



Joseph Cohen

Riding Up – Riding Down

Entering my building elevator daily,
I move in gently as I look around,
careful not to bump into anyone.
I seek to meet the eyes of fellow riders
representing almost every continent on the planet
-- they open up new worlds for me.
On one ride I speak in Arabic to two young women
wearing traditional head covering: “keef kon?” (how are you both?)
On another, I chat
with a middle-aged couple from Russia and
tell them that my late wife was born there.
I add that every night for 71 years,
I murmured “ya tibya lublu” (I love you) at bedtime. The stars of our lofty abode, the
children,
light up the short ride with chatter and whining
while pulling at their mothers’ clothes.
Students crowd into the car with backpacks stuffed with books.
Friendly folks meet my eyes and smile,
remembering previous elevator exchanges.
As riders leave, some sing out
greetings: “Have a good day,” “Bonjour,” “Sai chen.”
The younger ones prance through the lobby
greeting those they know and trading high fives
with Peter the concierge.
All day long, like a miracle, the car methodically rises from the ground floor, stopping to
take in and release its passengers, resumes its vertical trajectory to the top, then slides
noiselessly down to sea level.
Oh, how wonderful it is to traverse the globe
in this small and intimate chamber.

Joseph A. Cohen's first book of poetry, *A Full Life*, was published in 2005. His second book of poetry, *A New Path*, was published on his 100th birthday in July of 2017 by Ibbetson Street Press. His poems have appeared in the Constellations Anthology, the Ibbetson St. Press, Bagel Bards Anthology, Spare Change, Image Magazine, Great Neck Record, and more. He was a recent Pushcart Prize nominee. Formerly President of Sunweave Linen Corp. in New York, he moved to Cambridge at age 94 and spent the next 6 1/2 years doing writing and doing poetry readings at the Boston Poetry Festival, First and Last Word poetry series, Cervana Press poetry series, and meeting every Saturday morning with the Bagel Bards. An avid photographer, he taught photography in New York colleges for 40 years, and from age 96-98, he taught photography at BOLLI at Brandeis University. At the age of 99, he was awarded the Legion of Honor medal in Cambridge by the President of the French Republic for his service in France during World War II.

Beth Bahia Cohen, his daughter, is a professional violinist specializing in world music on bowed stringed instruments and is on the faculty of both Berklee College of Music and Tufts University.

The poem, which appeared in Joseph Cohen's book *A New Path* (Ibbetson Street Press, 2017) is reprinted here with permission of Beth Bahia Cohen.