

SPRING 2022

# Penn

journal of everyday life





Cover  
Our Lillies of  
the Valley

page 4

Seasonal: Storms



page 10

Day Trip: Making Tintypes



page 16

Art: Mary Cassatt



page 24

Harvest: Herbs



page 32

Celebration: Easter



page 38

Garden: Spring Flowers

page 46

Crafts: Knit Bunnies & Scrap Rugs

page 54

Local Eats: Pierogies

page 58

Home Sweet Home: Hot Bacon

Dressing & Potato Pancakes

page 68

Best Views: Bleeding Hearts

---

---

## Seasonal: *Spring Storms*



---

**W**e have a swing in the backyard. We love to sit and watch the birds and the clouds. In the spring, it's not uncommon to see the clouds moving quickly across the valley with the coming of a storm. You can even see the rain falling in the distance. We try to gauge the speed

of the coming storm to sit as long as we can to watch it arrive. Then we try to beat the raindrops in our run for the house.


As soon as the rain comes, when it hits the ground and the pavement, there are familiar smells. If it is an electrical storm, the clouds bring their own smell of ozone and static electricity. It makes the hairs stand up on your arms. Fragrance companies have tried



to duplicate the smell of newly wet earth in the rain. If you have your windows open at the start of a rainstorm you know the smell.

Demeter is a company started by a man who lived in Pennsylvania, Christopher Brossius, that recreates an extraordinary number of scents. The Demeter Fragrance Library today includes Rain, Thunderstorm and Wet Garden. It's amazing how they capture the scent and how it can evoke the memories of all of the other senses in a coming storm. One of their first fragrances, Dirt, was made to "smell exactly like the dirt from the fields around the Pennsylvania family farm belonging to our founding perfumer. We think of this as April 10th when the plowing begins in the Northeast U.S.— the beautiful scent of turned earth with a touch of last season's corn stalks."





In the Rain  
*By E. E. Cummings*

in the rain-  
darkness, the sunset  
being sheathed i sit and  
think of you



---

---

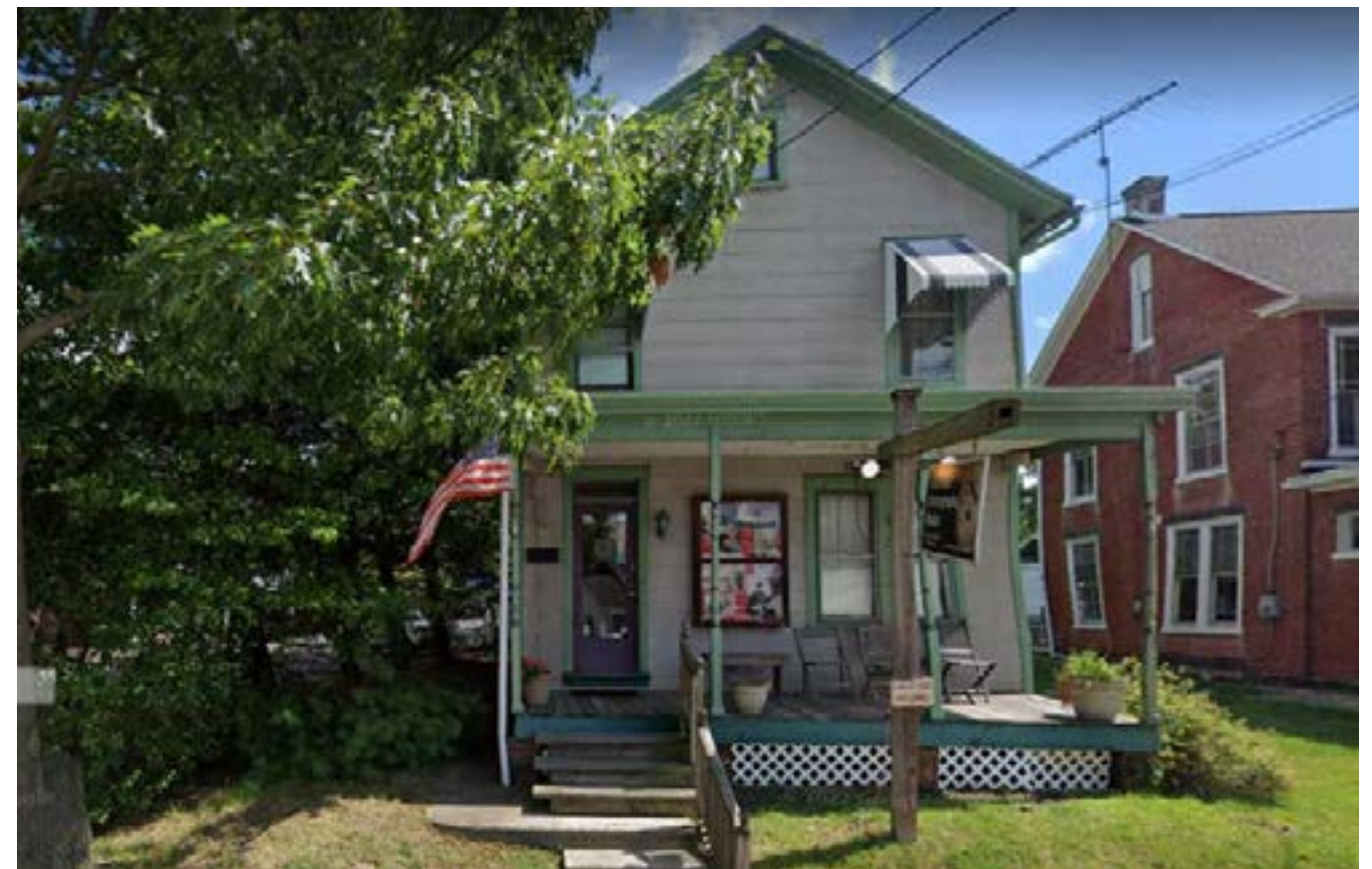
## Day Trip: *Making Tintypes*

**O**ur family loves photography—whether it is using our cell phones, iPads or with great cameras. We each have an appreciation for the visual. That led us to explore the idea of going to a photo studio that makes photographs as they were first made when the cameras were invented. You can choose to have a digital photo made or you can spend the time and go through the

process of having a true wet tintype made. It's a chance to gain a little bit of history with understanding of how the technology has developed since the start.

As a bonus, we chose a studio near the battlefield at Gettysburg. They had costumes and props of all kinds and a studio

*Left, our tintype. Below, the Victorian Photography Studio on Steinwehr Avenue.*





atmosphere that replicates the old photos we've all seen. Having a tintype made this way adds another dimension to a battlefield visit.

It's remarkable once you see the camera and the process to think about what the early photographers went through to take the pictures in books we have on our bookshelves. We have a whole new appreciation for the Civil War photographs by Matthew Brady.

*This page right*, Brady, the photographer, returned from Bull Run dated July 22, 1861. In the collection of the Library of Congress, LC-BH8277- 550. *Above*, Matthew Brady's outfit in front of St. Petersburg, dated between 1880 and 1889. Also in the collection of the Library of Congress, LOT 4172-H, no. 22. *Far right*, our tintype.







---

---

## Art: *Mary Cassatt*

**M**ary Cassatt was a well-known Impressionist painter. Her work, especially of children and mothers with babies, is most famous and probably familiar to just about everyone. Her art has been made into calendars, greeting cards and

prints sold by small gift shops and big retailers. Cassatt pictured models as well as people that she was commissioned to paint. While she did paint self-portraits, her most frequent subjects did not reflect her personal life. Cassatt herself was never married and had no children.

Mary Cassatt grew up in a wealthy family. Her brother became the president of the

Pennsylvania Railroad, for example. She was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1844. Her family moved to Lancaster then to Philadelphia.



---

*Left, Young Mother Sewing, 1900. Right, Lilacs in a Window, 1880.*





Cassatt pictured women doing everyday activities, sewing, having tea, bathing children. *Left*, Lady at the Tea Table, 1883. *Right*, The Young Mother Holding Her Baby, 1900.



When she was seventeen, Cassatt enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. She soon wanted a broader education than American art schools provided and sought permission from her father to study in Europe. According to Frederick A. Sweet, “The last thing she wanted was to be taught to do a

slick portrait that would be salable.”

Her father reluctantly conceded to her wishes and Cassatt moved to Paris where she became a respected artist. She was strong willed and hard working. Cassatt produced her art even as her vision began to fail around 1914. Mary Cassatt died at her country house in 1906.



*Above, Summertime, 1894. Left, Young Woman Sewing in the Garden*





---

---

## Harvest: *Herbs*

**W**ith an abundance of herbs grown indoors over the winter, by spring we are looking for tasty ways to use them. This is a recipe we have been holding onto for a while and finally got a chance to try. It is a buttery dough made

with parmesan cheese, flour and chopped fresh herbs. We used rosemary, thyme, fennel, basil and fresh cracked black pepper. Herb leaves are also set aside to place on the top. Cut into small rounds and baked, the dough produces a cracker almost like shortbread. They pair perfectly with herbed cheese.

The dough is chilled then rolled out to



Harvest: *Herbs*

---

about 1/8 inch thickness. Herbs are not only in the dough, but whole herb leaves are laminated onto the top of the dough by pressing with a rolling pin and wax paper. The rounds are then cut and baked.

The trick is not to knead the dough too much and to bake it only until the bottom and edges are just golden brown. Once cool, the leftovers are stored in a sealed container in a cool place. The fridge is fine. We also use a cool attic.



## Harvest: *Herbs*

---

Line a small container with plastic wrap. Chop herbs. We used rosemary, thyme, fennel and basil. Choose any soft cheese you like. We use cream cheese most of the time. Place a layer of the chopped herbs in the bottom of the lined container and mix the rest of the herbs into the cheese. Spoon the cheese mixture into the container and cover with plastic wrap. Chill, then turn the molded cheese out onto a plate. We have varied this recipe to use chopped nuts and they work beautifully with the herbs.





Baked eggs (*above*)

This is our new favorite breakfast. It is as simple as it is delicious. Melt a little butter into any number of ramikens. Carefully break and add two eggs to each little pot. Crack some salt and pepper. Bake until the eggs are firm (about 10 minutes). Sprinkle the eggs with chopped fresh herbs. We use basil and thyme. Add fresh grated parmesan. Serve with buttered toast. When we haven't baked, we love Dave's Killer Bread.



Cod Herbs de Provence (*right*)

We found a great source of really good frozen cod. This is one of our favorite ways to prepare it. The recipe came from the Crock Pot website. Herbs de Provence is usually made up of thyme, oregano, basil, marjoram, fennel and rosemary. You can make it or buy it. The only other ingredients are lemon and water. It cooks two hours on low. We serve it with rice or oven-roasted vegetables like brussels sprouts.



---

---

## Celebration: *Easter*

**W**e often have a ham for Easter, but this year we decided to make a pot roast with carrots and potatoes in the slow cooker. This gave us more time to spend

with family because less time was spent on preparation. Our hydroponic garden was bursting with lettuce, so a green salad added an easy side dish. David always welcomes his favorite chocolate cake with peanut butter frosting for dessert.

---



Celebration: *Easter*

With an abundance of daffodils in the yard, the choice of flowers for the table was easy. We always order marshmallow Peeps from the Just Born company in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and chocolates from Hershey. This Easter we chose to set the table with yellow homespun and vintage Hartstone ceramic dishes and trivets.

Every year we have difficulty finding hot cross buns in the store during the holiday season, so we decided to make our own.





---

---

## Garden: *Spring Flowers*

**T**he most important part of spring flowers is the extraordinary fragrance. While it is true, the surprise of the change of season and welcome sight of spring flower color is wonderful, there is nothing like the scent of lilacs and lily of the valley.

We have a lilac bush by our bedroom window right over the head of our bed. Even if it is chilly, for those precious few days the lilacs are blooming, we keep the window open to enjoy the fragrance. We hate to prune because it impacts the next year's blooms. But some years we just must.

---





*Above*, cut daffodils. *Right*, hundreds of daffodils at the edge of the woods.



Lily of the Valley blooms at our house on Mother's Day. It is the perfect gift from nature. The tiny bells cover our hillside and release the most wonderful scent. We have tried to duplicate it with muguet des bois, but there is nothing like the flower.

To propagate a lily of the valley, dig up gently around a plant, clip the runner and replant it in good soil. It will grow and create new plants with runners, like a strawberry. They don't mind shade. We have had them along the side of our house since childhood.





---

---

## Crafts: *Knit Bunnies*



**M**aking knit bunnies is a simple process and requires few materials. Embroidered eyes and nose makes them less a choking hazard for small curious hands. These are knit with acrylic sport weight yarn, number six double-pointed needles and polyester stuffing. If you are interested in having the directions drop us an email. The body is knit

in a single piece. The ears and arms are knit separately and sewn on so you'll need a yarn sewing needle. The only tricky part, if you've never tried, is knitting in the round on three needles. But don't let that deter you; it's not an impossible task to get comfortable with. We anticipate the baskets of bunnies will go to a pediatric ward or soup kitchen where children might like to have their very own little bunny to hug or keep in their pocket.







Above, equipment needed to make bunnies is a tape measure, scissors, yarn needle, set of size six double-pointed needles and stitch holders. You can see how the body is knit in a single piece in the round. *Left*, a basket of bunnies on the kitchen counter, ready to go to a new home. *Right*, closeup of a knit bunny face with yarn knot eyes and embroidered nose. A simple length of braided yarn serves as a bow tie.





**M**y grandmother taught me to knit and crochet. She started by giving me scrap yarn and an empty wooden thread spool with finishing nails around the top. I would

make yards of yarn rope that could be sewn into potholders, rugs, an endless variety of things. Today I use a plastic spool made just for that purpose. Leftover yarn is set aside for the project and the resulting rope is looped into a braid that is sewn into a rug.







---

---

## Local Eats: *Pierogies*



*Left*, classic cheese and potato filled pierogi manufactured by the Pennsylvania company Mrs. T's. *Above*, hand made pierogi with an assortment of fillings including, cheese, meat and mushrooms topped with glazed onions from the Polish restaurant Babuni's Table in Brodheads ville, Pennsylvania.

Polish cultural influence is evident throughout the entire state of Pennsylvania. It has the fourth largest population of Polish in the United States behind New York, Illinois and Michigan. While Pittsburgh and Philadelphia boast a large population of Polish, Luzerne County, in Northeast Pennsylvania, is the only county in the whole United States where a plurality of residents identify being of Polish heritage. It is thought they were originally attracted to this region for jobs in mining.



The Pennsylvania company that makes Mrs. T's foods names Pennsylvania part of the "Pierogi Pocket" of the United States.

While Polish foods are popular throughout the state, pierogies are probably the most popular dish with hand-made pierogies most prized. Pierogies are traditionally a savory pasta pocket filled with potatoes, cheese, cabbage or meat. They are often offered with glazed onions. Spicy Polish kielbasa is a welcomed side. The Pennsylvania Cooperative of Potato Farmers, up to now known for their

---

*Shown here, we made a recipe for mini portobello mushrooms and onions with pierogi from the Mrs. T's website.*





potato donuts and baked potatoes, offered pierogies at the Farm Show in Harrisburg.

For years, Pennsylvania Polish and Ukrainian ladies have gathered in church kitchens to hand make pierogies for fund raising and church festivals. Joe Snedecker, WNEP meteorologist known for his love of pierogies, recalls standing at the church

ladies' tables with his friends waiting to fill up on the broken pierogies that could not be sold. He is not alone in calling the pierogi the perfect food.

*Shown here*, another wonderful recipe from Mrs' T's website, our version of their spinach salad made with feta and spinach pierogi.



---

## Home Sweet Home: *Hot Bacon Dressing*

---

One of our favorite restaurants, no longer in business, used to serve hot bacon dressing on their salad. It was a Pennsylvania Dutch tradition David remembers

from growing up. Even in her 80s, his mother used to go out in the yard in the spring and gather dandelions to make salad for her hot bacon dressing. We still do it since we don't put chemicals on the lawn and pick only from the



back yard, not near to road.

The *Smithsonian* magazine classifies the dandelion as an herb and says that the “entire dandelion plant is edible, from the golden blossoms to the roots to the leaves.” Dandelions are also high in iron, calcium, Vitamins A, C, K and B2 as well as other vitamins and minerals. In the old days it was used as a medicine.

Once we make the dressing, we use it on our regular salad greens as well as fresh picked dandelion greens. We add a slice or two of hard-boiled egg. Traditional German recipes include egg, apple cider vinegar, bacon and a little flour as a thickener. It is best served warm over crispy chilled greens.

David also remembers his grandfather making wine from the dandelion flowers, though we haven't tried that yet. They say it has a taste similar to mead and that it takes about two years to ferment. If we are going to try that, we'd better get started.

*Right*, If you are uncomfortable harvesting dandelion leaves from the yard, grow them from seeds.



It's worth a footnote here to say we have struggles to make perfect hard boiled eggs for years. Every cook we encountered who had mastered the skill offered us their advice: salt, vinegar, age the eggs, etc. We tried the

plastic gizmos that you crack an egg into and then boil which was acceptable until we found the real secret. The pressure cooker. Now we make hard boiled eggs in the InstantPot and every egg, every batch comes out perfect and a breeze to peel.







Since we had an abundance of potatoes last year, we were happy to find ways to use them up before the next growing season. Dave remembered potato pancakes from his youth and made a batch

for us. They were delicious. We served them with glazed carrots, a staple now at our table. The recipe we used was simply mashed potatoes, an egg, flour, salt and pepper. He added a little cheese and fried them in olive oil until they were crispy.



---

---

## Best Views: *Bleeding Hearts*



*Above*, We are always amazed by the bleeding hearts flowers. *Previous pages*, a rainbow from a storm.

---

### *Penn, journal of everyday life*

A quarterly publication. All content in this issue is produced by Susan and David Bonser  
We offer this journal to you without charge and are delighted to find that you have shared it.  
Let us know what you think. Issues may be downloaded at <http://penn-journal.com>.  
You can email us at [pennjournaloel@gmail.com](mailto:pennjournaloel@gmail.com).  
See our other publications at <http://thebonsers.com>.  
All content © 2022 Susan and David Bonser