



Taking the Waters

“WHAT GOES AROUND, COMES AROUND,” my former college roommate Micky says with a smile. Sitting at the potter’s wheel, he molds and shapes elemental earth into cups, bowls, and plates for a wedding present. Despite a 24-7 world, where much of what happens seems out of our hands, we can choose to step aside, as Micky, a social therapist, regularly does to refresh the spirit at his potter’s wheel. Likewise, the essays, poetry, and art of *Your Turn! Stories of Renewal* explore the possibilities and realities of personal transformation.

In the late eighteenth century, the curative properties of mineral water springs drew to them an increasing stream of the curious. Americans began “taking the waters” at health spas, such as Warm Springs, Virginia; Yellow Springs, Pennsylvania; and Saratoga Springs, New York. The medicinal waters varied in trace minerals and other properties, from sulfur to iron to carbonated water. George Washington hoped to cure his rheumatism at Warm Springs. Wounded Continental soldiers rested at the nation’s first military hospital at Yellow Springs, hoping the water there would speed their rehabilitation. In 1771 Iroquois Indians carried their ailing friend Sir William Johnson, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, to High Rock Spring (Saratoga Springs) to help restore his health.

By the 1820s, Saratoga Springs became the health spa mecca of the north. (*Spa* is the acronym from the Roman *sanitas per aquas*, meaning *health through water*.) Known in its opulent heyday as the Queen of Spas, one could become fully immersed in the elixir of naturally carbonated water. Some doctors built sanatoriums, believing the Saratoga water could cure almost anything from chronic heart trouble and nervous conditions to temporary aches and pains. However, most chose to stay at the elegant hotels and tipple the foul-tasting water, taking several glasses before breakfast, more before lunch, and a final round before retiring at night. It is said that civilization follows art, but in this case, fashion, horse racing, and gam-

Opposite:
Dipper Boy at High Rock Spring, Saratoga Springs, New York. During the Victorian era, young boys were stationed at the various mineral springs in Saratoga to serve water to the visitors. In this view, the lad holds a long pole that he used to lower empty glasses into the cone where the spring water bubbled up. Visitors often provided a tip for the effort. Original photograph (ca. 1875) from the private collection of Robert Joki, author of *Saratoga Lost* (Black Dome Press, 1998).

bling followed the water cure. Although some came for the restorative properties of the mineral water, many came for the social interaction. One dismayed 1826 visitor wrote, "Out of hundreds in this village, but few are disposed to pass an hour in divine service. The pleasure parties and balls every evening in this village engross the attention of the old and young, sick and well, and I fear this village place will prepare more souls for destruction than those efficacious waters will ever heal infirm bodies." So much for life at the font of the Fountain of Youth!

At a deeper, spiritual level, how do people go about the business of testing the water, retooling and re-purposing their lives? This is the focus of *Your Turn! Stories of Renewal*. What if, for example, as one author conjectures, you won a complete makeover on the Oprah Winfrey Show? How long would you maintain the new hairstyle, new clothes, the new look? Perhaps you would discover that such re-inventing of one's image stops short of reaching the inner you.

Another author imagines an early summer morning, dew on the grass, a fresh breeze, and the sun slanting shadows across your path. Add to this serene moment a beautiful stranger, who surprises you by momentarily engaging you in conversation, then moves on ahead. Would you have the courage to follow, to trust your intuition?

What exactly does it take to rise like the rainbow from the foot of the storm or the phoenix bird from yesterday's ashes? In one historical piece of fiction, Tom Thumb asks this question after the burning of Chambersburg. So too does an inmate at a woman's correctional facility as she struggles to remain true to herself, despite a savage environment. Another author believes it takes the act of spirit to find renewal in a world of unrelenting change and motion.

Before healing can commence from within, a writer describes coming to the edge of human endurance and understanding and then leaping, trusting, no, *believing*, that a net will appear somewhere below. Another writer addresses head on what appears to be an insurmountable problem in a neighborhood, putting into play a community action plan, winning over one convert at a time.

In the final analysis, perhaps it is falling into or discovering one's chosen vocation, plunging into an active life with one's gifts, which brings out our best. Whether a journalist's unlikely beginning as a mediocre graduate research assistant or a housekeeping assistant's surprising interaction with a room guest, these authors capture transformative moments that come when least expected.

Your Turn! Stories of Renewal reminds us that nothing is wasted, that divine love and wisdom are never ending, that when we feel as free agents in the stream of divine providence, it is then that we are experiencing full force the "green fuse" of regeneration. And it is then that we can say without hesitation, "Look out. Coming through!"