjacket of the mind  
You are the chain we cannot see,  
which we do not know we wear  
You are the penitentiary within which we think ourselves free  
You bless the march of lemmings to the sea  
You are the exoneration of the assassin  
You wear the mask of God

You are the sound of the guillotine doing its work  
You commend dupes singing in fires you have kindled  
You are the contented quiet of the bombardier,  
the guiltless crack of rifles,  
the innocent whistle of falling bombs  
You are the song no decent siren would deign to sing

You are the sugar-coated tablet of social cyanide  
Sometimes you are modest and benign,  
a mouthful of cheese doodles, packaged as philosophy  
You cater to those who enjoy the taste of blood  
You are a merchant, selling the wine of power,  
a dealer hawking the drug of hate  
You are fond of cemeteries  
— and, sell flowers to decorate graves  
In the ashes, your aftertaste is bitter

You exude a pleasant odor, as does the Venus Fly Trap  
You are the perfume masking the stench of greed,  
the stink of burning flesh  
You are well-advised to remain downwind,  
lest your prey suspect your presence

You are the blanket of snow in the blizzard,  
in which one may comfortably sleep, and die  
You are the anodyne of conscience  
You are the best of puppet masters;  
the puppets do not feel the strings  
You bait the hook that seeks souls

Spare us the pain of thought  
Rescue us from finding our own way  
Save us from ourselves  
Who will save us from you?

# **Migrations: With High Hopes For the Space Industry**

Archaeological evidence makes clear,  
and records attest,  
in cuneiform, hieroglyphics and such,  
barbarians are on the march  
It's nothing new

History may lack themes,  
but it has its habits  
In the book of the past  
no chapter is more clear  
Barbarians are on the march

Let the heavy-wheeled wagons roll  
Let the bodies be painted,  
the omens taken,  
the arrows feathered,  
the axes sharpened  
Note the smoke  
Hear the cries  
They are on the march again

The tapestries of time are dark  
The threads of history are dipped in blood

*Outward, ho!*

The universe or nothing  
With luck there will always be more progress  
Let us hope for the best  
There will always be another planet to destroy

## **One Night on KOLN**

Radio:  
Late news, a ship sank  
Woman called;  
spouse on ship  
I told her: "No casualties"  
"Thank you," she whispered