

Joan E. Bauer

## Ode to the Chickpea

Near Jericho or somewhere in Turkey  
11,000 years ago—before there was pottery,  
someone began cultivating chickpeas  
also known as garbanzo beans.

Someone learned to cook them & perhaps  
ground them into flour.

Charlemagne ate them  
& before him, ancient people believed  
the chickpea/garbanzo could help you  
produce milk or sperm.

Chickpeas were not  
the Middle American Vegetable of the Fifties.  
That honor goes to carrots & potatoes,  
less nourishing, often tasteless & canned.

By the Sixties  
you could find chickpeas delectably blended  
with tahini as hummus.  
Or maybe in a salad,  
their nutty flavor, a nice surprise.

These days they're ubiquitous:  
roasted for snacks, brewed for coffee,  
mashed into meatballs.

I have a history with this humble legume  
which—as desi chana or Egyptian pea—  
nourishes so many around the world.

At my wedding reception, my mother  
asked my new mother-in-law Sarah:  
'What's this—in the salad?'

*Jasmine, that's a garbanzo bean!*  
*You're Italian! Surely you can recognize*  
*a garbanzo bean—*

## The Best of Whatever

*The happy life is one in which  
the best of whatever is experienced  
comes relatively often.*

-Allen Parducci (1925—)

A happy time: my freshman year.  
Each lecture over too soon for me. Still I felt  
so unprepared. Did I belong there?

I remember how Parducci got us reading  
Freud & Kinsey. He ran experiments:  
Cognition & perception. Nothing creepy.

His immigrant father, Corrado Parducci,  
the architectural sculptor 'made Detroit beautiful'  
working in Romanesque, Classical, Aztec/Pueblo

& pioneering Greco Deco in skyscrapers,  
private homes, banks & churches. So memorable:  
the 'Shrine of the Holy Innocents' in Chicago.

Corrado believed:  
*Pleasure & pain must always be balanced.*

That inspired the young professor who taught us:  
'Happy' when what we hope for falls beyond  
our goals, less 'happy' when it falls short.

A happy time: Stretched out undisturbed  
on a sunny bench. Sitting in the front row,  
asking questions.

## All the News

*The high school newspaper is not the enemy of frightened adults.  
It is one of the few windows they will ever have into what is  
actually happening in their own children's world.*

—Margaret Renkl, *New York Times*

I didn't know a serif from a sans serif  
when I was hired to teach journalism in PG County  
Maryland, just over the District line.  
I knew about libel & malice.  
I found a college textbook, ordered copies.  
I had a month's head start.

My first year students taught me  
about Blue Oyster Cult, New York punk  
& Patti Smith. They schooled me in how  
kids can get along in a newly integrated school.  
They proved they could hustle, selling ads,  
raising money.

We were only a monthly & couldn't  
find space for every story. But we did for stories  
about smoking, teen suicide & school budgets.  
Polling tenth graders on how many had taken PCP.  
No one closed us down.

Each year I took a dozen kids by train to New York  
for a journalism conference, hoping they'd be inspired  
& wouldn't get lost or pregnant.  
They were discreet.

I told my students:  
We're not some *Sam & Sally Gazette*.  
We're *The New York Times*.  
In those days, they still had their First Amendment rights.  
I wonder how who among them still looks for a story.

## The Judas Pain

Perhaps the highlight of Frank Capra's life  
was not the Oscar-winning movies  
but his tireless service  
in World War II

creating the ground-breaking documentary  
*Why We Fight*

which conveyed the justness of the war  
to the everyday GI & a reluctant nation.

A counterattack to Leni Riefenstahl's  
*Triumph of the Will*.

But after the war  
came the Red Scare

& Capra was questioned again & again.

He felt he had to prove his loyalty  
which he did reluctantly  
by 'naming names.'

Capra was never outed  
as a stooge as Kazan was.

But it took years for him  
to even hint  
at what he'd done.

The tension gave him cluster headaches.  
That went on for years.

He called it 'the Judas pain.'

He told himself:

*You welched, compromised, sold out.*