

Amoskeag

The Journal of Southern New Hampshire University

Spring 2014

Vol. 31, No. 1

Southern
New Hampshire
University 

Please address all correspondence to:

Editor, *Amoskeag: the Journal of Southern New Hampshire University*
Southern New Hampshire University
2500 North River Road | Manchester, NH 03106-1045

or find us at:
[facebook.com/Amoskeag](https://www.facebook.com/Amoskeag)
www.amoskeagjournal.com

Amoskeag is published annually in the spring and is sponsored by Southern New Hampshire University. The contents of the journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the university, its trustees, staff, faculty, or students. Work is chosen for each issue based on literary merit and appeal to our readers.

The editors welcome short stories and creative nonfiction (essays) up to 2,500 words, poetry (up to 4 poems per author), and black-and-white photographs and drawings. The reading period runs from August 1 to November 1 each year. All submissions must include a cover letter with the writer's email and postal addresses.

Subscription rates: one year, \$7.00; two years, \$13.00. Sample back issues: \$6.00.

Cover Credit

Cover photo: ToBeDETERMINED by Sarah Flause Cover concept and design: ©2014 Harry Umen, Chair of the Department of Communications, Media Arts & Technology, SNHU.

© 2014 Southern New Hampshire University ISSN 0742-9347

Annual Student Writing Contests In Prose and Poetry

Open to undergraduate and MFA students at Southern New Hampshire University, and to students enrolled in New Hampshire high schools.

Short Story or Creative Essay Prize: \$100 each. Poetry Prize: \$100 each.

Deadline is December 1st of each year.

Watch for further announcements at your school and online at www.amoskeagjournal.com or on [facebook.com/Amoskeag](https://www.facebook.com/Amoskeag).

The word Amoskeag comes from the Penacook dialect meaning “place of many fish.” Nearly two hundred years before the Industrial Revolution, the natives of northern New England looked to the Amoskeag Falls on the mighty Merrimack River for pure clean water and exceptional fishing. Generations later, this literary journal strives to provide a similar nourishing abundance of exceptional prose, poetry, and photography.

Amoskeag

The Journal of Southern New Hampshire University

Spring 2013

Vol. 30, No. 1

Editor	Michael J. Brien
Editorial Assistant	Kayleigh Mallett
Editorial Board	Traci Belanger Stephanie Collins Allison Cummings Linda Dyer Kathleen Fagley Diane LesBecquets Rebecca Mahoney Benjamin Nugent Robert Seidman David Swain Harry Umen Kristina Wright
Readers & Consultants	Jerri Clayton Meredith Imbimbo Jeannemarie Thorpe
Social Media Director	Rob Greene
Marketing Intern	Lisa Allard
Designer	Karen Mayeu
Art Editor	Harry Umen
Production Manager	Lisa Bonacci

Editorial Note

Growing up, moving on—change is a tough thing.

With so many variations on the theme (socialization and psycho-analysis aside) and purpose and scope and focus and ultimate completion, where do you begin, how do you scrutinize it?

The writers in this issue have offered us the opportunity, perspective, distance and prerogatives that I would certainly not have taken alone. Perhaps none of us would take, but I can assure you that it is worthwhile to sit with them and listen to how they have grown and what they have learned in the process of living. In this 31st Issue of Amoskeag, we are blessed.

In the stories of such authors as Robert Biegiebing, Murzban Shroff, Abe Amidor, Aaron Sommers, Nathan Alling Long, Amy Irvine McHarg, Isabel Frischman, Cynthia Roby and Malaina Poore, the ingredients and intricacies of living—humor, sadness, joy, pain, destruction and death are examined. Our poets—Melany Nitzche, Donna Pucciana, Allison Cummings, Deborah Brown, Jack Cooper and David Salner dig deep into the marrow of bone for universal meaning that well serves us all.

Amoskeag has been doing this excavating for a long time now, and though this is my last issue as editor, rest assured that Benjamin Nugent, Director of Southern New Hampshire's Undergraduate Creative Writing Program, author of "Good Friends" and "American Nerd: The Story of My People," and next year's editor will not lay the grubbing mattock aside.

Donald Rumsfeld in his leadership manual, "Rumsfeld's Rules" distills wisdom and growth experiences with a number of life's observations from a number of his elders. Here are a few I've selected to pass along—pertinent to editors, writers and readers alike:

- When starting at the bottom, be willing to learn from those at the top.
- Don't let the urgent, crowd out the important.
- Don't avoid sharp edges.
- Genius hits a target no one else can see. (*Arthur Schopenhauer*)
- When you do not know a thing, to allow that you do know it; this is knowledge. (*Confucius*)
- Penetrating so many secrets, we cease to believe in the unknowable. But there it sits nevertheless, calmly licking its chops. (*H.L. Mencken*)
- If you want traction, you must first have friction. (*Admiral Jim Ellis*)
- Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must be first overcome. (*Dr. Samuel Johnson*)
- There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. (*Niccolo Machiavelli*)

So, Amoskeag continues to take the lead. Thank you for joining us. God Bless.

Michael J. Brien, MFA
Editor

Contents

Prologue	8
<i>poem by Anemone Beaulier</i>	
Trees from the Azores	9
<i>poem by Emily Strauss</i>	
Host	10
<i>poem by Allison Cummings</i>	
Church Folk Postscripts	12
<i>lyric essay by Cynthia A. Roby</i>	
Sacrificing Isaac	14
<i>semi-autobiography by Abe Aamidor</i>	
Bullets	21
<i>photograph by Qian Sun</i>	
Two Crows and a Murder	22
<i>poem by Allison Cummings</i>	
How to Write About Silence	23
<i>poem by June Frankland Baker</i>	
The Order of Words	24
<i>flash fiction by Michael Charney</i>	
When She Saw Him	26
<i>fiction by Mark Hage</i>	
Cefalu	32
<i>photograph by Claudia Rippee</i>	
Home Sweet Humvee	33
<i>fiction by Aaron Sommers</i>	
Easter 2013, Scotland	43
<i>poem by Donna Pucciani</i>	
Lasting Ephemera	45
<i>poem by Janet Krauss</i>	
Tears	46
<i>poem by Sandy McCord</i>	
Bridge	47
<i>poem by Sandy McCord</i>	

Lingering	48
<i>fiction by Michael Onofrey</i>	
Rome	54
<i>photograph by Claudia Rippee</i>	
Abandoned	55
<i>fiction by Nathan Alling Long</i>	
The Adverb Poem: A Sort of Love Song	58
<i>poem by Deborah Brown</i>	
Ghost Dance	59
<i>poem by Deborah Brown</i>	
Fields	60
<i>poem by Jack Cooper</i>	
A Daily Making with Words: Poet Mark Pawlak on the Poetic Journal	61
<i>Amos interview by Kristina Wright</i>	
We Moved Like Water Flows	69
<i>poem by Judith Goedeke</i>	
To _____	71
<i>poem by Terry Savoie</i>	
Walking the River Trail	72
<i>poem by Edythe Haendel Schwartz</i>	
Sandstone Wave	73
<i>photograph by Qian Sun</i>	
Conjunctio*	74
<i>essay by Amy Irvine McHarg</i>	
Time Travel	81
<i>poem by Aileen Bassis</i>	
After the Picnic	82
<i>poem by David Salner</i>	
Be the Earth	83
<i>fiction by Isabel Wolfe-Frischman</i>	
Shadow of the Church	88
<i>photograph by Claudia Rippee</i>	
Oh, Dad!	89
<i>fiction by Murzban F. Shroff</i>	
Bad Boys	93
<i>memoir excerpt by Robert Begiebing</i>	

Fiona Lives in Detroit City	98
<i>fiction by Malaina Poore</i>	
The Sea That Has Become Known	104
<i>poem by Abigail Lee</i>	
Exit Strategy	105
<i>poem by Melany Nitzsche</i>	
Turned His Eyes Away	106
<i>Southern New Hampshire University MFA Prose Winner</i>	
<i>fiction by James Seals</i>	
Siracuse Bike	106
<i>photograph by Claudia Rippee</i>	
Empty	114
<i>Southern New Hampshire University Undergraduate Prose Winner</i>	
<i>fiction by Amy Fontenot</i>	
California Nails	117
<i>Southern New Hampshire University Undergraduate Poetry Winner</i>	
<i>prose poem by Natalie Jones</i>	
Brush it Away	118
<i>New Hampshire High School Poetry Winner</i>	
<i>poem by Kelsey Jarvis</i>	
Houston, I Have So Many Problems	
Or, I Learned to Read Before My Brother and it's Basically All Downhill From There	119
<i>New Hampshire High School Prose Winner</i>	
<i>creative non-fiction by Emily Bascom</i>	
Contributors' Notes	123

Prologue

Anemone Beaulier

One day, you will want to know
where babies come from, which is to say
where did you come from? And how

will I answer you, hip-high, overalls grass-stained,
first sex years and years away?
How will I tell you—mother of dolls, seeker of elves—the way

in which your father and I brought you to be
without a white stork lie or the flesh reality
that would seem to you a grotesquerie?

You will bend your body to the bend of me,
press close and closer, wanting
my words and breath, my heartbeat—

all the things you've always had
and which will never be enough,
not quite. And maybe I will tell you it is like that:

how we press our palms to others' skin,
press their ribs to our ribs, and it doesn't stop the want;
how we wish to close ourselves inside them, and cannot.

But once, on a summer evening
when butterflies flickered in the fireweed,
your father held me close—so close

our hearts beat out the same chaos,
so close we did not think
of the skin, nerves, bones caging us...

That once, it was enough.
That is where you come from.

Trees from the Azores

Emily Strauss

Trees transplanted from the Azores
thrive in California, their twisted
trunks dark and robust like seasoned
field hands, they grew outside my door
blooming white in the cool days of fall.

Passing someone's garden yesterday
that familiar odor filled my throat,
the Azorean in full flower, and I
remembered how I held my breath,
couldn't bear that rancid floral smell

the raw egg taste like the residue of long
nights in damp sheets redolent on a warm
morning, sticky legs pungent after endless
bouts, that same cloying sweetness from
a sturdy transplant bent with heavy flowers.

Host

Allison Cummings

On a quiet lane in Provincetown,
a woman collapsed by her door, crushing

pink mallows as her groceries and bones
slammed the slate. She cried Armand!

—incensed at the mutiny of nerve
and limb against the brain's daily chain of command.

So Toxo infects rats
who nuzzle to cats who will eat them,

and humans coked on dopamine
surf traffic, fear circuits unplugged,

puppets of the viral cells
compelling them to kiss lesions

into fresh hosts. Let us blame Parisian
bohemians, circa 1750, for breeding delusional

wormholes and bungee-jumping
into decades of kindly cat-folk.

Our obedient hands may feed mouths,
button coats while they can,

then one day violate the cosmic promise,
the neural parallel of brother hitting sister

with the girl's own curled fist.
Baby on a rug or ancient with a cane,

we cry and curse the sky.
Armand never came.

Cummings

As The Last Supper harbors Judas,
so each body hosts its private terror cells,

armies of microbes poised to break us down,
the parasitic mind in a skeleton shack,

sweet-talking escape from a ticking trap.

The hostess cooked trout in parchment,

and we cooed *Mère de Dieu*, candlelight
flickering in claret and our hair.

Until we stumble, our internal spies
murmur sotto voce, awaiting the day

we kneel, sighing *Christ*, and close our eyes,
wafer dissolving on the tongue.

Church Folk Postscripts

Cynthia A. Roby

Coworker knows I'm new to Buffalo's Allentown. Beneath her Asian weave and immovable I'm-not-really-botoxed forehead, I am eyed like a fresh soul; cordially invited into her fold of the saved. Coworker tells me, Come as you are. *We love everybody. I'd love to see you there.*

Ten Sundays pass. I come as I am: showered, vintage, Bohemian, dread locks. No press powder. No red lipstick. No Sunday hat. No Sunday shoes. No wig. No hairweave. Searching the rear of the sanctuary for solitude, I find a hip-room seat near a young mother with two under two in tow. Charcoal blotted eye sockets confess sleepless nights, hard times, being swallowed by life. I sit; note indentations of ragged tree branches on her wrists: evidence of life gone bad. She shifts. Smiles. Nods in my direction. Newborn reeking of baby oil and spit-up squirms in her lap. Tired young mother uncages the nipple of left water-balloon breast with an *I'm-not-new-to-this* precision. No evidence of third-finger-left-hand commitment. My heart saddens.

Heavy oak doors in back groan. Humid air ushers in musk of a man from who-knows-whose-party-last-night. He creeps in, spies the front pews through hard-blinking eyes of avoidance. Lifts his wrists. Eyes the time on expensive watch. *Breitling?* Drops his head. Sits quietly on the other side of tired mom. I lean forward. He turns, nods in acknowledgement of my presence, and shrugs shoulders beneath jacket that confesses a deficiency in order or neatness. Baby of tired mom continues suckling. His left eye massages water balloon. Preacher man says, *We're all sinners.* Tired mom weeps at hearing the words, burps suckling baby, shoves Disney-decorated bottle into mouth of the second pickaninny. Musty party man again shrugs. I nod in silent confession. Second pickaninny slings juice-filled bottle to the floor; grabs at water balloon and demands to suckle. Heads turn. Eyes roll. Hisses of *Shhh* roam, but not aimlessly, throughout the sanctuary. Tired mom's face is shoved into a mold of embarrassment. I extend my arms and take suckling baby. Tired mom exhales hard, applies comforting salve of rocking until pickaninny sleeps. She continues to weep.

Preacher man unleashes fire and brimstone. Points out sinners. Calls out liars, fornicators, homosexuals. *How does he know who's done what to whom?* Uneasiness makes a beeline for our rear pew and snatches musty party man into good posture. I shift in my seat, shake my head, ease out a *Laxod have mercy on this man ...* the preacher man, that is. Party man's eyes freeze hooker-thighs wide. Tired mom raises

her testifying hand and falls to her knees. Preacher man's words of unjustified and unqualified opinion force my fellows to bleed in shame. *Ain't this a regular Sunday.*

Preacher man zigzags across the pulpit on Tinker-Bell toes. I whisper show time through lips squeezed into a period. My eyebrows struggle to touch. He grunts, sweats like a woman over fifty, resuscitates a James Brown move, and then falls to his knees. The choir stands. Preacher man's Maceo-Parker posse helps him to his feet. The choir moans lyrics from a collage of soul-twisting-and-pulling gospel hymns. They rock side-to-side, wave their hands for effect. Preacher man lets out a sixty-second *Whoooah!* He takes a breath. White-dress woman in a loose wig runs to the pulpit, wipes preacher man's brow in slow sexy motion. She winks, smiles, then exits. My mouth tumbles into a gaping 'O'. Tired mom gets up and reaches for suckling baby. A cell phone rings. Heads of those nearby turn; their faces twist in disgust as if the pickaninny disturbance was enough distraction for one service. Ringtone is old school: Wilson Pickett's *Funky Broadway*. It's a shout-out from party man's disheveled yet expensive jacket. Releasing my 'O'-painted lips, I comment: *Brethren, that's too cool. Where'd you dig up Pickett?* Eyes from turned heads roll. Heads shake. Wigs shift. Strong exhales are released. Party man's body stiffens, yet his eyes roam. The ringtone continues. He plays deaf. Tired mom sighs at the judging eyes. Lowers her chin. Rocks suckling baby. Pickaninny, on the cusp of waking, stretches. Tired mom's face shifts in my direction and reads: *I just came for the Word.* I mouth: *Me too.* We smile. No teeth. I cross and uncross my legs. Shrug my shoulders. Our eyes refocus on the religious circus. Party man's eyes squeeze shut.

Coworker's hat catches the dust from my breeze outside of the church. *Where you going so fast? Stay for the fellowship luncheon—meet some people. Where did you sit?* She takes a breath, hugs me, leans back, gives me the up-and-down-church-woman look as the grip tightens on her insignificant-in-the-world-of-real-things Lana Marks Cleopatra clutch. *Why didn't you tell me you didn't have anything to wear? And I could have had my girl, you know, do a little something with, how can I say it without being misunderstood, your hair.* Inside I respond: *Diarrhea lips of judgment.* Outside I say: *This was fine. Thanks for inviting me. We aren't the same size. I'm mad cool with dreads; they are a part of, how do I say it without being misunderstood: who I am.* Coworker blinks hard. Behind my back, my middle finger struggles to extend. I snatch it back and instead squeeze my fist tight. *This judgment stuff ain't for me.* My head turns. My eyes trail sounds of Wilson Pickett calling from musty, expensive jacket. On his heels: church-hat woman from the front pew—in a state of obvious agitation.

Sacrificing Isaac

Abe Aamidor

The year was 1955 and the city Chicago when I decided to protest the Biblical account of the sacrifice of Isaac, which we were studying in Hebrew school at the time. What kind of God would order Abraham to kill his son, and what kind of man must Abraham have been to agree to this? Did Abraham take his son by the hand and smile at the boy, kiss him on the cheeks like any father would do? I wasn't the first person in history to contest this story, but then it was just me, the rabbi and the Torah.

The rabbi tried to calm me by saying God wasn't really going to let Abraham butcher his son. It was a test of faith, that's all. But to me that was the problem – God was playing this cruel hoax on Abraham and this man, the father of our people, really would have killed his son had God not stopped him. But such a man couldn't be my father—that's what I knew.

My teacher, Rabbi Mordechai Fein, was an older man with a big pot belly and buzz cut hair, sort of like Curly on *The Three Stooges*, which I could watch on TV after school at a neighbor's house sometimes, yet he dressed better than Curly, always wearing a light gray suit and dark tie and polished leather shoes on his feet. Rabbi Fein was nice to me in general, once whispering the answer to a question in my ear when it was my turn to say something and I didn't know the answer, but he grew impatient with me this time. I beat the top of my desk, the kind of old schoolhouse desk with cast iron legs and a wood top that opened like a lid, and I protested that Isaac should have hit back, not submitted to anything. I don't know if the rabbi dragged me away by the collar or if I tried to run from him; I just remember being held in a head lock near the door to the room, his elbow folded under my right arm from the back while he pressed down on my neck with his other arm. I tried to stop him, to resist, as he shunted me toward the principal's office. I can still see the look of horror on the other boys' faces but also empathy in the few who turned away in shame at this cruel reenactment of the sacrifice of Isaac.

My family lived in an apartment above a candy store on a commercial street on the Westside of Chicago in those days, a neighborhood in transition from Augie March to urban slum. My mother worked as a cook at nearby Mount Sinai Hospital, which is why we were tethered there. I wasn't allowed my own key to our apartment but I could always find my way inside the vestibule because the lock

on the door to the street outside had long since been broken; I usually waited at the top of the stairs for one of my brothers to arrive and let me in to the apartment.

My older brother Hillel, who attended the same school, came up the steps soon enough but didn't say anything as he walked around me. Once we both were inside, though, he said he'd heard what had happened earlier that day. "God tested you today and you failed," he shouted in anger. "Do you know what that means?"

"God tested Abraham," I replied, brushing past him on the way to the kitchen to get a drink of water. "But Abraham didn't test God."

When our mother came home she wanted to know what I had done. If I was in trouble at school that meant I did something bad. This was a normal and predictable interpretation for people who believe in authority, who trust it. But I could tell she wasn't going to pursue the matter further, at least not then. She'd had another bad day in the kitchen, making up for people who didn't show up for work, taking the blame for a dietician's menu error, or just listening on the phone to family members complain about the quality of hospital food in general. She turned to the refrigerator and took out some celery stalks and carrots to chop and then she poured oil into a skillet for fish she would fry. At dinner Hillel sneaked looks at me, then at our mother, waiting for something to happen but nothing did. An older brother, Jacob, who came home late, said he ate already at a friend's house and he went straight into his room. Our mother got up from her seat and wrapped his plate in wax paper, then dropped it loudly onto a shelf in the refrigerator. It had been a very bad day at work, maybe a worse day for her than it had been for me.

My mother spoke with the principal the next morning by phone. "Yes, he's very sorry for what he did," she said. "I don't know what upset him. Yes, yes, I understand. Yes, yes, it won't happen again." My mother said all the normal and predictable things when she spoke to the principal. I stood with my arms folded petulantly across my chest as she continued speaking to the man. She listened to more jabber on the other end of the line while she fidgeted with buttons on her blouse. She had called the man and apologized. She had thought that would settle the matter. Now she had to get to work. "I'll talk to him!" she said with finality, then she sighed deeply and hung up the phone.

And as she rushed through the front door and down the stairs she said I better not make more trouble at school but didn't wait to see if I'd actually obey her. I wasn't going back to that school, though. That's what I knew. I'd read books on my own, I'd get a job delivering newspapers and save up enough money to run away somewhere, I'd hole up like an outlaw in Old El Paso.

The school eventually sent someone in person to our home. Once more my mother apologized for me but I told this person what the problem was. God was a liar. He was crazy, too. My mother began crying when she heard me say that. I was threatened again and again by the representative. "They'll send you to the reform school on Foster Avenue," she said. "You'll have to grow cabbages and potatoes in the field and scrub down the floors in the dormitory yourself. You'll live with goyim."

I took her at her word. It would be a new life. I'd work in the fields, which was great. I'd get to meet new kids. It was great.

The woman issued a parting shot to my mother. "They'll take him away from you if you don't make him go back to school." My mother tried to suppress her tears but couldn't. Then she hit me, slapped me across the face, and went off to work as usual.

I returned to the Hebrew day school after three weeks. No one carried out their threats against me, but I had become bored at home. They put me in a different class.

"Why are we called the chosen people?" the new rabbi asked the students on my first day back. "Did God inspect all the peoples of Earth and decide we were the best, better than all the rest? Better than the Moabites? Better than the Idumeans? Better than the Egyptians, who were better than the Greeks and Persians combined? No, no. That's not what happened at all. God went to all the peoples of Earth, to 70 different nations and offered them the Torah, his law, his word. Anybody could have it. But all these other peoples, they wanted to know what they would get in return. They wanted to know what was in it for them before deciding."

I can see the rabbi bent forward over his old single-pedestal oak desk, a chalkboard behind him, and he's smiling warmly while scanning the room. He has intense eyes and a sharp little jaw with a trim goatee; he looks a bit like Lenin. "Only the Jewish people said without hesitation, 'We accept the Torah.' And God said, 'Yes, but what do you want in return?' and the Jews said, 'We don't want anything in return. We accept your law unconditionally.' That's why we are the chosen people."

Mother cooked meals at Mount Sinai during the day and after a while she took an additional, part-time job as a short order cook at a diner down the block from where we lived, working until closing time, which I think was 2 am, maybe even later. I had been to the hospital to visit her several times, but I never went into the diner. I decided to change that one afternoon. "Hi," I said to the man in a white paper hat who stood behind the counter at what I recall was named O'Reilly's

Diner. I stared at the man's smudged apron and wondered if it was blood. The man, fleshy and ruddy, wiped his hands on a cloth and looked at me suspiciously.

"I'm Judith Silver's," I told the man. I didn't think to say son. The man smiled. "Yeah, yeah, your mom said she had kids." The man cleaned his hands further and then stuck his right hand over the counter to shake mine. "She's comin' to work tonight, ain't she?" he asked.

I just shrugged. The diner was classic – round stools with chrome rings and shiny red vinyl seats lined the long Formica-topped counter, itself embedded with glitter, and you could hear the bacon and eggs sizzling and popping on the grill behind. I didn't know my mother served bacon and eggs, but I immediately intuited she was doing it for us. "She's not home from the hospital yet," I told the man. "I'm just out playing. That's all right, isn't it?"

"Sure, sure," the man answered. "Let me get you a Pepsi. You got any money? OK, your mom can pay me when she gets here."

I had watched the restaurant from across the street once before when I snuck out of the apartment after my mother put me to bed and I'd peered between the passing cars into this glowing hothouse of strange people who sat on stools in the evening and didn't go home themselves. I could make out my mother well enough behind the counter, moving her thick arms from pan to pan and pot to pot, flipping hamburgers with a spatula and serving up soup with a ladle. My mother had long, dark hair in those days but always wrapped in a bun and tucked under a hair net when she went out to work. I could see her chest heave as she flitted about and thrust her arms fore and aft, and I wondered what she was thinking when she wiped the sweat from her brow.

My mother, born in 1917 in Zambrow, Poland, in the central part of the country, was a modern woman in her own way – she read romances in German and Polish and during a field trip to an art museum in Warsaw spent all her money on reprints of French impressionist paintings depicting dance halls and waterfronts and the like. Yet she also knew the standard prayer book as well as most men. She was a woman with her feet in two worlds. The eldest of 11 siblings, she was married off in 1935 – a teen bride - to a young *Hassid* she did not know and moved in with him and his family farther East, nearer the Soviet border. The Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 and occupied most of the country, including Zambrow, but the Soviet Red Army quickly occupied the border region nearer their lands, including where my father and mother then lived. They, and a son born in Zambrow in 1936, were relatively safe because the Germans weren't

ready to take on the Red Army just yet. Two other sons were born during the war, and I came a year after it ended.

My oldest brother, Gerald, the one born in Poland in 1936, spoke only Yiddish upon arrival in America, but he was the *gaon* in the family and he was quickly enrolled in a full-time yeshiva in Cleveland. He was a great student, or so I was told, played the violin, too, yet he was expelled when he was 17 or 18. It was after he was kicked out that he came to live with us on the Northside of Chicago, where we had moved after my mother got a better job as food service director in a nursing home.

When Gerald came home our mother ordered him to see a psychiatrist. Being kicked out of a yeshiva was a pretty bad thing, I surmised. "A Jewish doctor will know what's best," she said. Gerald had been through a lot in his short life. He clearly remembered Poland and he must have known his martyred aunts and uncles on our mother's side. He escaped when they had not. He must have remembered the long train ride across Russia to Vladivostok, then the refugee center in Shang Hai, living on handouts and caution all the time. He remembered our father falling prey to a fever shortly after we settled in Chicago, making our mother a widow.

The psychiatrist worked at Mount Sinai Hospital. Gerald had to take the 'L' Downtown, then transfer to a bus, and then walk through a typical hospital hallway maze to find his doctor. I don't know what Gerald and the doctor talked about, but the psychiatrist told him to get a job and go to school nights like lots of American Jews had to do in the 1920s and 1930s, maybe like this doctor had to do himself when he was younger. That was the Jewish American success story when Gerald's success story was that he got out of Europe alive. Gerald took a job washing dishes at the nursing home where our mother worked, and he went to school nights. He decided he wanted to be an architect.

"Here, help me set up this table," he said after our mother brought home a disassembled drafting table for him. We only had a pair of pliers and a butter knife for a screwdriver but Gerald proved to be handy. I thought we had made a mistake when we completed building the table because the surface was slanted, but Gerald explained that that was how one worked at a drafting table.

"I need a stool," he said. "Do we have a stool? Maybe somebody threw one out." He explained that you had to sit tall at a drafting table and get a good look at everything; you had to lean into the table top without falling into it lest you start to draw uneven lines. "It doesn't matter," he said. "I'll stand."

"Do you need to know algebra to be an architect?" I asked him one evening as I leafed through the inscrutable pages of a math book he

had. He laughed. "It's calculus, not algebra," he replied. It's one of the few times I remember him laughing.

But it didn't last. He stopped going to classes and he stopped going to work, too. The doctor then advised him to join the Army. At least that's what was said around the dinner table. I didn't see that as a prescription or a punishment. I thought it was exciting. I still didn't fully understand that something was wrong, that what might look like opportunity to some really could be teetering on the edge. Gerald joined the Air Force and I still have a picture of him in uniform. He looks very thin and the oversized cap on his close-cropped hair lends a starkness to the image, perhaps exaggerating the effect. His wan, unhappy expression is unmistakable, though. Gerald lasted six months before getting a General Discharge. I don't know what the problem was. Things just weren't working out, like a lot of things in his life.

One day after this return Gerald called me to the window in back of our third floor apartment on Drake Avenue and asked me to look closely at a telephone pole in the alley below. "Don't stand so close," he said as he pulled me back from the window. "Do you see him now?" he continued. "The man hiding behind the pole? I don't want him to see you." It was the first time I cried for Gerald.

Gerald was committed to a state psychiatric hospital in Galesburg in western Illinois. My mother visited him on most weekends, taking a Greyhound bus from Downtown, then via a Studebaker Lark she eventually bought, in part to make it easier to see her son. She would always be agitated in the days and hours before she was to travel to Galesburg. One learned not to talk to her during these periods. After my mother died I found some old letters Gerald had written to her postmarked from Galesburg. "I promise to be good," he wrote in what seemed like a school boy's shaky cursive script though he must have been in his early 20s by then. "I don't want to be here. Please let me come home. I promise to be good."

This is how Gerald died: they were taking him back to the hospital, my mother and Jacob, who was driving by then, and Gerald did not want to go. I watched from our third floor apartment as the drama unfolded on the street below. He would not get in the car, so my mother took off one of her shoes and began beating him about the head, which he covered with both arms and elbows.

"Mother, mother," he cried.

Then he broke free, turned and ran up the stairs of our apartment. He ran straight into the kitchen, grabbed a long, serrated knife, and stabbed himself through the heart; he died in the arms of a firefighter who came later to offer assistance. He did not die cleanly or instantly.

I should tell you that Gerald was not my oldest brother's real name. Nobody born in Poland was named Gerald, not Christian and

Amoskeag

not Jewish. When Gerald was born he was named Isaac after one of my mother's siblings. It was his father's family, which I guess is my father's family, a part of our father's family that had come to America years earlier than the rest of us, who changed his name to Gerald. What prophet was named Gerald? It's a name from a 19th century British romance. Yet it's still hard for me not to think of him as Gerald. Even his headstone says Gerald.

And my mother had only one wish when she lay dying in a nursing home many years later. Bury her not in Poland or in Jerusalem, but next to her oldest son in a sprawling, gothic cemetery in a western Chicago suburb, far away from and out of sight of all of God's creations.



Two Crows and a Murder

Allison Cummings

Each morning he howls at destiny, shackled to a hated twin.
Peace must wait outside the halls of childhood,
if it waits anywhere at all.

Yesterday the sun melted the thin ice on our pond,
and last night it froze to a smooth black sheet.

When two crows attacked a robin in the park
where four cannons aim at the river,

we were lucky to be in the sun, watching.
The robin was lucky the boy screamed

the crows skyward, to die with a heart intact.
It would be luscious to wear a scarf of April's streams,

muddy and cold before the toads emerge.
Maybe longing begins not in a beloved face

or mother's arms, but in a witnessed death.
Leaves drowned over winter release their fishy stink,

damsel-like naiads molt in the muck—
four summers churning in dark water

before a month or so in the air.
Maybe a boy's love must uproot from the first garden

at seven to roam the arid country of men.
There's something about the cosmos,

an indifference that makes us want it more.
How often have you called it, beseeching, polite, or sassy,
and heard only dial tone, or a scoff and click?

How to Write About Silence

June Frankland Baker

Don't leave sound out.
Rather, follow where it has almost,
but not quite, arrived:

that holding back of breath
before you understand the phone,
or letter, and your day's next step,

or your not-yet-released sigh,
relief when finally you have reached
the arms of your family,

or that inexpressible pause
as you watch the closing eyelids
of a new baby at the edge of sleep,

the room so quiet you can hear
the relaxing muscles of the walls,
the shared stillness of the floor.

The Order of Words

Michael Charney

It wasn't the kind of conversation filled with unimportance, one where, for example, she might tell him that a former acquaintance had died after a long struggle with melanoma, alone, the woman's only daughter long ostracized for having married an artist and the ex-husband, living abroad, never even knowing of the illness; or that she had heard of a pet gone missing, apparently left tied up too loosely outside the bakery when its owner went inside to buy a loaf of whole-grain bread with rosemary. Nor was it the kind of conversation where he might lecture while she sat, uncaring, as often happened when he had strong opinions regarding the economy or the problems in the Middle East, opinions bolstered by a pretense of knowledge gleaned from poorly edited web pages pretending to offer news. It was a conversation different than these. More private, more meaningful, but held in a public place, the kind of place often chosen for such conversations. A restaurant. Not one overtly fashionable but also not one too casual. The kind where there is always an extra menu that holds the specials, even at lunch time, and always bread delivered whether wanted or not.

She said that her world had shifted. Those were the words she used: "world" and "shifted." Large words. Words that loomed, that included everything, and in the past tense. There were other words she could have chosen instead. She could, for example, have chosen "us." Or "we." But she didn't.

Words have weight, he thought he might say to her. They can be feather-light or leaden, can fly or float or sink.

He felt some of her words, felt them hollow out a place inside him. It was the miscarriage, she said, and finding out about his test results, about his defective gene.

It had been only moments since they'd sat down, he having squeezed self-consciously past a sizable man who hesitated, a forkful of portobello ravioli halfway to his mouth, as if concerned that any slight jostle might result in olive oil rain-dropping his Oxford shirt. The water had arrived, but that was all. He still held the menu in his hands. He half overheard their waiter talking to someone at another table, taking a drink order, using the usual words. Where they were sitting the words were not usual.

She told him that children were everything. The having of. The raising of. The needing and wanting of. He said nothing.

Charney

She continued talking, though more slowly, her sentences incomplete. He heard “maybe,” and “if things were different.” He heard “can’t” and “won’t” and “mustn’t.” He heard “love” and “but” and “even though.” “Get” and “keep” and “divide.” He knew what all the words meant, despite their incompleteness. Then at the last, the very last, she said “we.” She said “us.” A tear fell. His.

He thought of an apocryphal story about James Joyce, about how Joyce had once been asked whether he had spent a fruitful day writing. Yes, he perhaps had said. I spent my day writing a sentence, and it’s almost done. He had apparently selected all the words he thought he wanted to use, and had made sure that each one meant just what he wanted it to mean. What he wasn’t yet sure of, the story goes, was the order he wanted to put them in. The order, after all, is everything. It’s how we build, how we construct thought.

The order of words.

If she had started differently perhaps. With “us.” With “we.” But she did not. Even before they were seated she had already chosen the order of her words, and in doing so decided that the two of them were no longer those things. No longer us. Or we.

They ordered. They ate and drank. Not in silence, but nearly so. After all: this was a public place, the kind often chosen for such conversations.

When She Saw Him

Mark Hage

She never forgets a face. She arrived where the summons said she should, edged up the broad marble steps. Massive columns ascended in rows— Corinthian, she recognized. A policeman pointed to a scanner. She squared her handbag on the belt, slid rings and bracelets into lidless Tupperware. The man in front triggered a chime. The officer nodded to an area ahead. She looked that way, she saw another man, arms stretched, being sounded with a wand. Something about the red of his hair made her look again. He turned. Her organs budged. He had not changed. Ten years and not a gray strand: privileged genetics, eternal demon.

She walked past him. She looked ahead. He did not recognize her, he couldn't have; he never got to see her face. She hurried into the elevator, wriggled arms and legs for gaps with those around her. The elevator slowed at the fourth floor. They exited into people who had dispensed earlier, saturating the corridors. They stood, slumped into early morning postures, facing in directions like a Caravaggio. A man stared at a woman's breasts. Handhelds were pecked by addiction. Another elevator rang with arrival. She readied for his emergence. Others exited and added weave. He would not be going to the jury room, he was not here for that. He is about to be put on trial, she sensed. What has he done this time?

A door stirred, heads turned. A soft-spoken man wearing a yarmulke gave instructions she could not hear. She mimed the hands in front of her, hands that picked up questionnaires, dwarf pencils, demographic cards. She penciled into circles: female, white, single, the date she was born. She watched a recurring pattern. People chose seats that left an empty chair between themselves and others. We are creatures of hesitant solitude, she thought. She sat alone close to the podium. A short, buxom, court clerk tapped a microphone. "Good morning jurors," she said.

He recognized her. The cop lowered his wand, waved him through. He noted her composure. Someone else would have stiffened, passed by him at a distance. He inhaled, trying to capture her scent. He knew she saw him. She would think he couldn't have recognized her, and the normalcy she mustered must have been aided by that thought. He walked to the elevator, the one she took. A rare form of excitement wicked through him. He saw the lights count up to four and then stop.

The clerk tapped the microphone again. “My name is Wanda Greene. I will be guiding you with your jury service today. I am going to tell you what you need to know, but if you absolutely need to speak with me, you can stand in line right here, and say Ms. Wanda, I have a question. If you have *must serve or non-compliant* on the top of your summons, you’ve used up all of your excuses. You are now our guest. Welcome to jury duty.”

*

A bicycle is chained to a traffic sign. The bicycle was painted white—Chassis, wheels, seat, pedals—the white of medical coats, angels and clouds, hospital telephones dialing next of kin. Ghost Bicycles, they call them. Upright memorials, they stand near the pavement where their riders fell. The stained Schwinn appeared that week, decorated with beads and artificial daisies. Real flowers were also there: the bottom of the ashen stems housed in a deli bag, choked by a red outline where rubber bands once tensed. She asked for forgiveness facing the stones retaining Beekman Hill. She made a promise of upkeep. She dusted off the sign: rest in peace, her name, 24 years old, killed by a truck.

They gathered at the corner of 51st. They wore comfortable shoes. They brandished signs that cleaved the air, they wailed at the skies. They aimed fists at terraced penthouses, faced off with historic gargoyles. They held images of blinded rabbits, of mutilated primates. *It’s murder, not science! It’s murder, not science!* They chanted at his uniformed doorman. They kept an eye out for his car. They blew whistles when residents came in or out of the building to inflict the most discomfort to his private life. “It’s the black Jaguar! He’s here!” someone shouted. They unlidded pots of paint, they tossed their coats at the curb. They smeared red pigment on faces and arms. They dropped to the asphalt, stacked their bodies in the street. A slaughterhouse landscape: man bestial to animals, man discarded on man. He swerved, sped north. They chased, howled, turned back. Policemen walked by. Early evening came. They piled their signs into a van, shouted a few more times. They embraced, unlocked their bicycles. They pedaled away.

She had been standing inside Designers’ Apparel, near the entry. Beekman Hill rose across the street, separate, with its capped sentinels and centenary capital. Deep within the store, women who did not know each other spoke of their husbands.

She saw him pull up into the parking lane. He idled his car in front of the store. The car was British, black, imported with the steering wheel on the wrong side. That’s where he sat, next to the moving traffic. Young men and women had walked by her earlier, in tufts, like smoke signals. A poster with caged canines danced above their heads.

She had heard their chants up the avenue, rhythmic, angry. He was focused in their direction. She saw him run his hand through his red hair. She thought he was handsome, dressed for impact. She glanced in turns at him and at a necklace she held. He faced forward. She set the necklace down, picked it up, willing him to her presence.

From the store, she saw a bicyclist's front wheel appear to her left. The rider's helmet was white. Red paint covered her arms and face. She rode downhill, against the oncoming traffic. The bicyclist turned and fluttered an arm, pointed at the car. "It's him!" she yelled. She called out the names of men and women at the expanse behind her. No one had followed her.

He jerked his car door open, held it out. He looked ahead, motionless, arm triangulated like a shelf bracket. She was still facing backwards, when her bicycle collided with the door. She was thrown off, a silent arc. She landed in a traffic lane. The trucker never had time to hit the breaks. Someone screamed. Someone in the store said something. She folded up to either side of the tire passing over her. She unfolded. He sat still in the Jaguar for a moment. He reached for his telephone. He locked his car and it beeped twice. A man from a deli counter hurried over and cradled her head. Blood stained the asphalt in jagged diameters. Someone muttered a prayer. People kept distances or came forth. Some stood upright, some bent down. The truck driver kept repeating the same few words in a language of birth. Police cars disrupted streets, ambulances drizzled their lights. She was photographed, shrouded, taken away.

She stood behind him, facing the police officers, a few feet from tailored fabric, from erect bearing. He told the officers he did not know someone was coming that fast the wrong way. That he only looked behind him. They took his name and address. They said he would not be charged. She came closer, ready to speak. An officer looked at her, he nodded, inquisitive. She shook her head sideways. She turned. She hurried away.

Ms. Wanda cleared her throat. "If you are not chosen for a trial after the lunch break, you could be asked to go home early. But don't take that personally."

They were dismissed for lunch. She stepped out into the street with a crowd that chose nearby restaurants. She wandered away on Lafayette, farther north. There was a restaurant with communal tables. People scooped from bowls and blew on white porcelain spoons. She ordered soup dumplings. A woman carrying a juror pamphlet sat to her diagonal. She asked if the dumplings were good. They traced back to someone they knew in common, they shook

hands and introduced themselves, they both loved *Les Misérables*.

“What do you do?” the woman asked.

“I am a teacher. How about you?”

“I am a social worker. I hope they let us out early today,” the woman said.

“You don’t want to serve?”

“I hate jury duty.”

“I want to be on this particular trial.”

“You do? Which one?”

“I don’t know the specifics yet.”

“But you know you want to be on it?”

“Yes. I want them to pick me.”

“How come?”

“Men do horrible things.”

“How horrible?”

“As horrible as men are capable of.”

“Look at us speaking like this in here. Someone might overhear us,” the woman said.

They ate in hurried bites. They separated by walking at differing speeds. She went back to the courtroom at the hour they told her she should. She passed a small ancillary room. She saw him. He was speaking to a man in a dark suit. He was now wearing glasses, they suited him, red hair and tortoise shell: master of evasion, infinite chameleon.

Drums with names were spun. Names were drawn and called. Potential jurors held cards with juror numbers. She heard her name. Ms. Wanda handed her a jury card and pointed at a door. “Those soup dumplings are good,” she whispered, “good luck with your jury service.”

They filed through courtroom mahogany, sat in wordless rows. She searched for him, one chair at a time. Two attorneys entered. The tall one, Swain, spoke. Mechanical, enunciating. “In our society, in our legal system,” he summed up, “I will come right out and say it. Judgment is the manifestation of the law.”

The other attorney stood. Bald, stocky, with a lazy left eye. “My name is Colarusso, he said. Colarusso lisped, it made people smile, and not in a bad way. A gold bracelet appeared and disappeared under his sleeve, united with cufflinks and tiepin in sheen of moderate carat.

Colarusso sat, Swain stood. They questioned. They watched.

“...The right to a trial by a jury of peers...In our society, in our judicial system...”

She was to be interviewed next. Colarusso reviewed the questionnaire she filled out.

“Ms. Larson,” he said, “I see that you are a teacher.”

“I am.”

“Where do you teach?”

“I teach at The Spence School.”

“Where is the school located?”

“The Upper East Side.”

“Is that an exclusive school Ms. Larson?”

“In a way, it is.”

He asked more questions.

She brightened, she charmed.

Swain rose. “Ms. Larson,” he said, “you checked off on the form that you have been a witness to a crime. Can you describe what happened?”

“I saw someone snatch an old man’s wallet and run.”

“What did you do?”

“I called the police department, Mr. Swain.”

She nurtured. She lied.

“Would you be willing to follow the intentions of the law and render a decision?”

“I would,” she said.

He watched her return from lunch recess to the courtroom. She still thought he could not have recognized her.

He recalled the day, the store, her reflection through the car’s glass holding a necklace, her interest in him. Protest signs ahead, those who assembled to single him. The girl on the bicycle was a surprise. What he did was instant, left no space for reflection. He reached for his telephone, he got out.

She stood in the store’s doorway. He avoided eye contact. It would have initiated interpretation, led to a need for resolution. He sensed she stood behind him, facing the officers. He knew she would not speak up before she even realized it.

She is in one of the jury selection pools, he thought. I hope for it, I hope for events to place you at my trial today. You will wind yourself into it. Weigh your answers, insinuate regard. You will connect with both lawyers fleetingly, separately, interpret their needs. Let your empathy be detectable by each, one at a time. Tell them nothing about knowing me. I welcome your tenure in these rows. What is ours continues, outside of convention, unclassified, the truest of intimacies.

Colarusso paced. He took time. “Ms. Larson,” he said, “should my opponent here fail to prove his case, do you feel you can judge fairly in favor of my client, even though, as it has been said, he is a person of means?”

"I can," she said, using the tone that had appeased the most demanding parents.

"Ms. Larson," Swain said, "the defendant is wealthy, but that is immaterial to the case, and the law applies to everyone equally. I am confident however, that as this trial progresses, we will prove our argument. Ms. Larson, in the event we outline the merit of our case, would you be able to judge against the defendant?"

"I would," she said. *I would.*

Swain moved on to the next juror, asked if he belonged to any clubs or organizations.

She raised her hand, and offered "restroom." Colarusso and Swain kept their eyes on her as she exited. She found the room where she saw him last. She pushed at the door. He was alone, seated.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello," he answered.

"I know you," she said.

"Yes," he said.

"You killed that young woman on the bicycle."

"Yes."

"There is a memorial for her. The bicycle her mother rode with her when she was a child. It is painted all white."

"I left flowers," he said.

"I got into your trial today."

"You straddled the middle point."

"I never allowed them to see my aim."

"I noticed you this morning."

"I didn't think you knew."

"You held the necklace," he said.

"I am going to be on your trial."

"I will not object."

"Will you tell them that I knew you?" she said.

"No. I would like you there."

"I could tell them that long ago, you killed a girl, or say I could never be part of putting a human being in a cage," she said.

"Justice is a decision," he said.

"Justice is chance encounter," she said.

He stretched his hand toward her. He did not withdraw until she reached for it. They held hands, stood still.

There is life beyond courtrooms. People asleep at night. Attorneys, the accused, judges. The woman sits by her window. There is a beginning of sunlight. It is cold. She holds a mug that provides a small bracket of heat. She does not think. But there is a day ahead, and there would be decisions, and that's what makes a world of illusions so real.



Cefalu

Claudia Rippee

Home Sweet Humvee

Aaron Sommers

I am inside the vehicle too, trying not to cry, waiting for my Sergeant to tell me we're safe, waiting to get out of here, out of this country. There are three soldiers in this vehicle, the Sergeant says, and all three of them are going to be safe. Just as soon as we reach the checkpoint.

The night is darker than ever. But it's not peaceful dark the way it was back in Vermont. It's boogie dark—dismally dim.

Spc. Del Greco sitting up front yells at me again.

"What's that?" I say. I can't hear him.

He turns around, says, "Keep your eyes open."

"Yes, sir," I tell him, drifting off, against my will, against orders. There's lot's of padding in my brain bucket, and it bounces rhythmically against the glass window.

The 10th Mountain Division needs our support. As a Private First Class all I've got to do is provide cover if requested—but only if requested. Otherwise, stay silent. It sounds to me like they're hiding me. It sounds to me like the military equivalent of playing right field.

I'm jostled out of unconsciousness, and we're all fucked, I say out loud.

Del Greco takes me in.

"We're three clicks from base, private."

"Oh," I say. My mouth is dry and my groin is damp. Up ahead is Bagram Air Field.

In my corner of the barracks are Staff Sergeant William Belman and Specialist Marcus Del Greco. Belman's from Atlanta; I don't know yet where Del Greco is from.

First Lieutenant Michael Emmett Brown, Brownsie, is our unit commander. He's got a thick southern drawl and breath like rotten egg salad. The brass orders him to cover as much terrain in the Southeast region as possible, clear it of Taliban and mark it ready for prime time.

We're on a timetable so those opium-eaters can start ruling again.

Now they got us wearing three types of gear on our brain buckets. There's this mini-radar system, an infrared sensor and some clunky digital scope that never works right. The helmet must weigh forty fucking pounds and my thick brown hair is all greasy and matted.

I can't sleep because of Marlene, my girlfriend of two years. She's the only person who supported me back when I enlisted. We fought

a lot before I left, and part of me thinks she was happy to see me go. Even though she writes me every week—wondering what’s happening over here—I just can’t describe all the grotesquerie.

At least not in the way it needs to be described.

I promised her I’ll write a story while overseas. I’d call it, ‘If Genghis Khan, So Can You!’ or maybe even ‘Home, Sweet Humvee.’ I know she always supported me, but most of her family—and everyone in our Podunk town—said it’s only because Marlene lost her brother when the second tower collapsed on 9/11 and he was incinerated on live television.

She isn’t one for vengeance, though.

Neither is Belman. He always keeps his cool. During Advanced Combat Training—back at Fort Armpit—he counted his rounds and at the end of this long exercise knew exactly how much armament remained. He’s the only one who did that.

Staff Sergeant Belman is the opposite of what everybody in my small town told me—*taught* me—black people are like. First of all, he isn’t lazy. Belman works harder than anyone else in our unit and I never see him sleep. Not once. Belman’s smarter than Lt. Commander Brown, too, but without a degree from West Point—or anywhere else for that matter—on paper he just doesn’t shine.

Tonight the order is to rest up. But how can you sleep when it’s an order?

Marlene. Did you cut your beautiful red hair real short just like your sister? Marlene—calling herself the “ginger ghost.” Does she remember how I kept count of those freckles? Maybe the problem is I drag her down with the weight of my insecurities. Or maybe she sees things—good things—in me I never knew existed. Maybe I just worry too much. I don’t know anymore. I used to know a lot of things about her and us but I lost that knowledge a long time ago.

I miss her infectious laugh, her slender legs, her genuine optimism and those nights we tried to stay warm in my apartment listening to Ray Charles on WRUV, the university’s student radio station. I miss sex and ice cream—in that order. By now, Marlene is probably in the arms of some bookish grad student. I’ll bet he’s into photography, too, and has one of those pubic-hair goatees and reads her Keats after they make love. I’d like to order a drone strike on guys like him.

“Hey,” Belman speaks up, “yoo-hoo.”

“Yes, sir?” I manage.

“Anybody home?”

“What?”

“Have you listened to one God damn thing I’ve said?”

“Oh, sorry, sir. I’m just—”

“You still thinking about your lady, aren’t you?”

“No—” I lie, “No, I was actually wondering if—”

“Stop obsessin’ and stay alert, soldier. You look like shit.”

“Got a headache.”

Belman nods. “It’s probably the weight of your brain bucket. Like I keep tellin’ you an Del Greco—ya’ll gotta remember to remove the spotting scope when we in the Humvee. Got it?”

“But they said—”

“Yeah, they *say* a lot of shit. You wanna listen to them and wear a neck brace back home? Walk around lookin’ like this?”

“No.”

“Alright then. You listen to your Sergeant.”

During the night the 10th located a Taliban stronghold and requested Pamela.

“Pamela” is the name of our Predator Drone. The Predator is an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle first developed by the CIA in the early 1990s. She collects sophisticated surveillance, gathers threat risk, and turns high-value targets into a parking lot—all while many miles away an operator watches a re-run of *Everybody Loves Raymond*. Anti-tank armaments, bunker-busting bombs, laser-guided missiles, fragmentation explosives and various other high-munitions warheads, make Pamela one mean bird—responsible for more Taliban casualties than our entire brigade.

Pamela’s also the name of Brownsie’s ex-wife.

The 10th needed to get precise coordinates before they send her out from Bagram, so our unit is sent in to patrol.

I really need some time to eat SOS, but we have to rush. SOS stands for Shit on a Shingle, this tasty creamed beef they serve us on toast each morning in the Mess Hall.

I’m still not sure who we’re fighting against. Sgt. Belman says Operation Enduring Freedom is just one big race against the shadowy Pakistani Intel. I believe him, too. Belman’s the most intuitive, high-hearted and humble man I’ve ever met.

About a week after I arrived I woke up in a cold sweat and spotted him huddled at his little desk lamp, reading a letter from his wife Claire. He never slept. Spc. Del Greco, you always knew he slept because the guy snored like a narcotized grizzly bear. Anyway, Belman had a great family, a wife and two daughters back in Georgia. He showed me pictures of them a bunch of times, always glowing with joy,

his two precious girls, Francine and Olivia. They're honor roll students in middle school. He says they want to be teachers.

It's about two in the morning when he tells me about Benny. Benny—his dog back home—a floppy-eared, runt-of-the-litter beagle the Sarge adopted. The letter says he has bone cancer and the vet gives him a month or so to live. Belman says it hurts him more than anything else to be over here, in this irredeemable, God-forsaken country, while over there in Georgia little Benny suffers.

He starts talking about other stuff; more combat and war stuff. A discourse about insurgents and I'm crying myself softly to sleep.

There's never anything left in the area after they meet Pamela. All it takes is one missile, one bad-boy, and the whole place lights up, rains splintered fire like a tornado in Hades. Last month Lt. Brown tells us Pamela felt "PMSy", so they load her up with a Metal Augmented Charge.

Later that afternoon, Pamela turns an entire village near the Hindu Kush Mountains into a big pile of scorched gravel. It's all just a black and white video game on Brownsie's computer.

I keep telling myself it's only a routine patrol. The marker from the 10th on the GPS on our Humvee's metal dashboard, a blinking checkered flag on the blue screen—my beacon of sanity—promises me a twenty-minute ride north.

The moon's obscured by blobs of thick, syrupy clouds. Our headlights are the only thing visible on that dusty road.

About halfway to the checkpoint, a whir and Belman yells brace yoselves. Our Humvee shakes from below and an orange fire covers her thick windows. The blessed beast lurches left, then right, finally landing back on all four wheels with a deep, metallic groan. Warm streams of urine saturate my right thigh.

Spc. Del Greco tries to get a move on, but it's nothing doing. She keeps making grinding and screeching sounds, like a bunch of boys with ADHD under our hood are scraping their nails on a chalkboard. Del Greco surveys the rows of angry blinking lights on the dash and says a belt popped out of the drive train. He's got to go outside and fix it.

Belman glares at me and says something. I don't want to hear him. "What?" I say.

"We've got to go out and cover him."

Once outside the Humvee, Belman motions for me to stand still because I'm making a racket, kicking up sand. A big red scorpion scurries near my right boot.

Sgt. Belman points to a milky arc from an RPG launcher, about ten yards to the right of us and orders me to fire. There's only sand—

boundless and bare—peppered by lifeless hills and mountains in the distance.

I've never traveled much outside of New England, but Afghanistan reminded me of a land drained of any color and hope—a country where dreams and empires go to die.

Two swarthy men emerge from the ground. I try to fire my rifle but the goddamn safety is still on. A few bulky rounds from their AK-47s zip by me and bounce off the door. Sgt. Belman takes them out. Three more appear. He pushes me into the Humvee, just as Del Greco starts it up.

Then another whir.

This time, the charge sends flames around her like some ghostly cloak. My bowels are upside down. It's roasting in there. The Humvee is a big fucking microwave, and my balls are cooked. We have sixteen inches of ground clearance on these magnificent, modified vehicles. They gave us an automatic grenade launcher, sniper detection systems and titanium suspension, but no air-conditioning.

Sgt. Belman yells and squeals.

He rolls around outside, a blue inferno all around him. If Dante himself designed a uniform, it'd be this one. They don't give us grunts any fire-resistant Army Combat Uniforms. Only the aviators get them. I mean, the ACUs they issue us are warm—and comfortable—but they light up like cheesecloth.

I can't move. Only think. How Belman told me a week or so earlier we call our ACUs "blues" as a throwback to the uniform of Union troops in the Civil War.

Something crackles, pops outside—probably a compression flare in Belman's ACU insert—and jostles me out of my mental drift.

The fucking extinguisher is stuck in a steel case on the right side of the door, and I can't get it unfastened. Just when I reach for my 9mm, out of nowhere Spc. Del Greco kicks it loose and nearly takes off my index finger. I flip the selector switch on my M-16 to "full automatic" and let loose.

If you've never been in a Humvee, then you've never experienced what it's like to be safe, truly safe, in a vehicle. This isn't your father's Ford. This is a High Mobility Multipurpose Vehicle. It'll take troops over the bloodstained river and through the Chekhovian woods. She'll drive circles around the fastest tanks like the M1A1 Abrams and carry payloads no Jeep can match. I'd love to have one of them on the interstate highway.

Even when we can't see shit out here, I always know our beast will save us. She never disappoints, either. The few gun turrets on each side are just in case her crew gets pinned down in a shitstorm and needs to use small-arms fire.

This is one of those cases.

I don't know where or who I'm firing at, but I really let loose. The M-16 doesn't have the recoil of other rifles—like the terrorist-toys those Taliban troops favor—so you can fire quite a few rounds off in no time. They gave me lots of practice with our Tool of Democracy during Basic Training. Hundreds of shells fly onto the metal floor, rattling like loose change.

But within a minute or so I exhaust all my rounds. The warm sap of adrenaline pumps through me and I climb into the cramped turret of our MK-19—the Humvee's belt-fed, automatic grenade launcher—and go to work. I punch the safety selector switch and discharge one 40mm grenade after another, moving swiftly in a full orbit because the MK-19 has a 360-degree range of fire. Clusters of orange bursts temporarily illuminate the sky. The blasts pockmark some of the landscape. Somehow, Del Greco manages to get Belman inside. Our Humvee hurtles back to base, her mangled door flapping in the wind.

Spc. Del Greco talks to Belman—tells him to hang in there—but it's a one-way conversation. He's tits-up and not moving. I turn to look at him and his face is a piece of burnt steak. He doesn't have his eyes or ears anymore. I throw up all over my ACU and Del Greco doesn't flinch.

The next day, Commander Brown announces to the battalion Sgt. Belman is dead. A British Officer in the Surgical Unit says he'd never seen blast injuries like that before. Ninety percent of his body was burned, and they couldn't airlift him to the only hospital for advanced skin grafts because our chopper is tied up with an extraction of Army Rangers near the Pakistan border.

It's a shitty way to go, and Sgt. Belman deserves better. The next day—during our formation—they place his body on the C-5 Transport Plane. I picture little Benny, shivering, all afraid of the veterinarian. I run over and try to start up our Boeing CH-47 Chinook, just to prove some airlift is always available. Commander Brown goes ballistic and orders me down. It causes a big scene because he histrionically draws his weapon.

There's no way I could take off—it's a twin-engine, heavy-lift rotorcraft requiring at least two pilots to operate. I flip the switches with reckless abandon—an unwise thing to do with a thirty-five million-dollar piece of equipment—but I can't help myself. Brownsie writes up the whole incident. The Army Review Board Agency discharges me with a crisp letter and—hooh-ah—my tour ends early.

The first thing I do when we land at Burlington Air National Guard Base is call Marlene. I think she'll be excited to hear I'm home. But she sounds kind of worried, and when I tell her what happened she

says oh no and cries. We make plans to meet for dinner, but they're canceled at the last minute. I tell her I'm not feeling well—which isn't a lie. The anxiety attacks I told the Board about now include pins and needles in my extremities.

My nights are ruled by insomnia. I become a fan of those late-night infomercials hosted by a washed-up singer from the 80s. He's amusingly tanned and displays a box set of songs from the decade. One night I rather perversely buy—and listen to—the entire catalogue of "A Flock of Seagulls". The following night I end up in an opioid-enhanced stupor listening to George Michael's oeuvre, crying halfway through.

Flotsam and jetsam take up my days and nights. Empty cartons of Ben and Jerry, shell casings, spiral notebooks, empty beer bottles. A dented Dunkin Donuts "Box O' Joe" next to my bed. On the rare evening I get shuteye, I yell and scream in my sleep and disturb my downstairs neighbor, a co-ed from Braintree, Massachusetts. More often than not she looks at me with all the warmth and fondness reserved for an escaped patient of a mental hospital.

Two weeks or so after I return to Vermont, the Department of Veteran Affairs in Montpelier assigns someone to help me "re-adjust" to civilian life. His name's Mike Cogswell. He's got a degree in social work from the University of New Hampshire and a red, patchy beard. Mike's soft-spoken, drives a Prius, and I'll bet he loves rocking out to Hootie and the Blowfish. He's a real nice guy, and he listens to me—as much as any sane person can.

Mike's the only one I talk to. About the serious shit in my head. Things dark and gruesome—like my weekly resolution to drive off the West Dummerston Covered Bridge.

Within a month or so of my non-hero return home to the Green Mountain State, Mike helps me get a studio apartment, a brand new truck, and even the part-time job I have now. I'm at the Ulysses Grant High School in Brattleboro. I'm a special education teacher-assistant.

Mike says I'm doing great; but something happened.

On my way to Wal-Mart some guy in a pickup truck cuts me off. I honk at him and he gives me the finger. It doesn't bother me too much, because he speeds up and cuts off someone else. I figure it's the routine business of driving in modern-day suburbia—nothin' personal.

Ten minutes later, the guy pulls into a parking space across from me. He's middle-aged, tall and balding. He has man boobs and chews gum with loud smacks.

It takes forever to find all the things on my list. Somewhere in

the hardware section I'm panicking and sweating bullets. I puke in a wheelbarrow. To top it all off, the "express" checkout line is long, really long—all because of me. It's a hard decision: pay in cash *or* use my credit card. I keep deciding, then *undeciding*, and the cashier, a teenage girl named Brittanie, wears all of the people's frustration in the store on her cherubic little face. Somebody is yelling.

"Hey buddy, what's it gonna be?"

It is the man from the pickup—speaking from the end of the line.

"Jesus," he crosses his arms and sighs. "What is he, broke or *stupid*?"

I just hand Brittanie a bunch of cash and bolt out. She says something, and there's someone who looks like a manager approaching me, but by then I'm gone.

My truck starts with a roar as I talk to Belman. My brain buckets off, see? You're right. The SOBs at CENTCOM are MIA. I get it, Sergeant. I hear you. You're always right.

Xanax. Yes, there's always that. But my truck's a fucking mess—and all I can find is an empty pill bottle. A desperate hunt through the backseat floor results in a Sudafed, two Tic Tacs and a faded white oval pill of unknown origin. I down them with a swig of cold coffee. My profile's twisted. The Ray Bans and black leather jacket don't make me look anywhere near cool.

A few minutes later, the fat guy comes out. A boy in a wheelchair struggles in front of him. It's Tim Triplet. He's one of my students in the resource room. Tim's rocking and groaning, because that's how he communicates—that's the best he can do—and before I can say hi to him the fat guy scowls at him. It's obvious he is quite inconvenienced. Timmy's mother pushes him gently out of the doorway, intimidated by this big bully bastard.

The administrators at my school, they're always talking about teachable moments. They're fleeting and unpredictable but essential, they say. I decide this is a teachable moment—and this guy needs to be taught a lesson.

He drives off and I keep a couple of car lengths between us at first—just like I learned from *Magnum, P.I.*

By the time he turns onto a private road, I'm able to see his dandruff. I needed to see if he has a gun rack, because that could complicate things. He doesn't—though two bumper stickers ("Support Our Troops" and "Bush/Cheney") make me throw up in my mouth.

In a pitiful attempt to lose me, he accelerates, and before we play that game I floor my truck. The road is all dirt now—practically one lane—but it doesn't matter to me. I stop perpendicular to his vehicle, sending plumes of dust all around us.

Jabba the Gut lunges towards me.

"Hey," he slams his door. "What's your problem, asshole?"

He keeps talking and I survey him. He's within knifing distance.

"Hey dickhead, I'm *talkin'* to you."

The cold steel of a .44 rests heavy against my chest. It's much heavier than the 9mm they gave us in the service, but this is the Magnum model—and let me tell you, it makes quite an impression. It's the kind of revolver Clint Eastwood used in those "Dirty Harry" movies. Classic, with a traditional design, it's a real behemoth of a firearm. Some say it's a pistol on steroids.

When his grey nose hair is in my face, I quickly, but carefully, pull out my peacemaker.

He takes a quick breath, steps back and turns ashen. "*Ho-ly* shit."

"Shay hello to my little friend."

"*Whoa*, guy."

"You got a fucking problem?" I ask rhetorically.

"Nope—" he swallows and holds up his hands, "nope, no problem."

The barrel is against his forehead. "Well you got one now."

"Hey man, let's take it easy. Just. Take. It—"

"Don't tell me what to do, you fucking hick."

I wave the gun. "Get on your fucking knees, fatty."

"You got it," he kneels down, "whatever you want, buddy."

"Call me sir, *God-damn* it."

"Yes—yes *sir*."

"That's better."

"Please, sir. I—I got a family."

"Well, I feel sorry for them."

"I'll give you whatever you—"

"Tell me what." I say. "I'm gonna do them—and society—a favor."

"No, please, just—"

"I mean, why should you be above ground while little Benny isn't? Huh?"

"Oh my God, no. Please sir. Please—"

The chamber's out with a loud click, the cartridges look lined up and with another snap, it's all back into place. It sounds like Satan cracking his knuckles.

"As I see it, it's a moral imperative. You know?"

"I'm sorry, whatever I did," he whimpers. "I'm just really, truly very sorry."

"A karmic responsibility, if you will." I shrug. "I have to do it."

"Please—sir—I don't want to die."

"Well fatty, you're not alone there."

"Now put your hands behind your head and cross your ankles."

“Take my money. I’m beggin’ ya please. Just take—”

“Shut the *fuck* up. I don’t want any of your goddamn money.”

His face is uglier now, a big red salty mess. He shakes his head and probably thinks this is just a big nightmare and all he has to do is wake himself out of it. I know that feeling like a good friend.

“Then what the hell do you want?”

Three rounds sprain my wrist and nearly send me on my ass. His eyes shut and his flush, craggy face contorts with each discharge. My ears are ringing.

“Shut the *fuck* up.”

A serpentine wisp of smoke emerges from the tip of the long barrel. I’m right up to his face.

I take in my profile again. Two large ketchup stains on my white T-shirt look like something off the set of a Tarantino movie.

The muzzle is against his forehead again. He trembles wildly, still cries and winces and whispers please Jesus no.

It rests there a good minute or so. My stomach is all over the place and out comes a real loud, juicy fart. I let them loose in our barracks all the time. Between Belman’s feet, Lt. Brown’s halitosis, and my flatulence, that place was a Level Four Biohazard. I miss the Sergeant. Not a day goes by without me doubting my guilt for what went down. Not one. I also miss Del Greco and Brownsie and even Pamela. I’d take them all back in a second over these gum-toothed hillbillies that surround me day and night. It keeps getting worse all the time.

The handgun comes down on his bald head, just to shut him up. He falls sideways and a small crimson puddle spreads on the gravel. My back pinches as I scoop up the warm shells.

Police sirens wail in the distance, but my radio is nice and loud, and I take a detour home. They’re playing something good for a change, this great old country song, “Lonely Women Make Good Lovers.”

I sing in this nasally tone, just like I used to do in the showers at the barracks. Marlene once said my singing voice was best suited for enhanced interrogation. She’s the only person who ever knew me and yet still loved me. The only one who accepted me for who I am. But our relationship—like everything else—dissolved into a lifeless mass. I’m crying in little sobs, and then hysterically, wailing like an infant, punching the dashboard and yelling, going much faster than necessary. In a blur my truck swerves off the road, through someone’s manicured front yard, taking out a mailbox, two potted plants, and a garden gnome.

Mike tells me I’m doing great. He keeps telling people that—but I’ve got my doubts.

Easter 2013, Scotland

Donna Pucciani

Picture a farmer crying.
He wears Wellington boots,
a woolen cap and gloves,
a coat against the wind.
He holds a spade. His breath
surrounds his face
in an aura of whitish death.
He has just uncovered
another lamb.

The newspaper reports
thirty-five-foot drifts
in the Highlands, where
newborn lambs have frozen
in mounds, small corpses
limp and scarcely distinguishable
from the ever-falling white.

Windblown dunes sift
among the rills, the downs
where ewes have birthed
then scattered shivering
into grottos.

Where is
the Lamb of God
that haunts these hills at Easter,
sacrificial but tidy in the prayer-books?

The Good Shepherd has left
his flock, his staff and rod
back at the Psalms. David,
a shepherd-boy turned
giant-killer and king,
never knew such sorrow

Amoskeag

as that of the farmer
who swallows tears
as he shovels, who cradles
in his arms the tender lumps
of life, frozen hard as little
statues carved in ice.

Lasting Ephemera

Janet Krauss

The Japanese call the act of planting ephemera
because the plants do not last—they raise
their leaves and succulence to fade back
into earth. But one accepts this arrangement
each spring when the soil offers up
its moistness again spilling over
toiling fingers as they shape receiving spaces.

In the garden laughter of good friends effervesce
into the air, the fine grains of gravel
at their feet become whiter and the yellow
branches of the willows touch the water
as if to reach inward to root, as if
it wasn't enough the trees were already
grounded near what gives them sustenance.

Tears

Sandy McCord

I.

You alight impeccable from your caparisoned
steed, certain that your tears serve
as an example of sadness. Look here!
Not even the sleeves of women dragging
nets through surf have suffered as mine,
their dye running in a river of real sorrow.

*after Impu Monin no Osuke
and Hokusai*

II.

There is a flood that hides
behind her loss; there is
a screaming torrent held
tight inside her constricted
throat. It refuses to flow
and so, day by day, she drowns.

Bridge

Sandy McCord

I.

The bridge hangs between night
and day, still painted white with frost.
Like a span of magpie wings that solidifies
the sky, it draws me into the unknown.
Does it lead me to my love, or to my death
in the warships running under Red Cliff?

*after Chunagon Yakamochi
and Hokusai*

II.

The Charles Bridge pretended to be solid
stone, to be only a road across the Vitava
River, while wielding magic to transport
the traveler from sooty delusions of cold-war
Prague through an avenue of saints
and a thousand years to the city of Wenceslas.

Lingering

Michael Onofrey

He stood on a walkway to the side of the hospital's main entrance gazing at a mostly empty parking lot, Van Nuys, California, a lukewarm June morning, which was developing as if in accordance with a monotonous weather forecast: marine layer due to burn off around noon, hazy sunshine turning into glaring sunshine, smog part of the mix, inland valleys getting the worst air, Van Nuys, mid-San Fernando Valley, prime locale for said miasma—Southern California's version of early summer. And so, as he stood absorbing this, it struck him that both circumstance and weather were conspiring in a play of indifference, for there was no drama, yet he felt there should have been.

In his right hand a somewhat large plastic bag hung, color off-white, contents: tennis shoes, house slippers, soft denim jeans, a cream-colored blouse, a brassiere, a couple of pairs of panties, some socks, a bathrobe, a toothbrush, a tarnished Timex wristwatch, a pair of glasses, dentures, a hairbrush, a wallet, a handbag, and a half dozen paperback books authored by Rex Stout.

It was quiet where he stood even though there was a moderately busy street on the other side of the parking lot, but of course the parking lot was large, which put the street some distance away. He walked further to his right and came to a concrete bench and sat down, his butt feeling the bench's hardness and coolness through a pair of khakis, plastic bag finding residence next to his right hip on the bench. Two crows, laboring in gray air over the parking lot, cawed as they made their way from left to right in his vision. He thought he should be hungry, but he wasn't. He thought he should be a lot of things—devastated, sad, stricken, mournful—but he wasn't. Nor was he jubilant or upbeat. If anything, he was exhausted.

A novel came to mind, *The Stranger*, by Albert Camus, and with this recollection he almost chuckled for it was the first novel he had ever read and he had read it just as he was getting out of high school, which was a time when he couldn't really read, a time when his reading ability was that of a six- or seven-year-old. He had needed a dictionary for words on most every page, some pages five or six words. *The Stranger*—a relatively simple book in terms of reading, but a complex book in terms of theme, or themes—what a way to begin reading, which subsequently led to his carrying a paperback dictionary and a novel everywhere he went for the next eight years.

Some people were going in and out of the hospital's main doors

to his left, not a lot of people, just moving figures in his peripheral vision, figures too far away for sounds of conversation to reach him, if indeed there was conversation. But then there was someone near him, someone smoking a cigarette, the cigarette's odor alerting him to the person's presence, while at the same time drawing his attention to the large, trashcan-like receptacle that was nearby and that served as an ashtray for smokers, a receptacle full of sand and to his left, a receptacle that he hadn't given much thought to, but now, putting two and two together, he understood that the bench went with the huge ashtray, a smokers' area of sorts. He further realized that if he had been a smoker he would have understood this straight off.

The person to his left flicked the cigarette over the wide-mouthed ashtray that was housed in a wooden latticework frame, motion registering in his side vision, particulars, such as cigarette or hand or arm, absent, just as all the other particulars about the person were absent. If anything, there was simply a presence along with the smell of cigarette smoke and some motion. His mother had been a smoker, a heavy smoker, and now, with this thought bubbling, he understood the first order of business he would attend to regarding his mother's house which would soon be his house once the name on the deed was officially switched over to his name in what he envisioned as a simple bureaucratic procedure thanks to a living trust that had been drawn up the previous year. He would rid the house of tobacco odor and gunk, a job that would require throwing out all the curtains and linens and towels and throw rugs, as well as some of the furniture. Wall-to-wall carpeting, which was in the living room and dining room, would have to be shampooed. He'd rent a machine to do that. Next, he'd go room by room and put a stain-killer undercoat/primer on the walls and ceilings and trim and doors and all other paint-able surfaces, sanding and patching where needed, all this before the paint went on, a room-by-room project that would allow him to live in the house while he did this work.

The person to his left cleared his throat, and indeed it was 'his' throat, a phlegmy sound, a 'male' sound. He turned his head a notch, which wasn't enough to look up at the man's face, but it was enough to see an off-white plastic bag hanging from the man's one hand, the right hand, the hand nearest himself, left hand evidently controlling the cigarette.

"Doesn't seem like a Tuesday," the man said.

With this, he turned in his posture to look at the man, body and face. The man wasn't smiling, but neither was he frowning. He was a heavysset man and his face was fleshy and clean-shaven, complexion pinkish-white, while here and there on that large face broken purple capillaries lay just beneath a paper-thin layer of skin like loose clusters

of dropped sewing thread. The man's nose was substantial as was everything else about him, glasses included, frames black and probably made of plastic. From the underside of the man's chin wattled flesh merged with a thick neck. A short-sleeved plaid shirt and a pair of large khakis were on the man's body. His left wrist had a silver wristwatch, band solid silver and embedded with pieces of turquoise. Splayed white hair, thin and dry, rose from a visible scalp that began well back on the man's forehead. Behind the lenses of the glasses, blue irises, each with a black dot, were settled on a middle distance, which made him wondered if the man had spoken to him or to that distance.

His own vision now went to the off-white plastic bag that the man's right hand gripped, thus verifying what he had suspected. It was the same kind of bag that he had on the bench next to himself, and, as with his bag, it was weighted.

The man brought his cigarette up and inhaled and then lowered the cigarette and then exhaled after a drawn-out moment as if that moment were a pause in a conversation that was about to begin.

"It seems like a Sunday," the man said. "It's too quiet for a weekday."

The man now looked down at him as if to examine him in the same way that he had examined the man, a head-to-toe appraisal, and what the man probably found was—fifty-something years old, rangy, thinning russet hair combed straight back, nondescript bifocals on a sun-brown clean-shaven face, clothing similar to the man's own, khakis and a short-sleeved plaid shirt, but no wristwatch, and, with regards to footwear, sport shoes as compared to the man's black cowboy boots. Size, in all departments, was different.

"I saw a priest go by," the man said. "He went by while I was at the nurses' station filling out forms."

He almost nodded at this, but for some reason he didn't, perhaps because the man brought his cigarette up and drew hard while his vision went back out to the parking lot. After a moment, smoke ran lazily out of the man's nose and mouth.

"I'm going to have to call my son and daughter," the man said, voice at normal volume. "Son up in San Jose, daughter in Boise, Idaho. After that... Well, I don't know. Of course there's paperwork and bureaucracy—Social Security, banking, insurance companies. They told me I'd get the death certificate in a week to ten days, 'ten working days.' The lady I spoke to at the cremation place told me the same thing, 'ten working days,' which is when I can go over to her office and pick up the ashes. She told me to put a check in the mail today. All this while I was at the nurses' station, me on my cellphone, but of course the woman at the nurses' station provided a list with numbers and addresses. But first, there was that decision—cremation

or burial. Once I said, ‘Cremation,’ I was handed the cremation list. Did you go that route?”

The man’s eyes were now on him and he was about to respond, ‘Yes,’ but the man began talking before he responded.

“Everything is so ...arranged,” the man said. “Prearranged and efficient. But of course how could it be otherwise, given the situation?”

Technically a question, but the man seemed not to be expecting or needing an answer, for his view distinctly shifted to the parking lot while his left hand brought the cigarette up, lips forming to accept this, lips slightly purplish.

Continuing to look at the man’s face, which remained devoid of emotion and/or expression, it occurred to him that the man didn’t mind his looking, which was a reconnoitering of sorts on his part because he found himself utterly curious about what this man was feeling and what his reactions were to such feelings. Thus far, though, all he had to go on were the man’s words.

“Of course it was all necessary—decisions, following instructions, appointments, tests, waiting for results, and a plethora of medications—the pharmacy, the doctor’s office, the hospital, the back-and-forth, the in-and-out, the waiting, the waiting, the waiting. Always waiting. Of course she had to retire, no choice about that. This was two years ago. I stopped working as well. Fortunately we could afford it. No real problems in that regard. But still ...In sum, it had turned into a full-time job, two full-time jobs. And what was the end of it? Congestive heart failure. By the time I arrived, it was all over.” He had heard mention of the same thing, “heart failure,” himself, while he was at the nurses’ station. He further noted ‘two years,’ which he could relate to in much the same way as what the man had voiced. This one-way conversation had turned uncanny.

He was about to nod as to indicate agreement or understanding with what the man had just said, but the man was looking out at the parking lot with what seemed to be disregard for his presence, which left him feeling more like a voyeur or a bystander as opposed to a participant.

But now the man looked at him, looked at his face, and with this the man said, “And now what am I to do? We were married for forty-two years.”

The man paused, eye contact continuing, which made him feel like he should offer an answer of some sort to the question: “What am I to do?” But of course he had no answer for that. Then there was the other part, which told him that it was the man’s wife who had died.

“Last couple of years were...trying,” the man said, eyes shifting back to that middle distance in the parking lot.

“There seemed to be a purpose when the children were young, purpose and meaning. But as things progressed and as the children grew and as our investments and bank accounts grew, ‘purpose’ seemed to diminish. And then these last couple of years . . .” The man trailed off as if his words and thoughts had gotten lost in the parking lot.

“And now, as I was walking out of the hospital lighting a cigarette,” the man picked up, “there was this need for . . . ‘purpose,’ or meaning, or something. As if there should be some purpose or meaning to this. But I can’t find one. All I can find is ‘experience.’”

The man’s view returned to his face as he sat looking up at the man.

“I feel empty,” the man said. “Vacuumed out. I wish I were religious. I wish I believed in . . . something. Something beyond: ‘Well, I’ll go home and make a cup of coffee.’ But how can I believe, when I don’t believe? Belief isn’t a matter of filling out a form.”

The man moistened his lips with his tongue.

“There is this feeling for ‘meaning and purpose,’ and it is vividly tangible. And yet: What is there beyond simple experience?”

The man looked out at the parking lot.

“I need something. I am looking for something, searching for something, which in fact might not exist. That ‘something’ might be a fiction, but my looking for it and needing it isn’t.”

He paused. And then he continued.

“My friends tell me: ‘I raised a family.’ They of course are talking about their situation, as if this were an accomplishment, which I can claim, too. And in a sense it is—accomplishment. But what about after the family is raised and gone? What then?”

The man tilted his large head and said, “And something else—It seems to me, or seemed at the time, that raising a family was a completely natural thing—an urge that was being fulfilled. Tough at times, yes, but natural. So in my estimation to give family ‘accomplishment’ is like awarding eating or sleeping purposeful value. ‘The purpose and meaning of my life, which I fully accomplished, was eating.’ Put that way, it sounds absurd. Absolutely absurd. But—that may be all there is.”

He raised a hand, the hand with the cigarette, a smoking wand, a gesture of exasperation, or question.

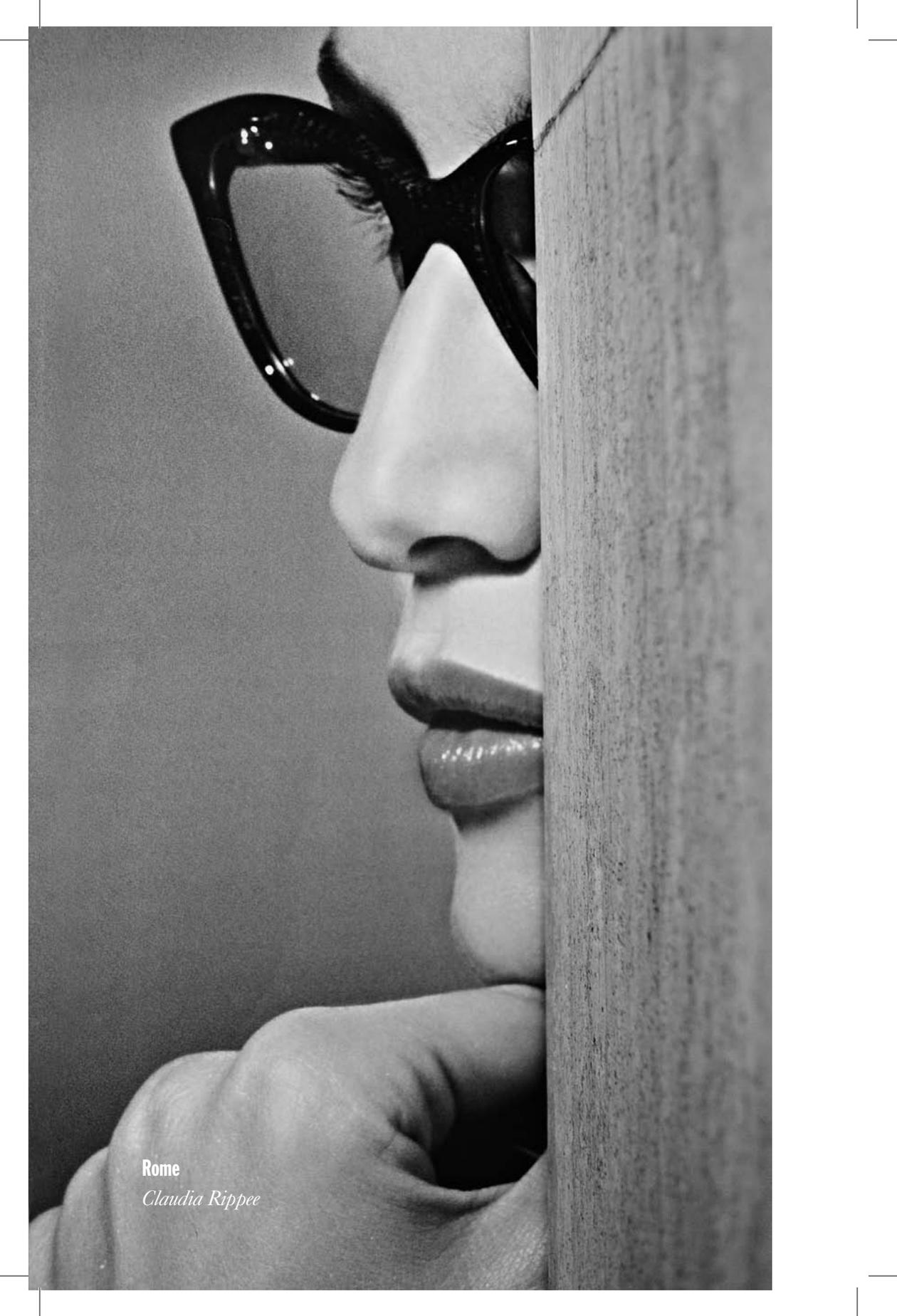
“A Tuesday—as no-nothing as that sounds—another day. Yet individually we all suffer. Not together, but individually. A true loneliness—private, heartfelt, and sacred.”

The man stood. And then the hand came down and he walked off, silence following him like a shadow.

Stepping down from the walkway, the man entered the parking lot

Onofrey

and walked laboriously and after some strides he glanced down at the burnt-down cigarette between his fingers and flicked it away to be rid of it. The cigarette landed and bounced, a shower of little sparks, and then there it was, smoldering on black asphalt like a lingering event.

A black and white, high-contrast photograph of a woman's face in profile, looking through a narrow vertical slit. She is wearing dark, thick-rimmed glasses. Her hand is visible at the bottom, resting against the edge of the slit. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of her nose, lips, and the texture of the surface she is looking through.

Rome
Claudia Rippee

Abandoned

Nathan Alling Long

for Andrew

You are here again, in a large, empty farm house deep in the South. It is old and white, with green shutters and a rusting tin roof. The unpolished floors creak, the large windows rest crooked in their frames. You stand a moment, taking in the musty scent, and touch the damp dusty wood of the front door.

You have not been in this house before, but in others like it, too large and outdated to maintain, too stoic and majestic to tear down. Despite its size, it is a simple house, with high ceilings to draw away the heat. The long hallway through the center, with screen doors at either end, makes a breezeway in the summer. The rooms, you know, sit squarely on either side, four down, four up, with a kitchen at the back and a wide porch that skirts two sides, to keep it from looking too square and bulky.

You go from room to room, shaking free each door—for they are always left shut, as though to preserve the remains of the private lives they once held. Each time, before entering, you imagine what might be on the other side—a lavishly furnished room, a wild animal who's come in through a broken window, an old inhabitant living out its final days—or a corpse.

But you find none of these. The rooms are sparse, abandoned. You take in the browning wallpaper, open the drawers of the limp and crippled furniture that remains. You peer in the closets, and finally, you look out the windows at the fields and hills in the distance. Perhaps you find a book of interest, a coin, a teacup, or an old toy. You hold it in your hands as you walk through the house, contemplating whether taking it is theft if the house has been forgotten, and will likely collapse in long slow heaves, alone and unnoticed among in the fields.

Upstairs, you stand in the hall, imagining who once lived here, what daily life must have been like. Though the house is fascinating to you now, you imagine how slow life must have been, how boring. You wonder in which rooms people made love, what secret desires breathed in these walls.

And you recall a summer long ago, that boy you had walked with along the river, how you kept talking and walking until you were far from anything familiar. Tired, you both sat and drank the last of

your water and ate the one orange you brought, and though you were hungry and could have consumed a dozen oranges, you shared it with your friend, and felt empty and clean. Then you two swam naked in the river, the cold water stirring up your heart and making it beat fast. After, you both lay in the grasses, the hot sun drying your body, feeling like a fire on your skin. Everything shone and you had never felt so radiant, like the cold water and hot sun had awoken each cell. You lay there, staring at the blue sky, each pulse of your heart a shiver and quake. You felt both content and ready to devour everything around you—the river, the meadow, the hills in the distance—the earth itself.

Then you looked over at the boy, your friend, lying beside you, the last drops of water shimmering on his skin, and you wanted to devour him as well—you felt it before you could stop yourself, before you remembered that he was another male. That long history of human passion you had been taught and memorized, but never exactly felt, suddenly made sense. You turned away, terrified at how strong it was, as though you'd just discovered that the sun itself lay within you.

You got up, put on clothes, told him you wanted to keep walking. Then you took off running across a field, your palms open wide against the stalks of grass, which felt like a thousand small whips against the skin. You did not run so much as fall forward, catching yourself over and over, wanting to outpace that feeling you had by the river, wanting to fall off the Earth and onto another one, the one that existed a moment earlier.

But you couldn't fall off the Earth, and your friend followed, like it was a game of chase, and so you kept running, though you were empty and tired, until you came to a farmhouse, abandoned and still, surrounded by fields.

You rushed onto the porch, drew the screen door back and pushed hard against the front door. You were surprised when it finally rattled open, the cobwebs anchored to the frame breaking apart like rags. You walked inside, your footsteps echoing in the empty hallway. You stood and breathed in the dust, felt the cool, shadowy air. For a moment you could almost believe this was the world you were falling towards. Or perhaps from now on, the world would keep unfolding anew like this, every moment an unexpected wonder.

Then you heard him on the porch and heard the screen wheeze open behind you. You took to the stairs and opened the first door you could find. The room was large and empty, except for a tall mirror covering the hole of the fireplace and the frame of a bed leaning against the wall. Your friend burst in behind you and grabbed you by the waist, toppling you to the floor.

As you wrestled, rolling across the floor, you thought of nothing except how maybe you could burn this feeling off by something akin

Long

to fighting. For a split second, you saw your face in the mirror, but you turned away. You needed privacy, even from yourself. Whatever you were doing, whatever you would do, you could not look. You grabbed his leg, his arm, you try to pin him down, to free yourself from his grip. But you did not want him to let go.

Still, you arched your back off the floor and twisted around, and now your face is against his, your cheeks against each other, your eyes fierce and staring into his. He grabs the back of your head and presses your lips to his. And then you are kissing. And you think, yes, the world is like this, one shock after another. But even then you don't know what that means. The shock of him pulling off your clothes, the shock of it being too rough and unstoppable, the shock of how fast you release, and how long he takes. Then, that the kissing had ended, that he will not touch you now, that you are more apart than you ever remember. The not calling, the no longer taking walks together, the swirl of uncertainty and fear. The way your daily life now feels flat and hollow, the fear elation will never come again, the months, then years, waiting for it, and fearing it at the same time.

And now, years have passed, and you have been with others, and you have been alone, which you are at the moment, in this other abandoned farmhouse, making love to no one on the floor of an empty upstairs room, the sound of your breath and heartbeat echoing off the walls.

The Adverb Poem: A Sort of Love Song

Deborah Brown

Surely it didn't happen that way. Certainly
I remember. How emptily—could I not know?
How deeply forget? How casually could
you speak that? How flimsily report it?
How it happened, faithfully, how it didn't,
gracefully, delicately. I am fatuously welcoming—
to blissfully— your overture. I am disgracefully
improvident and luckily rich
in certain senses, though not
carnivorously. I have exhaustedly
written these lines to you,
flippantly, not answering, yet worriedly
tipping past the tipping point, pointedly.
I am gratefully, gratefully, responding
to your adverbial touch,
modifying as it does the verbs,
the actions, adverbs being the first
to go, the first to get cut, the last hired,
an underclass in the language pool, but lovely,
delightfully, sinfully, telling us what the verbs have
bombasted in bass notes. You know an adverb
colors the hair brightly, the false eyelashes
glaringly, a beauty spot by a lip, darkly.

Ghost Dance

Deborah Brown

It's one of those nights when ghosts tap
on the roof, one of the nights when they sound
like birds dancing up there. Their steps echo all
night, echo in one room and then another, the echoes
split like Echo herself, her voice left to cry out
over valleys and mountains, forever uncollected.

It's one of those nights when I think it is the ghost dance
the Lakota performed at Wounded knee knowing
what they would become. It's one of those nights when
I hear their steps that I want the light birdlike steps of
everyone I've lost— man and woman and dog—to persist
with the light tapping that tells me they are still here,
still part of the world I live in, even if only in for the moment.

Fields

Jack Cooper

When there were fields
small boys dug holes up to their chins
and pretended to be the living dead

They made cardboard forts
and invited the girls in
to roll up their skirts

They found dinosaur bones and meteorites
solid gold coins and arrowheads
with stories that grew like magic crystals

In the time of fields
in the golden summers
of weeds and rabbits
dogs and horny toads
no one talked about the war overseas
or the poor family down the street
or the hobos in the camp by the tracks

Everyone forgot about Nancy
who was killed by a runaway bus at Christmas
and Carlos who lost his hand in a cement mixer
and Kalib Johnson who got teased at school for being slow

In the distant open fields
little children and dogs
and creatures of the sand
were anointed with impenetrable dust
before the fallen came home in flags
before time counted

A Daily Making with Words: Poet Mark Pawlak on the Poetic Journal

Kristina Wright

*In this interview, Pawlak discusses his latest book of poetry *Go to the Pine: Quoddy Journals 2005-2010* (Plein Air Editions/Bootstrap Press, 2012). With carefully crafted observations and startling shifts in focus, this remarkable poetic journal, a literary genre which fuses elements of poetry and journal writing, undulates with a quiet intensity. Ruminations on the natural beauty of the Maine Coast—"skittering shorebirds" and "salt marsh with views of bay, distant headlands and sea beyond"—juxtaposed with nostalgic glimpses of human imprint—a "fisherman's shack, long abandoned," a "lobster boat up on blocks"—bring into bold relief the fleeting passage of time in a timeless place.*

An Amos interview

Talk about the poetic journal form? How does a poetic journal differ from a writer's notebook?

I've always kept a writers notebook. It was something my first poetry teacher Denise Levertov encouraged me to do as a way of "inviting the muse." It was something she herself did. She described such a notebook as a place to jot down lines from poems you found important or passages that expanded or deepened your understanding of poetry. If a word or phrase or image came to you, then write it down in your notebook, she told us; also snippets of conversation you overheard, your observations of people and objects. My notebooks have been the place where my own ideas about poetry have evolved, as well as where many of my own poems have gotten their start. I started to write poetic journals about 15 years ago. It is different from my writer's notebook, different also from traditional diaries or journals that focus primarily on recounting a day's experience. Poetic journals emphasize the act of writing itself in collaboration with the day's account.

The roots of the words poetic and journal are Greek and French. Combined, they mean a "daily making with words," emphasis on making. It's a literary genre joining aspects of poetry with the daily, or near daily, "takes" of journal writing. So it's born of twin impulses: to observe and track changes in daily life and to memorialize experience. Poetic journals owe allegiances to Asian writing — particularly the

Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon (completed in 1002), the 17th century travel journal Narrow Road to the Interior of the great Japanese haiku poet Matsuo Bashō; also the poetic diaries of Masaoka Shiki.

You published an earlier poetic journal “Hart’s Neck Haibun” in your poetry collection (Official Versions). Can you explain what haibun is?

Haibun is a Japanese form in which prose and haiku are spliced together. It goes back to Basho, who perfected the form in his travel journals. I adapted the haibun to suit my purpose without strict adherence to Japanese models. My poetic journals treat the haibun form imaginatively much the way that Ted Berrigan treated the sonnet form in his Sonnets. The essence of haibun is what I’m after, which is terse prose and prose narrative combined with keen observation of nature (including people) put down on paper as minimalist poems or poetic epiphanies. Here’s an example from “Hart’s Neck Haibun, Book V: 2004”:Kristina

July 28

5:38 A.M., sun not yet up but the glow of dawn spread over all from the point of Hart’s Neck. The lowest of low tides. You could walk across the harbor in places but for the muck that sucks your shoes off (I’ve tried it). Even the two children’s dories at the far end of the neighbor’s long pier and the floating dock they are always tethered to are today aground. One lobster pot, tied to its buoy is only half submerged. A pair of Great Blue Heron at water’s edge, pick their way among rocks and seaweed. A seagull shadows them, hoping for an invitation to breakfast, or at very least an opportunity to clean up their scraps. Much thrumming of motors already, shouts of lobstermen hauling gear in preparation for the days’ work. And now the sun is climbing the ladder of fir branches.

July 29

*Time here measured
by the movement
of Great Blue Herons
stalking crabs
in the shallows
at low tide.*

Your poetic journals invoke specific places. The setting for “Hart’s Neck Haibun” is mid-coast Maine, and for “Go to the Pine” it’s Down-east Maine, Lubec and Eastport, right at the Canadian border.

For about 14 years I rented a cottage on Hart’s Neck on the Saint George peninsula, spending summer vacations there with my family. That’s where I began to write poetic journals. My entries included things noticed from the porch overlooking Tenant’s Harbor where I sat reading and writing early each morning. Other entries recorded things that caught my attention while strolling the rocky shores, or touring the surrounding area by car on rainy days. Observations about lobstermen and their boats, about the varieties of luxury yachts at anchor, about the flora and fauna of the area, about the local residents and their habits filled the pages, as did place names, fragments of overheard conversations, and words and phrases found on signs, on restaurant placemats, and in the regional newspapers. I continued this practice of writing a poetic journal when, starting about 8 years ago, we vacationed farther up the coast in the Lubec and Quoddy Head area bordering the Bay of Fundy.

So may your journals be classified as pastoral: observations of nature, geography, and local people?

In those two journal sequences, yes; but that’s not the only locus, not the only subject matter of my poetic journals. I have subsequently extended the practice to the urban environment where I live and work—Cambridge and Boston. I’m putting the finishing touches on another collection of poetic journals that draws upon my daily commute to the harbor campus of UMass Boston. Its working title is “Inbound/Outbound,” referring to the Red Line subway I ride each day. This book consists of prose and poems—haibun again—observations of fellow commuters and the homeless denizens of the city. Like my Maine journals, it contains overheard conversation and found text, too. Here’s an example:

Take Me Home

*Female street musician
standing on subway platform at rush hour,
guitar case open at her feet
into which commuters awaiting trains,*

*myself included,
have dropped coins, a few bills.*

*Chinese or Korean,
she strums and sings
in heavily accented English,
over and over, just the chorus
of John Denver's "Country Roads:"
Take me home
To the place
I belong...*

*Her tongue wrestling to enunciate
the "l's, the "r"s
West Virginia,
Mountain momma,
Take me home
Country roads.*

I detect the influence of William Carlos Williams. Are there American precedents for the kind of poetic journal poems you write that complement the Asian influences?

Yes. Readers of William Carlos Williams' short much-anthologized poems such as "The Red Wheel Barrow," "By the Road to the Contagious Hospital" and "The Pure Products of America" forget or don't know that these nuggets originated in his 1923 experimental book *Spring and All*, which, much like the haibun form, combined imaginative and descriptive prose with poems. Decades later *New Directions* reprinted *Spring and All* in the anthology titled *Imaginations*, alongside his other seminal experimental books from that time. Webster Schott, in his introduction to the anthology observed that *Spring and All* was "not wholly poetry, but set with the jewels of poetry"—an apt description of my poetic journals, too.

Besides Williams, are there other American precedents for the kind of poetic journal poems you write?

Another source is the observational poetics of the Objectivist group who followed in Williams' footsteps: George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff, and Lorine Niedecker in particular. The poetic journal, in its attention to the details of daily life, embraces and extends Williams's renowned dictum, "no ideas but in things," and George Oppen's practice of "thinking with things as they exist," both of whom

celebrated and encouraged a poetry grounded in concrete images precisely observed. City poet Harvey Shapiro said this about the Objectivists:

“...from them I got the sense that the world did not exist to be exploited in rhetoric. That there was a way of writing about objects, things, landscapes, trees, that gave the object its own life, its own space, while still permitting the poet’s imagination to create the poem.”

I like to think that my poems follow that prescription.

Wasn’t this approach to writing poems taken up by many of the post-WW II poets associated with Donald Allen’s anthology *The New American Poetry*.

Exactly right. And the practice, particularly of the Black Mountain poets, of “composition by field” and writing in open forms resonates with the poetic journal form I’m working in. So does the principle Charles Olsen articulated in his essay “Projective Verse” that “One perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception.” No narrative bridges, no filler, one precisely rendered perception put down next to another, meaning constructed by means of juxtaposition, parataxis.

In the early 1960s when Donald Allen’s anthology first appeared, the poets he included considered themselves to be in opposition to the academy, didn’t they? But they were also different from one another in the kinds of poems they wrote.

True enough. Allen somewhat arbitrarily, on principles of geography and coterie, grouped them in his anthology: The San Francisco Renaissance, The New York School, and The Black Mountain Group. Nevertheless, whether east coast or west coast, many if not all of them, embraced an open poetic form that resembled the journal poem I’ve been describing. Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, Joanne Kyger, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac, all of whom were influenced by Buddhist philosophies, wrote poetic journals. Frank O’Hara’s Lunch Poems are poetic journals of a kind, as are many of James Schuyler’s poems. Among the Black Mountain Group: Robert Creeley (*A Day Book*, *Pieces*), Denise Levertov (“*Top Stay Alive*”), John Wieners, and Paul Blackburn (*The Journals*) did so, too.

There is a meditative quality to your poems in *Go to the Pine*. You mentioned West Coast poets influenced by Buddhist philosophies. Do you feel a similar affinity to Buddhist principles? Do you meditate?

Writing journal poems requires a certain discipline, putting down words on the page that are records of things observed on a daily or near daily basis. It requires a state of active, open attention to the “still smoking” present. I should not have been surprised then that one reader of *Go to the Pine*, my “Quoddy” journal poems, asked me whether, like her, I practiced Buddhist meditation. I replied that I didn’t, not in any formal way. But I do recognize the similarities to meditation in what I do. Both are solitary exercises in mindfulness. When I compose poems, my eyes are wide open, looking out on the world with a fresh gaze, seeing details in the commonplace that in the hubbub of daily activity go unnoticed. It is a way of listening to my mind’s whispers, connecting the inner and outer selves, my emotions and ideas, with perceptions of things around me as if the boundary between self and outside world were a semi-permeable membrane. Putting these observations down on paper is then for me a meditative practice. The key word being practice, an exercise performed daily with no end in mind, no goal to achieve, emphasis on process over product or progress.

It strikes me that the apparent stylistic casualness of your poetic journals might cause them to be viewed as unfinished, drafts? Have you ever been taken to task for a lack of selectivity with regard to your poetic material in the journals?

There is always the danger that readers will miss seeing that casualness of tone as a cultivated style and the breadth of inclusiveness as lacking discrimination. But I’m confident that my discerning readers will “get” it. I have always loved Theodore Roethke’s quip: “It is hard to be both plain and direct and not appear a fool to contemporaries fed on allusions, sibylline coziness, hints and shadows.” Frank O’Hara is a good example of a poet who cultivated casualness as a style. I forget who it was that described his *Lunch Poems* as “I do this, I do that poems.” (Mine could be described as “I overheard this; I saw that.”)

So you don't advocate the Beat principle of "first thought, best thought?" There is some cooking involved in your journals? I'm thinking of Robert Lowell's put-down of the Beat poems as "raw" versus the kind of "cooked" poems he advocated.

MP: Allen Ginsberg made immediacy the foundation of his art: "first thought, best thought."—improvisation, bodily presence, and a Buddhist immersion in the passing moment. My poems are not spontaneous riffs on passing thoughts. My inspiration may be of the moment, but I do revise, applying craft to give shape to the experience, to hone the poem to convey the sense of immediacy and sudden insight. But I'm not trying to achieve the high-modernist ideal of the poem as patiently constructed artifact. I want readers to feel the fresh breeze blowing through my poems.

Your journal poems strike me as a mosaic of fragments. Was it your intention that they be read that way?

"And when is a piece that resembles a fragment—really the whole?" "That's a rhetorical question posed by Kimiko Hahn, in her own recent poetic journal, or *nikki*: *Narrow Road to the Interior*. (She borrowed Basho's title.) A 'fragment' literally means a piece of something, a part broken off, detached, or incomplete. Sappho's poems are indeed fragments that have come down to us from antiquity, pieces of once whole lyrics she composed. But in the poetic journal, there is no completed whole that the individual units or poems are the remnants of, just as a life can't be viewed as complete while it is still being lived. This sense goes against the nature of poetic journals, namely, its ongoingness. Philip Whalen, whose poems commonly lacked any title but for the date they were composed, famously resisted a collection of his complete poems for just this reason.

You mentioned Kimiko Hahn. Are there other poets among your contemporaries who are writing poetic journals?

Indeed. Quite a few. Tyler Doherty and Tom Morgan recently compiled *For the Time Being: The Bootstrap Book of Poetic Journals*. I recommend it as both a contemporary history of the form, plus a comprehensive anthology. (Yes. I'm included in it.) Interestingly, since the anthology was published, I keep coming across additional poets writing poetic journals that should be included in a subsequent edition.

One of your Quoddy Journals (6:VIII:06) describes the elusiveness of capturing “the poem [you] most want to write,” a paradox that expresses the ecstasy and the anguish of the writing process itself. What advice would you offer to aspiring poets, many of whom submit their work to journals like Amoskeag, to “invite the muse” as your mentor advised you?

Advice? I would tell poets starting out to read omnivorously, broadly, deeply. Find poets that inspire you; find poems that stimulate you, that afford you pleasure as “sight, sound, and intellection” (Objectivist poet Louis Zukofsky’s criteria). Develop writing habits that work for you; establish your own form of ‘practice.’ That will be an invitation to the muse. Let William Carlos Williams serve as example to you. He had a full-time practice as a pediatrician. He delivered a million babies in his career, but still found time in the moments between house calls and appointments to scribble notes for poems on his prescription pads. He found inspiration everywhere. He demonstrated that there is no proffered subject for poetry—anything can go into a poem. Read the masters, but also read journals to see what your peers are up to. Attend poetry readings whenever you can. Poetry slams are fine, but poems meant for the page when read aloud offer something different in terms of craft. Find fellow poets and share your work. Invite friendly criticism. Seeing your bad writing habits reflected in the mirror of another’s eyes is how you grow. Fellow poets can also offer one another mutual support. More than talent, you need persistence to succeed, but you also have to be honest with yourself. Finally, you must have the courage to ask yourself the toughest question, the one posed by Rilke in his Letters to a Young Poet: “Must I write?”

We Moved Like Water Flows

Judith Goedeke

the door slammed behind me like a head-on collision
I walked through a labyrinth of stark corridors
behind a broad stone rectangle in a police uniform
more doors, jangle of keys, clang of bolts
one smash up after another sealed in grimy air
light slicked down like rancid butter
he took me to a room with a few wooden chairs
the guard said I was crazy, it wouldn't do any good
show them any mercy, they take advantage, gang up on you
I heard them coming, shuffling down the hall in silence
they filed in, dressed alike, checked me out hard
the guard's face stared through the little plexiglas window

you could tell by their eyes, and who got which chairs
which ones were the alphas
who was playing dead just to survive
who was belligerent
who was okay
who was completely lost
we all looked at the floor as we said our names

then we stood in a circle
stretched our heads gently toward the heavens
breathed deeply, unlocked our knees
arced our arms overhead, hands met, came down slowly
then arced in front of our navels
we gathered clean, pure qi energy from the air
and brought it slowly inside
we moved like water flows, undeterred by rocks in the way
our breath and the swish of clothes rustled like a stream

afterwards, the stories tumbled out
poverty and drugs, voices strained, edgy
beatings and abandonment, whispered betrayal
abuse passed on, combative
hungry children's eyes, voices breaking
armed robberies, monotone
stabblings, no way out
the sight of a dying man's hand on the ground-

Amoskeag

his nails bitten down and raw made hot tears splash-
onto the hand wielding the gun

they bore broad pink scars, blind eyes and missing teeth
limps, wrinkled burns and a paralyzed hand
no woman unscathed, not one

still, the gavels came down sharp
as if justice were a clear and certain thing

To

Terry Savoie

To _____

When I read that Cherokee children
were fed mockingbird hearts to better
enable them to learn their fathers' tough
tongue, those hard-edged, harsh sounds
the great men made when arriving home
after a hunt, the mockingbird being the
master mimic now in & one with the child,
I turned my thoughts to you, my still-born
daughter, who never did hear my words nor
ever would have a bird's heart to ingest for
a tutor as you greedily ate away my heart
until you seemed to know my language,
the words I never spoke locked inside.

Walking the River Trail

Edythe Haendel Schwartz

Rio Limay, Patagonia

The puelche wind wails spite
down the canyon, its appetite

rapacious. We shudder, eavesdroppers
drawn to the pitted bank where a horse lowers

her head to drink and willows bow
below repeated scorch. What we know—

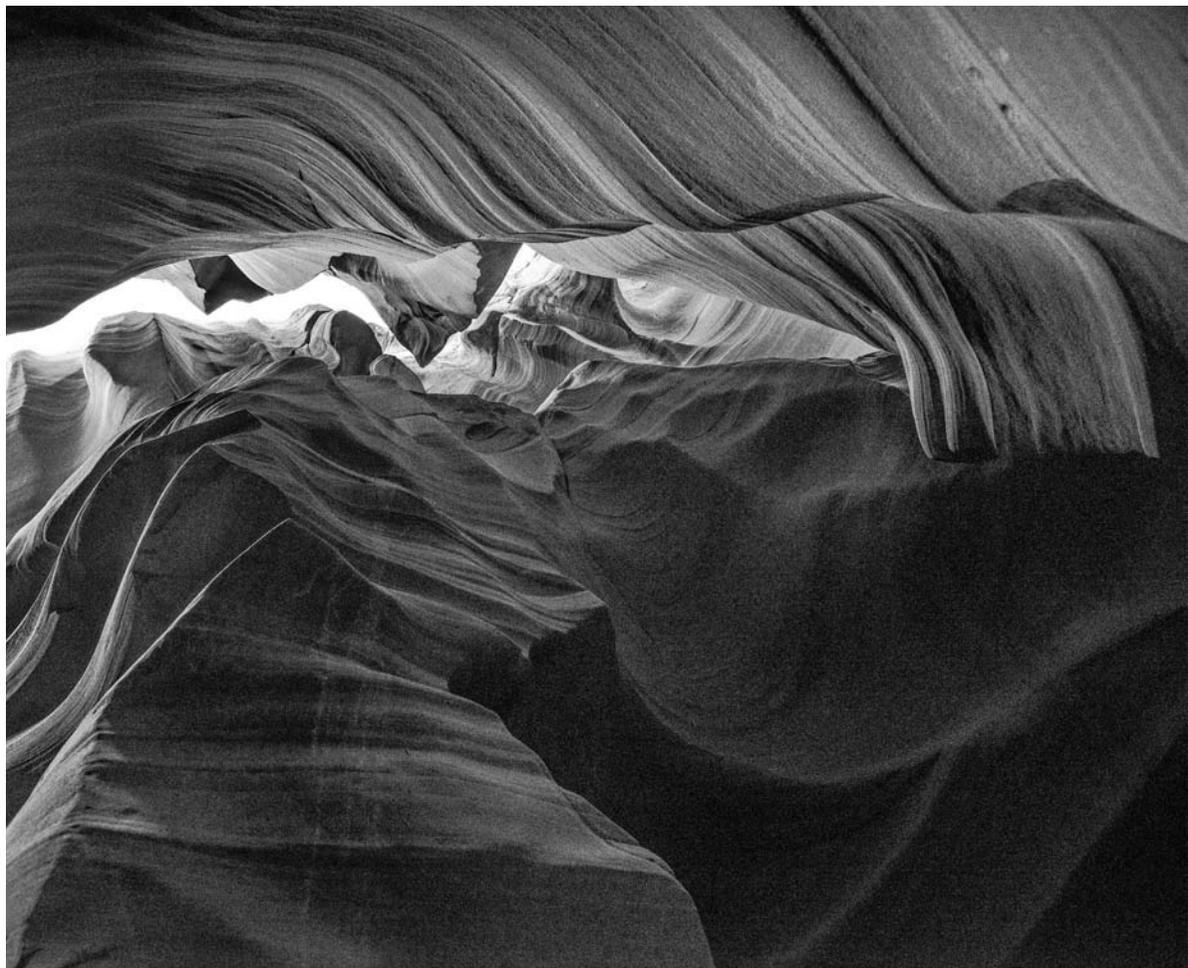
slopes strewn with shacks. Tin, twine, and wire
bind the people to the river

swashing over nenio, jarilla, grasses
in a sea of sutures—

We watch the condors dive for carrion,
eat our lunch among the bones

of the Mapuche. Once there was a nation
here, a living tongue. No reservations.





Sandstone Wave

Qian Sun

Conjunctio*

Amy Irvine McHarg

*All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flames are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.*

~ T.S. Eliot, “The Four Quartets”

October glided in on a wakeless liquid sky. The days were so seamless that even I, who had been scanning the atmosphere for signs to support my theories of apocalyptic climate change, could not find flaw. The days were shorter but perfectly crisp, like the ripened apples on the old tree in the creek bottom—an unpruned specimen that had, over decades, grown entwined with a wild juniper—until it was impossible to tell which branches sprung from what trunk.

I had a new rifle, a Remington 7mm.08. It was small and light, with yet enough firepower for larger game. Or a larger predator, if the need arose to take one down. After all, there had been the bear that killed my daughter’s pet goat, then came after my husband when he arrived on the scene to investigate. And there had been the unmistakable scream of a female mountain lion in heat—which, one night, sliced cleanly through the surround sound of a battle scene my husband and I watched on the flat screen. The next day I found her tracks just beyond our bedroom window. Not far from where our daughter often played.

This gun then, was perfect—for a small woman like me. I practiced at a firing range in the desert below the mesa on which we live—a dry and rugged place where, just as you pressed the trigger, a jack rabbit or a tumbleweed would undoubtedly cross the line of fire. Such unexpected movement flustered me; it took a lot of nerve just to shoot the paper. I am not like my husband, Herb, who is almost assassin-like: Even with a 7mm mag, it’s one swift movement for him to shoulder it, aim, and fire—and even at 400 yards the bullet hits the bullseye most every time. And as an elk bolts over a distant ridgeline, he can drop to one knee and do the same. Me, I could hit the second ring at 200 yards, sometimes the first, if I really shored myself up. That was good enough for a clean kill, I reasoned. That is, if the animal complied by standing broadside and still for at least a minute. I didn’t care. All I hoped for was no suffering.

It wasn’t always like that. The imperfect aim, I mean, and the reticence to shoot. There was a time before marriage and motherhood,

when I had a steadiness and libido, in both body and mind. Once I stood on the porch of our home and watched as Herb and his fourteen-year-old son took turns with a bb gun, trying repeatedly to hit a beer can which was tied to a string and swinging from the branch of a tree in the yard. They had finally concluded that one of the sights was off, that the gun needed fixing. I just had this certainty about it, which made me put the butt to my shoulder and sink four shots in a row, dead-center.

But then I unleashed a small human into the world. I had climbed sheer rock walls, fought forest fires, and scooped broken bodies into ambulances, but motherhood took away my nerve and moxie. Our guns were locked in a safe, but still I worried incessantly. Just a few years before, my father had taken his own life with his hunting rifle. Maybe that was the reason for the new compulsion—which drove me like steely cowboy with a bullwhip. I could do very little but be as safe and certain as possible, at all times.

I believed it to be for my daughter's sake. I began to hide in the house, behind locked doors. I installed smoke detectors in every room—which was overkill, in an eight-hundred-square-foot space. I scrubbed every surface incessantly—determined to eradicate any germ, dust mite, or mold spore that dared co-exist. All this, in place of running naked in the desert. Of making out with my husband in public. Of reading poetry and building bonfires and painting with pastel crayons the vivid, visceral images in my dreams.

And so purchasing my new rifle had not only been the reasonable purchase of a tool that was inevitably part of our outback, homesteading way of life; it was also a way to counteract the monumental maternal forces that now ran the show. In short, the gun was meant to be a way back to me. But given my reactions at the firing range, it didn't look like I was getting there. To what once was. Rather, it was frantic, frenetic. Like running in place on a fast treadmill. With shoestrings untied and scissors in my hand.

Still, there came a morning that month when Herb convinced me to slip out of the house before sunrise. Orion's Belt was strapped to the eastern horizon, where the San Juan Mountains were haloed with just a whisper of first light. We drove out to the northern edge of the mesa and parked near a broad, sagebrush-crusting draw that meandered between hills of pinion, juniper and yucca. Pulling on the oxymoron of camo and neon orange, we chambered bullets, and started walking. We hadn't even dropped into the draw when a small group of does moved into a clearing. Herb hung back while I crept forward to squat in the grass.

My husband would have called her "a billboard," the way one of them stood—and only seventy-five yards away. But my mind blanked

with a kind of buzzing. I skipped crucial steps—like thinking what was beyond my target. It wasn't that there was another life form or property beyond the deer I had chosen; it was that I aimed due east—just as the sun crested the incisive silhouette of the San Juans.

I shot anyway. Which is unlike me. In all my days of high adventure activities and rescue work, I was used to following protocol under great stress. Later, Bregman, the man who analyzes my dreams, would say my trauma had been triggered. No pun intended.

“What is important,” he would say. “Is that you learn to recognize the trauma response and stay present in the moment.”

I was anything but present. Though I had shot it at least a hundred times, the rifle's kick was like a bomb through my teeth and bones. There was no time to ponder it though, for the doe I had shot did not go down. Instead she limped away at an astonishing rate, keeping up with the other deer as they headed for cover in the trees.

A horrible sound came out of my mouth. And everything hung suspended. It seemed I would be stuck like that forever, mouth open, wailing question marks into the sky.

“What are you standing there for?” Herb yelled. “Go!”

Normally we would have waited before going after wounded game, but he was right; she was moving fast and given the terrain, I would lose her if I didn't follow. So I chambered another round and took off.

Once in the trees, I scanned the damp ground. There was no sign of blood, and the tracks had spread out—each set taking its own serpentine route. I worked back and forth through hills and gulleys until I found one track that was slightly irregular and followed it. Fighting the hysteria that was rising in my throat, I choked on my own gasps of air. Snot bubbled out of my nose and formed a suspension bridge between my face and upturned fleece collar.

The doe was standing at the next hill's crest, broadside again, utterly still and looking right at me. There is good reason not to ever anthropomorphize an animal, but it sure seemed like she had been waiting for my arrival.

I stopped. And gawked. Her wounded side was hidden from view. But we were only twenty feet apart—and what I could see on her good side were the tawny thick hairs, like those on a good artist's brush. The ever-so-slight twitch of a ragged ear. And glittering walnut eyes that gazed steadily into mine. In an animal, one thing you can feel with certainty is fear. This one had none.

And then, before I could raise my rifle, the other does moved from the shadows, to stand in front of her. They gave cover to every inch of her. They seemed utterly alive and unflinching as they stood in a moment not of their choosing. But I had entered some kind of stasis. The horror and panic of my actions froze both my cells and my psyche.

Suddenly I was a river in the dead of winter.

Peter Levine writes of how wild animals are rarely traumatized—not in the lasting ways that humans are. In *Waking the Tiger*, he writes that “the key to healing traumatic symptoms in humans lies in our being able to mirror the fluid adaptation of wild animals as they ‘shake out’ and pass through the immobility response and become fully mobile and functional.”

My mother always says “Get on with it.” Which she no doubt learned from her mother—whom I remember taking me to see *Where the Red Fern Grows* when I was about seven-years-old. I came out of the theatre sobbing—devastated at the deaths of Billy’s hounds, Old Dan and Little Ann.

“Oh for Pete’s sake, it’s nothing but a couple of mutts,” she had snapped. Her mouth was stiff, like a hyphen—a kind of punctuation that makes you think there’s more to come. In my grandmother’s case, I was always hoping for more. Of her. But there never was. She was a Mormon rancher’s wife in the cold upper woodlands of Idaho, where her god rewarded suffering and sacrifice. There was never enough, and animals were collateral damage. Crying over dead ones was not a luxury she could afford.

I wanted to get on with it. To make my own mouth a grim hyphen of determination and just shoot or walk away. But I was the frozen river.

Suddenly the does turned tail and moved en masse down the other side of the hill. For every inch of distance they put between us, they covered my doe entirely with their graceful bodies.

My doe. I did not mean it in some hunterly, possessive sense. Or maybe I did. Whether or not I wanted it, our lives were entwined now, with our meeting in this way, as predator and prey.

I followed them down the hill, where they broke out across the open swale. On the other side, they formed a single file and trotted quickly along the base of another set of hills, incised by a narrow, rocky gully that would be hard to track them in. The wounded doe was in the middle, limping slowly now, but lithely, her head bobbing as she went to compensate for the wound.

Watching her, I remembered then Bregman’s words, about how the personality is formed to compensate for our pain. How the dreams come to show us who we really are, beneath that compensation.

I squatted and laid my rifle across a sturdy pinion branch and put her in my sights again. It was a perfect shot.

But...I could let her go. She could heal, and go on, possibly—limping like this for a long time. I could buy ground beef at the grocery store and not feel nearly so complicit. Better yet, I could go vegan and eat only the grains from my neighbor’s fields—as long as

I didn't think about the fawns he carved up with his thresher every summer, the ones he tried to flush out before cutting but never could manage to get them all. He had once told me it was the hardest part about growing food.

There was also the fact that this doe might really suffer, because of my imperfect shot. So I let out my breath. Began the long process of pressing the trigger.

Before I could fire, another shot rang out, off to my right, and the doe's good shoulder bloomed red.

The scene was timeless. And later I would wonder about this, how we tend focus on the mundane even though it rattles rapidly by—like one of those cartoon books with pages you flip with your thumb to make the images move—so that you feel in your body the anxiety of so much passing, but not much else in terms of sensation. This is in contrast to the deepest moments—of deep fear, and pain, and joy—which happen in slow time; they somehow unfold as if they are forever unfolding. These feelings morph into one another and you are carried on their currents into caverns of yourself never before known.

It is in this moment, I thaw, and feel love. And the imminent loss of life. It is excruciating. And yet exquisite. From this slow, sensual place, I watch:

The doe takes a delicate, halting step.

The other deer stop, turn in unison to look her up and down. Noses twitch. Ears prick. An assessment is happening, some sort of group process to determine how to preserve the herd, even at the expense of the individual.

Another halting step—the pointed little hooves more staccatoed this time, like a ballerina en pointe.

The lead doe turns and bounds up the gully. Like a ghost. Like a musical note. Something there and gone, but with some signature that lingers—a sensation left on the skin, or in the recesses of the ear.

And then the doe with the red rose on her shoulder crumples into the snow. Before she hits the ground the others have turned together, like a row of synchronized swimmers, and disappeared after their leader.

Only the one body, now a carcass, remains. In the slanted light of early morning, fingers of steam rise from it.

And then time contracts: I turned to my right, in the direction of the report. Around a bend in the draw, between two hills and just barely visible, stood my husband. His rifle was still shouldered. I would later learn he had not seen me, that he'd been shouting for me to come. And he would learn that I could not remain in the slowness, the sweetness and pain of the moment. That I instead became ungrateful, angry even, for him stealing my shot—when he believed

he was doing me a favor by putting an animal out of her misery. The anger, after all, was easier; for in the moment when I felt deeply, and the ice floes began to move through—I balked at their promise to melt and run like high water in spring, along a wild and uncharted course.

That night I would dream: I am running barefoot, behind Herb and a tall indigenous man. We are chasing antelope, the fastest mammal in North America. In my hands, I clasp a bow and arrow. But then I hear my daughter calling from a house. I leave the men and run to her. I feel panicked. Worried.

Bregman would later ask me what associations I have with guns and hunting. I would tell him all the men in my family—on both my mother's and father's sides—were hunters. That my fondest memories are of the hunters bringing back meat, the family gathering to prepare it, then the feast. But then I would remember too how it divided my parents. My father was always gone, and whatever kill he brought home left a bloody mess that she had to clean up. For one of their first dates, my father had taken my mother to the Salt Lake City dump to shoot rats. Given their extraordinary incompatibility on that front, it's amazing they ever saw one another again, let alone met at the end of the church aisle. And no surprise that the marriage ultimately failed.

Then Bregman had me feel into what it was like, running like that.

I feel alive and excited. But when I turn away, I feel so sad and kind of dead.

He would next ask me if this was a familiar feeling, in my waking life. I would say yes—that this is generally how I have felt as a mother. Divided and at war—with my husband and with myself.

I don't go much for Greek deities as role models—for many were jealous, vengeful and unfaithful—but as Bregman and I explore the dream, I recall Artemis, goddess of the hunt. She carries a golden bow and arrow, is escorted by a pack of hunting dogs, and a male deer. She is the embodiment of wildness—in animals and in ourselves.

But she also comes to women when they give birth. Athenian girls, in celebrating their coming-of-age, acted the “she-bear” for Artemis. She reminds us that the feminine is not about turning away from our wildness, but facing into it fully.

In Artemis, the feminine is whole. Integrated and alive. And so it seemed in my deer. But in me, one half has been split-off, encased in ice. This, Bregman tells me, is the effect of trauma—as well as my maternal inheritance, for it is what mothers hand down to daughters if they cannot live in their souls. And so the lineage continues: We compensate for the wound to avoid really living fully again—so we cannot be vulnerable to more hurt.

I see now: That which I could not possess in myself was hurled

elsewhere. Into the world as apocalypse. Onto my husband as wrongdoer. And onto my daughter as creature in need of over-protection. All to avoid the wound—and perhaps even more importantly, to avoid all the deep feeling that bleeds from it.

And then comes this dream:

I am at the edge of a meadow, surrounded by dark forest. I watch carefully as an elk herd begins to run. There is a baby elk calf that is nuzzled to its feet and urged to follow the lead bull. As the herd gathers speed, the calf is right at the flank of the bull.

Bregman had me feel into being the calf, and instantly I felt all that is missing from my version of motherhood. I felt how I can be wild and wobble-legged—but it's okay, because the herd, as archetypal beings, can carry me. And this will change everything: by staying with this image and the sensations it evokes, this tribal, primal sense of myself will shift the mundaneness of my life to mythology.

Mother. Daughter.

Predator. Prey.

Animal. Archetype.

When the river is no longer impounded, we are all things.

** A term for Carl Jung's psychoanalytic theory of the conjunction of polarities in the psyche. Marc Bregman, founder of Archetypal Dreamwork, has expanded on this theory to include the conjunction of the Soul with the Divine.*

Time Travel

Aileen Bassis

A physicist
on the radio talked
about time. It never stays still.
It's not motionless like
craters on the airless moon
but keeps crumbling,
time getting
more disorganized as
cells lapse into forgetting
to stop or get lost,
synapses damaged
with signals tucked away to appear
days later like a single sock found
stuck inside a clean sheet.

My mother,
travelled time through the milky
way of dementia, scrambled it
like beaten eggs for her
cocoa cake, cutting in days
from seventy or eighty years ago
like butter sliced into sugar.

Mixed or poured,
folded like an accordion fan
side to side or front to
back, time floats
out of reach between
herds of neurons
and twitchy dendrites.
It's remote as quasars
and jittery as
a skipping brainwave.

After the Picnic

David Salner

My mother puts the blanket down,
unwraps wax paper from our sandwiches,
releases the sweet and sour smells
of lunch meat, dill pickles.

My father leans against a tree
with jigsaw bark, drinks something
purple from a glass, shakes another Lucky
from the pack, cups his hands

to light it, sighs the blue smoke
in and out. His eyes meet mine.
I see through them into our future: a job lost,
a long breakdown. After the picnic,

he spirits me into the house
on day-old sweat, on night-air
that fills with wine, tobacco,
the stale smells of his body.

I breathe that richness
when I need to know I had a father.

Be the Earth

Isabel Wolfe-Frischman

The day she did it, a golden warm June day, she threw her silver glitter high-heeled sandals up over a telephone line - a gang thing, she thought. She effervesced inside, her eyes were shiny like soap bubbles. She was in love with the world, the world was in love with her. Her every action was more creative than the last, she was a creator, a gangster-heroine-goddess.

For months, Violet had ravaged the internet, laying waste to countless hours as she Googled the Jewish zealots, the Hindu thugs, the Hashashin - the Muslim assassins of the middle ages. She obsessed over the thugs who worshipped the goddess Kali and strangled their victims, the Hashahin who murdered their victims in brightest sunshine, exhibitionists of their cruelty, and the modern terrorists who put simple hardware (nails and bolts) in their bombs, to maximize damage. She knew IED's could be camouflaged and buried beneath discarded cigarette packages, stepped on in the street, in twenty-first century Iraq. Not in the U.S. Still, she never picked up litter.

"My little round girl," Jimbo, her lazy, sloppy, common-law, Pisces husband, had liked to call Violet. "You're the only girl I've ever met with a fat back," he said. He adored Violet. "No kids!" he had said when they met, "just you and me forever!"

She had revered him too, muscle-bound though he was, and unemployed. In those early days they lived for one another. And then, their oops-kid. The little surprise girl whom they disciplined strictly and sent to a private Catholic school, even though it was a little pricey. Caley. The girl who grew to resent the hell out of every single thing they did.

Violet had once given a crap about her looks. Now her partying days were over, and she had guilt, regrets, and a husband with some pretty contradictory moral convictions. She missed wearing the silver shoes, but she was practically a nun now, a nun bearing scars from botched eyebrow piercings and an ugly, rosy cicatrix where her old boyfriend Otie's tattooed name had been removed. And there were more scars, scars inside, from the D and C's. Little did Jimbo know. (Jimbo, the only person who had ever shown her love. What a disappointment he turned out to be.)

Violet's father could always tell when she was getting her period, and he felt compelled to say what a bitch it made her. That made her skin creep, gave her little adrenalin bumps out her pores. She had

learned to disguise her PMS, mostly by stuffing it with Reese's. (She would sneak on ball-of-the-feet tiptoe like a clumsy fairy princess into the garage and retrieve the sticky chocolate and peanut butter candies from inside a cloistered toolbox.) Jimbo didn't have a clue about any of this stuff – he never knew when it was her time of the month, or anything else about how women's bodies worked, let alone where she stashed her chocolate. That's how she finally got the daughter - the baby she dared to keep. The little Caley, born in June, on a golden warm day sixteen years ago.

*

In her favorite girls' magazine's have-an-astounding-vocabulary article, Violet had read that the little sleeve on hot coffee cups is called a zarf. She told the Starbucks people every time. But they didn't seem to care. Not enough people listened or cared. Nobody cared the way Violet did. She was the girl who went to visit people in the hospital, the one who went to memorial services for friends of friends. The professional weeper.

Fertility. Breeder. She had aspired to that. Lots of little ones to love her. Lots of fat little babies. Like a hog farm. Jimbo actually knew about these things from his childhood. A sow can come into heat nearly twice a month. Humans are pretty fertile too. So women have to know things. Birth control things. Catholic things. "No more kids, Vi! Just you and me and little You Junior!" said Jimbo.

Violet said she didn't want them either. But she kept getting pregnant. And "miscarrying," Then crying, and throwing herself into her chocolate. And her research.

Lately, on the occasions when Violet was able to extricate herself from the computer long enough to work out to the yoga DVD narrated by the sexy Asian yoga guy with the long black ponytail, lying on the beach, the guy who pronounced his l's and w's (and sometimes y's) in the New Jersey way, gulping them, she would feel one with the entire universe. But hers was a kind of skewed one-with, where she wished actually to become part of all the particles, for everyone to become part of the particles, more literally than figuratively. She would look down at her striped leotard and the checkered floor, dizzy. She thought about regressing into a past life. She thought about UFO's. About explosions.

The day Jimbo got a long-term substitute teaching job, he went out and celebrated for two days, and on the third day, lost the job. They made love, she of the fat back, he of the bulky ape arms, the unemployment.

She wished she could feel it.

She wished that her daughter didn't hate her.

She wished for a baby.

Mostly because Caley was hatching plans to leave her parents' house forever, she barely noticed that her mom hovered over the boys she brought home. Especially Tyler, the geekiest, the one with the greasy, moldy-looking, green Mohawk. When Caley was studying, Violet would make Tyler a Velveeta on Wonder, with mustard, and they would chat. Tyler could find anything, anything on Google.

Jimbo got sober shortly after the short-term long-term sub debacle. His daughter's breasts bothered him. He began to notice this at the same time he began to notice his wife's obsession with the internet. Violet had a huge file marked "Recipes," but she was living on Reese's and coffee. The only person she spent time with was Caley's little computer nerd friend. Her sweaters got baggier and covered more of her, and her hands were always covering her face, her mouth, her words, as if to keep them in. And the Evil out. She got angrier.

The morning she felt that the time had come, Jimbo had carelessly left a soggy towel wedged in the shower door, trapping her, soaking, inside for a good minute before she extracted it and broke two newly clear-polished fingernails in the process. The tessellations on the shower floor reminded her of cartoon explosions - everything reminded her of some kind of blast. The shampoo, the soap, the shaving cream under her arms hurt, made her skin burn. Little immolations. Dripping wet, she checked her horoscope. Leo, the lioness.

Violet had gotten up early and attended a yoga class. She had never noticed the statue's toes before - the statue at the front of the room. It looked Muslim to her. The red-painted toenails. Yes, she knew the Muslims made their women wear - burkas, that was it - but she had heard (hadn't Sarah Palin said it?) that under those burkas the women wore garish eye shadow, body glitter, red-painted toes. Incendiary toes. Explosive toes.

After class Violet went home and took the shower, the tessellations blaring. Dripping onto her horoscope, she found an email about her third cousin's memorial service. Violet put on her funeral outfit, her atoms charged for weeping. Next to her black pumps were the silver glitters. They attracted her and repelled her at the same time; they reminded her of the yoga statue. She grabbed them and tossed them

into her purse, and the universe began to expand. In front of the cousin's church, Violet threw the silver sandals over the wire.

The things she didn't know she'd do that day. The random, unexpected things. She's driving home from the cemetery, and she's distracted, thinking, crying a little. She sees a bald guy with tattoos, a skinhead type, a white supremacist type, walking a cute little curly-haired doggie. A cute guy, a cute dog. Probably both Virgos. He gives no indication that he is planning to cross the street, but apparently he is, so when she makes her left-hand turn and he has to cross behind her car, he says to her, acid voiced, "Nice stopping."

"Fuck you," she should have said, or something better. "I'm sorry," she said.

The preacher, in his funeral sermon, had invoked brotherhood. He quoted from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Qur'an. Violet was pondering this as she was almost running over the guy with the dog.

Brotherhood. Violet went home and straight to her favorite computer file. "Recipes." Printed out the instructions. And began to collect the materials from her stockpile in the depths of garage detritus, next to the rusty, unused lawn mower and her Dad's old toolbox full of peanut butter cups. She had dumped the manure into a long neglected recycling bin with the nails, the bolts, and the rest of the methodically procured ingredients; she had enjoyed the gathering process. It was like a scavenger hunt.

She cleared her mind of mundane thoughts, became one with the cosmos, the universe, and drove to the local abortion clinic. Although she had researched it, staked it out, even stalked the doctor in charge of the place, she could not believe she had not connected this fact to her conscious mind before: this doctor was a Muslim. Bonus points.

Violet turned out to be the only casualty, as she had somehow missed that the clinic was closed on this particular day. The police were baffled. There was so little evidence: everything was blown to sub-molecular levels. Except for the Reese's wrappers and a charred shred of one of those Starbucks sleeves, they had nothing to go on.

It would be days before the silver slippers were found. Jimbo saw them when he was on a frantic, panic-stricken fitness run around his neighborhood, thinking of the epiphany he had had before Violet disappeared, and hoping, hoping that she would come back soon. He at last went to the police to report a missing person. Who liked Reese's and aspired to being one with the earth.

When the cops came to the house, they saw a stiff-dry rolled up towel by the shower (made even less appetizing by a couple of polished fingernail fragments garnishing it), crusty dishes in the sink,

Wolfe-Frischman

a note from the day she had disappeared, lying on the kitchen table:

Vi, you won't believe this. I tried reading the astrology online. And you know what? I think we should have a baby!!! – J.



Shadow of the Church

Claudia Rippee

Oh, Dad!

Murzban F. Shroff

It was the third time the Guru of Income Tax had called for Dad. Guru, not as in doyen, master, or spiritual authority, but guru as in Satguru, Income Tax officer, Ward 14, scourge, terror, and nemesis of industrialists, businessmen, and hoarders of wealth. What was he doing calling Dad?

“I like you, sir,” he told Dad. “I will see what I can do to get you a refund. That should help, huh—at your age?”

It wasn't surprising that he said that. Fact is, everyone liked Dad, children and dogs included. Oh, and not to forget the girls I got home. They waxed eloquent over him. “He is so cute, your father! Why aren't you like him—gentle?”

How could I answer that? How could I explain why some of those genes never got transferred? Why I could not do half the things he did? He would, for instance, place six glasses of water for my mother, every morning, neatly arranged on the table. At regular intervals, he would draw her attention to them, reminding her to stay hydrated, to retain her body fluids in the midst of a long, unsparing Indian summer. And he would teach English to every servant we hired. It did not matter that the servant invariably left us for a better salaried job. “It's good,” Dad would say, smiling. “Good that they have the motivation to better themselves, good that they progress. And that they take away something lifelong from us.” Mom would give him a hostile look. “Yes,” she would say sharply. “Good that they don't even give notice, spring this on me overnight, when I have so much work and no other help.”

When our neighbor's dog, Romeo, went blind—having scooped the rangoli powder at the door into his eyes - he was left at the animal hospital in Parel. He was admitted not just for treatment but as punishment for tearing into a tall, fat Chinese jar, a ceramic marvel, painted in the tradition of the Tang masters of the eight century. The jar had swayed, staggered, and toppled over, splintering into a million pieces.

When that happened and Romeo was banished to a world of darkness and to the confusion of a netted cage, Dad was the one who'd visit him. He'd take him biscuits and would play with him. He'd give him his hand to sniff, and the familiar smell would drive Romeo mad with joy. He would think he was going to be taken home; all was forgiven.

Dad also made it a point to take Romeo a special ball that made a rumbling sound when it rolled. Ears cocked, Romeo would tear after it, trip over it, paw it, and refuse to let go, forgetting, for a few moments,

that he was blind.

That was Dad; that was his trip: heart in the right place, eyes wide open!

Physically, Dad was a picture of affability. He was frail, soft, and tranquil. He had brown eyes, deep, searching, and sensitive. He spoke less, was interested, always, in knowing more about the other person: his problems, his achievements, his goals, beliefs. Dad believed in the concept of an alert humanity. If there was a problem, as in poor rainfall in the villages, or a famine brought to light by the morning paper, he'd be sure to write out a check. The amount would go from his pension, meager as it were, and which came as a reward for forty years of service in a nationalized bank. No question of leaving the bank, he had said, in years when offers had come his way. The bank is coming up well. Do you know what the deposit base is? And how many customers have opened second accounts? And how many branches we now have, compared to when I joined?

"Oh, Dad!" I would say, and give up. I was in college then and missed not having a father's car to drive. It wasn't as if the girls I dated minded. They were simple enough, and at that age these things didn't matter. It was girls' fathers who looked at me disdainfully when I said I wasn't mobile. "What does your father do," they would ask and lose interest.

The "Oh, Dad!"s became frequent after I started working. When I started receiving cash payments that weren't accounted for in my books. Most people I knew did that, transactions in cash, to spite the caretakers of the nation for not giving us good roads, good water, and good air. Dad was an exception. He paid every bit of his taxes – more, never less, to ensure a good night's sleep for himself and his family. He stole mine, though, I can tell you that. A few times over, my "Oh, Dad!"s became agitated. What to do? He'd write out thank-you notes to people who'd send me cash payments. "Received in cash, a sum of twenty-five-thousand rupees. Signed on behalf of Mr. X by Mr. Y" In brackets, Father.

It was all there in black and white, my suicide note, should it fall into the hands of the tax officers waiting for a kill. Always waiting, even if it took years.

And though wide was the gap between father and son, and disparate our approach to life, not so the bond. We were close, immensely close. Dad would speak to me, confide in me, should something nag at his curly white head.

That morning, after the call, he spoke about Satguru. He had met the officer when he realized that he, as a senior citizen, was due for a tax rebate on certain counts. He had gone to the ward office and submitted his appeal, full disclosures of his accounts, his tax returns spotlessly clean and detailed. Satguru had studied the papers and seen the stamp of honesty. He also saw a frail little man, gentle and

amenable, unable to say no or to differ. He filed that away and then phoned a few days later. "I can help you," he told Dad. "But you will, of course, tell no one."

"He wants a bribe," Dad said to me, his eyes wide with fear. "He says he will arrange a refund every year. I have nothing to worry about. But I have to give him a cut, some chai pani."

I could understand Dad's fear of bribes. He had kept away from them all through his working life. I had seen him reject copious bundles of cash that came with a warm handshake on Diwali. He was gracious in his refusal. "I am looking forward to the sweetmeats, but this, please, no. So sorry, but I have a problem with it. The problem is entirely mine." He'd move to other topics of conversation to reassure the offender that it was but an aberration, no judgment had been made. It was easy to see why they liked Dad. He was inexpensive as a banker, and gracious, and forgiving.

But now he was worried. Satguru wouldn't be so forgiving if Dad refused his offer. I had no doubts that Satguru liked Dad. He genuinely wanted to help him. At the same time, he wanted his pound of flesh. What to do? Bribes and corruption were the order of the day.

"What do I do? What do I say?" Dad asked me. "I wish I had left matters to your accountant." Then wistfully and sadly he said, "Who would have thought...? I thought he was genuine, honest, somebody who would help me, because it is right to do so."

"Dad," I was tempted to say. "No one is honest these days. No one does things free, out of goodness. It's like searching for a toothpick in a haystack. It's the day of the great smash and crawl. You remember that, don't you? The game you taught me as a kid. You hide a coin in one hand and smash both palms on the table and your opponent is supposed to guess which hand has the coin. Today the rules have changed. You better have a coin in both hands, one over the table, one under. And you better let your opponent guess which hand it is in and reward him accordingly."

But I didn't say that, because I didn't think Dad would understand. Besides, it wasn't fair to cast swine before pearl. Wrong example, unfair analogy.

I advised Dad in the only way I knew: cleverly and deviously. "Lie, Dad, lie!" I said to him. "Tell Satguru just about anything. Say that you stay with a son who doesn't give you any money. Say you have to pay for your keep. Your food, your medicines, your recreation, your clothes are all your own responsibility. Your son expects you to pay for everything: electricity, water, phone bills. Play on Satguru's sympathy, his liking of you. Do it, Dad. For once in your life, lie!"

He listened. He struggled. I could see he hated the idea. Besides, he knew I was a good son. He hated putting forth these distortions. Why reduce the image of our home, why denigrate the family? was the thought in his mind. It swam transparently in his eyes, in his facial

expressions, adding to his discomfort. All the same he relented. It was better than paying a bribe, better than succumbing to a practice he had shunned all his life.

The next day he went to meet Satguru. It was lunchtime by the time he returned. I knew by his face that all was well. He looked at me gratefully, sheepishly, and said, "He believed it all, hook, line and sinker. He just asked me a few questions about you, and that was it! Gave me the refund quietly, like it was my birthright. He said I was to come to him anytime I was in a spot." Dad's voice lowered. "He even offered to buy me lunch. When I protested, he insisted that I drop in next week for lunch. He is quite a decent fellow. I felt quite guilty at the end of it. I just wish he was honest. I know he has got a good heart. Deep down, there is great good in him."

"In all, Dad, in all!" I said. "I would rather believe that human beings are congenitally good than bad. It's just that money does to you what you allow it to. It takes over your life, rules it, makes a feverish child out of you. It's a question of being too long in the toy shop, or never being there at all."

Dad wasn't listening. "Quite a decent fellow, I tell you, quite decent, huh. If only he would see it's not necessary: all this hustling, all this sponging, this under-the-table stuff, not important at all."

We had just sat for lunch when the phone rang. Mom answered. I could see she was annoyed. Mom hated interruptions when she was putting forth a meal that she had nurtured. Once a week she made something special, and this was chicken vindaloo day, a celebration of sorts, for what, we joked, was Dad's incipient corruption. The fact that he had lied, he had eased up on an old ethic.

It was Satguru asking for Dad. There was silence as Dad heard him.

"What is with him?" said Mom impatiently. "Can't leave us alone or what."

"Let's be generous, Mom," I said. "The man seems to be quite decent. It's just that he likes Dad. Maybe Dad will change him, after all."

But there was no chance of that, we surely knew, as Dad returned to the table, his face white, his eyes wide with despair. In a trembling voice he said to me, "He wants your file now. He wants to open it. He says he wants to teach you a lesson you won't forget."

Although inwardly I shivered, and my heart began to pound, thinking of the endless trips to the department, the waiting, the humiliation, and the slow grating investigation that would burden my memory, eroding both, my patience and my pride, despite that, I said in my calmest voice, "How can that be, Dad? The only lessons I learn are from you."

Bad Boys

Robert Begiebing

In seventh through ninth grade, I got in with a couple of pals beyond Gale Road. Both Bobby Ades and Steve Winkleman lived on Ide Road just over a quarter mile from where Ide met Gale next to my house. Bobby—a tall, strawberry-haired lad—was another juvenile troublemaker. Shorter and with dark curly hair, and our pediatrician’s son headed for private school soon, Steve went along with the schemes and adventures Bobby cooked up. How I managed to join this duo most likely had to do with our hard time on the school bus together, the bus that picked up all Gale and Ide Road kids at the juncture of Ide and Green River Road. I recall Mr. Gassaniga, the teacher who had commented on my scholarly ineptitude, coming onto the bus parked outside the school one day to see that the students were all aboard and seated. Seeing the three of us sitting together, he stopped, looked right at us with his shit-eating grin, and crowed, “Oh, look! The Three Innocents!”

So I had begun to get a reputation not only as a blockhead in the classroom but as a minor rebel. If Tobias Wolff describes in *This Boy’s Life* how he experimented and cheated in the 1950s to create a better, more successful, private-school-boy self beyond the down-at-heel kid in a broken marriage and brow-beaten by his stepfather, I experimented with creating a bad boy self beyond the boundaries of Church and catechism, Cub Scouts, band and chorus, the junior high basketball team, the Boy’s Club, and the world of *Boy’s Life* magazine. I had tapped into the planet of adolescent angst in the 1950s: the kid who gobbled burgers and played pinball, cigarette dangling, at the Modern Dairy Diner; the kid who egged and stoned passing cars to celebrate Halloween; the imaginary denizen of the smoky cosmos of jazz musicians and Beats.

Between twelve and fifteen I spent endless hours with Bobby and Steve sharing jokes and “talking pussy.” There was one stunner a class ahead of us given to tight angora sweaters and equally tight skirts and pants. She had short, thick blonde hair, a face of the teen-slut genre, fine breasts, a most tempting bottom, and stood about 5’4” and 100 pounds dripping wet. The very sweater-girl stuff of masturbatory dreams. We talked of her endlessly, fantasizing and speculating. The greatest coup any of us ever achieved was when she actually invited Bobby Ades to a high school dance. Steve and I were dumbfounded at the news. Bobby never told us much about the experience in the aftermath, except for saying, “I got my hands on her tits beneath one

of her tight sweaters; you know, that button up the back?” I don’t recall his going out with her much again, so my guess is the date wasn’t a stupendous success. Perhaps she lost a degree of high school street-cred going out with a younger, albeit bad, boy.

A fourth bad boy named Francis entered our circle. He was rather more of a lost cause than we others, but we were happy to tag along and enjoy his largess from the money he stole from his well-heeled parents. Mostly the money went for pizzas, soft drinks, and cigarettes. Bobby looked older than he was and could at times succeed in buying a pack of cigarettes with Fran’s money, or he’d score them through his older brother Frankie Ades, another bad boy around town known for stripping young ladies of their virtue in his fifty-nine Chevy parked along dark lanes or in back rows of drive-in theaters.

My parents weren’t too sure about my falling in with these characters. Once, my father asked if I were “playing second fiddle” to the group when I was invited at the last minute to go with them to Fran’s uncle’s hunting and fishing camp. I don’t recall how we got there—where the camp actually is near town—but I recall a mature forest of massive trees and scarce undergrowth and a nearby river or body of shining water. A place thick with birds we saw and heard and animals hidden in the deeper surrounding forest. The building itself was a large beautiful lodge made of real logs. It had a gigantic, field-stone chimney and fireplace, bunk beds, plenty of furniture for lounging about and dining, and animal heads and huge fresh-water fish mounted on the walls. My understanding was Fran got the key from his uncle, but who knows? We’d hole up there on Saturday afternoons swapping jokes and stories, stick-roasting several packages of hot dogs, downing quarts of soda and bags of chips, finishing off a few Devil Dogs each, and smoking Winstons or Kools—just all around preparing for the primordial mysteries and pleasures of adult male lodge-life. We could talk about anything we wanted. Who were the “skags” in school (of course all dying for a chance at our bodies), who were the babes (whose bodies we coveted). Who were the retards (teachers included). Who was a pussy. Who or what was gross. Who was a rough hard-ass?

Then there were always a few games of Blackjack for small change or cigarettes, making us feel tough and manly. Endless jokes, often with traveling salesmen at the center. Our jokes were the familiar adolescent currency of the 1950s, ending in such punch lines as:

~“Eeek! Eeek! It’s a bald-headed mouse!”

~“May I please have another pickle with a bone in it?”

~“Your garbage is all eaten and you dog’s pregnant.”

~“Hello Vi? Ayah, this is Sy. That was shit in the pumpkin pie.”

Laughter all around.

Most of our forays into this bastion of male hunter-gatherers were

Begiebing

innocent of deed, if not of thought and word. But one time we went berserk in a way that helped me to understand later in life how things in a war-zone, in a fight ring, in a mob, or even within a family spin completely out of control, and otherwise sane people perform crazy, harmful, devastating acts.

We hadn't been drinking beer or liquor of any kind. I didn't develop a taste for the stuff till later, and we had no access to it, even from Fran's sticky fingers. But we were saturated with sugary drinks, hot dogs, salty chips, and those devils. We were more or less winding down the afternoon in our private redoubt. A final game of Blackjack. Bobby accused Fran of cheating.

"What are you talking about, you Jerkoff!" Fran said and tossed his cards at his accuser. Bobby tossed something back, and before we knew it we were all tossing stuff at Fran. At some point one of us picked up a chair and threw it against a wall, dislodging one of the animal heads. The next thing I knew several items of furniture were in the air. A window was smashed.

"You fuckin' Feebs!" Fran yelled, picking up another chair to toss our way.

"Fuck you!" Bobby yelled, and threw a rustic coffee table in his direction. "You're looking for a rupture."

Suddenly all kinds of furniture and decorative items were in the air, and we were laughing like mad men.

Fran, taking the brunt of it now, ran out, leaving the front door open. We ran after him. Outside, we laughed until our full stomachs hurt. Fran finally collected himself and went to shut and lock the front door.

"Lock us out, you bastard!" Bobby yelled. "My fucking stuff's in there." We had left our packs and jackknives and roasting sticks inside. So everybody but Fran picked up a log lying nearby and started to use it as a battering ram. Then Fran joined us as we slammed against that heavy wooden door again and again till it started to splinter and finally gave. Not satisfied with the door, we began to use the ram on the windows, smashing one after another, unable to stop the madness we had taken so far already. We completely trashed the place.

Worn out, we went inside to recover our belongings. Suddenly we all felt guilty amidst our havoc. The devastation was something we would never be able to explain, not only because it would be unforgivable, but because we couldn't articulate why it had happened even to ourselves.

Scurrying away, we decided not to explain a thing, let Fran's family discover the mayhem on their own, and swear we never had a thing to do with it. That we had always used the camp respectfully. In fact, we had until that day we went crazy.

I never found out whether our story worked. I know Fran told his parents when they asked him that we were utterly innocent, that it must have been some horrible vandals with no respect for people's property. He was a pretty good actor. I heard the family was restoring the camp, but I also heard that we were absolutely banned from ever again using it. We had, it turned out, not only destroyed a particular extended family's rustic lodge in the woods, we had destroyed our very own private getaway, the most perfect clubhouse any boys of any age could have ever asked for. As Cousin Ron would have said, "Dumbshits!"

I hadn't necessarily learned my lesson, however. We had dodged a bullet; our parents weren't handed a bill for the destruction. My father literally hadn't had to kick my ass up and down Gale Road. I should have thanked my stars and cut my association with Fran, at least. But when Fran came to us one day and explained how he had found a broken piece of frosted window at the women's locker room in the Williams gym, we couldn't wait to have a look. Lasell Gymnasium was situated at the top of Spring Street, with a pool, basketball courts, squash courts, and exercise rooms, and the townsfolk were granted one evening a week when it was open for our use. Part of a larger gown-town initiative to play nice. I had used the facility throughout my early youth and would recognize even today its particular smell of gym sweat, rubber, and chlorine.

So there we were one bracing October townie-evening ducking into the shadows on the Main Street side of the massive gray-stone building, ensconced in an ample ground floor window well, peeking one by one down into the locker room. It was one of the college boys' locker rooms turned over to the women every townie night. We saw a few familiar female students dressing and undressing, a teacher or two, and one older woman I remember who had always seemed to me a rather ugly person—a dull face and heavy body—who was suddenly naked before me with a round belly to be sure but with magnificent breasts and a bristling, even stunning, dark triangle of pubic bush. Good Lord, it hadn't occurred to me that an older woman who wasn't superficially pretty when clothed might be an object of erotic stimulation, but there she was arousing me in all the Rubenesque glory nature had given her, a sexual being, the object of another man's passion, a woman who had brought children of her own into the world.

As I was contemplating my new-found philosophy, eyes glued to the broken out triangle of frosted window, Steve whispered, "Get the hell out! Cop!" We stupidly broke for it, but the cop ordered us in a commanding voice to stop. He was so close to us by then that we obeyed his orders.

Begiebing

“Whadda you kids up to?” he demanded.

“Nothing, officer,” Bobby said without pause. “Just snuck over here to grab a smoke where nobody’d see us.”

My legs started to shake.

“Sure, sure,” the cop said. “I saw you down there in that window well. Women’s locker room, right?”

We were suddenly speechless. I saw he was a campus policeman.

He pulled out a pad. “What’s your names?” he asked, pencil hovering over the pad. He looked at me first.

By now I was in full body-tremble. A thought flashed into my head: Had the authorities let the chink in the window go just to catch little guy-shits like us up to no good? I thought of lying, but I was so panicked from being discovered by the police, no less, that I was unable somehow to lie. I gave my name, spelling it when he asked. The others followed my lead. He took our phone numbers as well.

“Your parents will punish you enough,” he said. “I don’t have to. Now get out, and don’t ever let me catch you back here again.”

Off we ran, certain that we were doomed. For days we suffered through school, constantly checking with one another: “Has he called your parents yet?”

“Not a word. Yours?”

“Not yet. Jesus. I’m gonna be screwed good.”

“We won’t get out of the house for a year.”

Such words passed among us for a week, then another week, our dread growing with each day as we contemplated our embarrassments and public crucifixions.

But the cop never called. It turned out that he had merely given us one hell of a scare as warning. He probably knew we would suffer more anticipating for a month or two his revealing our behavior to parents. He was right. I think my soul absorbed more dread in that couple of months before we realized he was letting us off the hook slowly than any other brief period of my life. We no doubt had magnified the horror of our parents’ response. My father, after knocking me around and restricting me to the house for God knows how long, probably would have laughed to himself and his buddies, making me the butt of his jokes around the table in some bar or breakfast counter late one night after a gig. My mother would have had her belief in the Devil re-confirmed, the Devil and his dark webs of sexual temptation for poor boys and girls. But she would have left the heavy punishment up to my father and found thereby, and in my expected confession to our priest, my penance and absolution.

Reprinted with permission of Anaphora Literary Press from A Berkshire Boyhood: Confessions and Reflections of a Baby Boomer (April, 2014)

Fiona Lives in Detroit City

Malaina Poore

In Detroit, the houses are lined up tight. Tiny square yards, some with weeds and tall grass, some with white stones in place of green, and only a very few with planted flowers or manicured shrubs. Every fourth or fifth house is abandoned or maybe burned up. Detroit has a real problem with arson. Anything is reason enough to start a fire—rage, disenchantment, celebration—just burn the fucker down. Our yard is not well loved but Maw Maw pays a boy to mow it, water it now and again, prune the row of hedges. We don't plant flowers or decorate with whirligigs and peeing cherubs and signs that say, "Bless This Home." We don't do much more than walk through on our way in or out.

Everyone knows I was born to a beautiful mother and a guy named Ronnie who didn't hang around. I was their only pinch-faced baby and the only grandchild on either side. This made me quite a disruption. My parents didn't even know anyone with a baby. I went with my mother where she went: to a parties in Cass Corridor, to the food stamps office, to nowhere but her bedroom all day while she slept. With time I learned to be quiet, almost invisible. I behaved like many children could not—like a stunted, mute adult. And I don't think I was even adorable then. Today I am fifteen and absolutely not adorable.

I stay with my grandmother. She is my guardian, but she is not too strict. I can eat whatever I want and I do most of the shopping. We order pizza often because Mee Maw is sick of cooking and I don't know how. We eat lots of bowls of cereal, especially Lucky Charms, even for dinner sometimes. For dinner we eat two bowls.

My grandmother is weary. I hear there was a time when she was a real fighter, a tough cookie. But time and heartbreak have just sucked her dry and turned her arthritic, crumpled and sore. She creaks and moans just to get up from the chair. Her flabby arms are splintered with purple veins. Her wide, puckered ass lay dead in turquoise polyester. In a lighted vanity mirror she smears rouge on her cheeks and paints her eyebrows. When I love her, my heart cries, "poor thing." When I'm angry, I figure she deserves her misery.

The house beside ours is cinder block painted white, fenced in by linked chains. The aluminum awnings over the windows and porch were once white but have turned grey with rusty stripes. Broken steps lead to a small cement porch painted blue and peeling. The front door has a brass knocker and a gate of bars. There is a square of front lawn and a square of back lawn. The lawn is overrun with crabgrass, but mowed weekly by a neighborhood kid. The hedges have grown unruly.

A man sat on the porch in a white undershirt and jeans with bare feet, staring straight ahead.

We all knew why he was there. Because he was fresh from the loony bin and only his Grandmother would take him in.

I excited myself trying to steal a peek at him from my bedroom window next door, scared to death he would look back. I did this every chance I got. I call him Johnson because that is the name on the mailbox. From a distance I could make out a great many tattoos on his arms and neck and they looked messy, smeared. He was clean—his hair, his white shirt—but his skin was messy. When people walked by on the street, they didn't look either. But they wanted to. Looking away took concentration, but it was better to seem uninterested.

I decided to speak to him, I counted to myself one, two, three—go! But it was hard to jump and hard to speak.

A driveway ran between our two homes. I waited for him to come outside and then I did the same, bringing bags of garbage for the black cans that belong to the city. I did not look up. My heart banged around wildly in my chest. I pulled the trash can to the curb while looking at him from the corner of my eye, then looked away. My walk was slow but deliberate. I made decision to say hello as I walked back up the driveway, but then lost my nerve. Someone told me he'd tried to suffocate himself and killed some brain cells in the process. Someone else said that the hospital cut part of his brain out because it was defective.

I did not look up but I was taking him in. The air between us felt charged, like I didn't need to look to know he was there. My mind measured the distance between us. He loomed over everything. I walked up the driveway halfway and stopped to kick at some weeds sprouting from a crack in the cement.

"A lot of weeds out here, huh?" I asked.

"Mmm" he said, eyes straight ahead.

"Your Grandma lives here?" I asked, pointing at the white box of a house.

When he turned to face me I could see that he was not at all vacant or lobotomized or brain dead. Electricity leapt from his eyes. Big and warm and smart.

"She does." He nodded to my house. "Your Grandmother lives there?"

"Yes." I nodded. "And me too."

I stood at a safe distance and only wanted to get closer. I'd take a small step forward then look away, making my way to the porch where I stood beneath him.

He was gorgeous in a beastly way. Eyes dark as pits. Thick black hair. A strong, broad build and muscly, meaty arms. Peeking out from under his shirt there were a shocking array of tattoos and scars, documentation of his sad life on skin. Prison ink sketches in black

and gray, ladies made up like clowns, spider webs, jumbled words. Hundreds, maybe thousands of raised white razor nicks in this flesh of his arms and hands and neck. That was the messiness I saw when I spied on him.

“You want me to pull these?” I asked, motioning to weeds in the walkway that lead from the driveway to his porch.

“If you want.” He kept his eyes on the road.

I leaned over and yanked. I looked up through my hair to see if he was watching me and he never was. It took effort to pull the plants out completely.

He spoke. “Bring me one of those.”

I held up a dirty cluster of leaves and roots. “These?”

He nodded. “These are wild plantain. They grow near the road. But they’re medicine.” I stepped into his yard and onto his porch and handed him the whole bundle. He tore away some of the leaf and put it in his mouth. “If you get burned or stung, just chew a little, then put it on your skin like this.” He set the wet, green mush on the bank of my hand. “And it will heal you.” He took a fat leaf and spilt it open, brought it to his nose to smell the greenness. I stood there dumbly, not knowing what to do with my arms or how long to leave the spitty mess on my skin.

“Do you ever do this?” he asked suddenly, squinting. “Look at everything with squinty eyes like soft focus?”

I stood at the edge of the porch, with my eyes slit as he showed me, looking at the grass. I have a habit of doing what I’m told. “Now try to look at it really sharp. Concentrate on the shape the outline, the space around it. All the little intricacies. It’s amazing, right?”

It was the same city street I’d lived on all my life, but brighter. Sharper.

“Are those cuts from where you tried to kill yourself?” I asked.

“Oh, no. When I die I am going to be quick about it. Quick like a snake bite, you know?” His hand shot out and pinched my arm.

“No. I don’t know.”

“Good.” he said. “Go home now.”

I walked quickly back to my house, shook my hand off in the bushes and closed the door behind me. I stood there a minute behind the drawn curtains, just breathing and looking around the front room with squinty eyes. My heart had not yet calmed. I brought the hand where the plantain had been up to my mouth and licked it, remembering the way his eyes shone and his weird weed medicine.

What I want more than anything is to be held by a man like that.

This is what to do when you are fifteen: 10th grade in the daytime, snacks in the afternoon, creeping around the yard trying to get a peek at Johnson to think about later in bed. Passing MeeMaw in the

hallway. Driving out with my friend Jane into the evening towards trouble. Putting on make-up and meeting boys. Trying to end up someplace that teenagers are allowed to be.

I walk home in the evening. My sandals scrape against the concrete. The clipped green lawns, the streetlights and the stuttering sprinklers. Dogs behind chain link fence. The same thing every day. The neighborhood girls on porches, eleven or maybe twelve years old. They dress up pretty for the weekend in halter tops. You can see the training bras peek out. A radio plays through a second story open window. It's a local station airing dedications from young girls to boys who are probably annoyed by them. I want to tell them to stop. Stop growing.

I stop by the empty parking lot of what used to be a supermarket where the boys congregate on skateboards. The owners threw down gravel as a deterrent, but whatever. A big snow shovel can scrape it all off to the side. When the cops peel around the corner with authority, sirens screaming and lights twirling like a circus act, nobody even moved. Let's just say it wasn't the first time.

All these guys are friends but here is no kindness. There is banter and competition. There is a car stereo that blares rap music and old punk rock and songs about bitches, loud and constant. I often have a crush on one of these guys, usually whomever I know least.

Jane is beautiful. She her pick of boys but she chose Finesse. He has so crammed in his mouth they look like a big mistake. Finesse is the kind of dog that would jump up and bite out your throat, unprovoked with his white bog swagger and pants too loose. Blank eyes, dull skull. Never tied his shoes because he wanted to look like he didn't give a shit. Never did anything for anybody but his own self. Face like a mallet, or what the mallet struck. One time he accidentally walked into the kitchen table and then kicked it hard. "Punk ass table!" he shouted, and I always think of him this way. Angry fucking dunce. When you walk around thinking "fuck you, fuck you, fuck you" all the time, really starts to show on your face, and it did on his.

"I'm too fucking cool!" Finesse says, after landing a tricky jump on his skateboard. He's not that cool. We girls sat off to the side saying, "this place is soooo fucking boring," meaning not only our lousy hometown but the entire world. Girls like us with flat chests and soft bellies wish they were dead or wealthy enough to afford the alterations so we sat off to the side, watching others in motion.

Finesse put on a blue baseball hat and headed for the party store. I asked him to us beer and he called me a cunt. Then he went to get beer. We all drank from bags in the parking lot.

When it gets dark Jane and I leave in the borrowed Chevy Nova, primer grey. We have nowhere to go so we just drive. Everyone is out in their car at night; it is the motor city after all. The car lacks shocks and a tailpipe, sounds like small aircraft and feels like weaponry. We

wear black eyeliner and silver hoops that bond us together, show that we belong to the same clan. Spider web stockings and combat boots. Jane looks too healthy to pull it off, like a short Latin Barbie in a witch's costume.

Do you know how the night can feel when you are high or excitable with love or lack of sleep? The pavement crackles and the air is electric. That is how this night feels. Undulating night. Just to be out in the cool air wearing lipstick that is too red, pushing the car too fast, playing the radio too loud. There are men beside us, diving in and out of traffic to shimmy their way up to the Nova's window and slash their tongues about in a gross fashion.

"Ugh." Jane says. "What do they want?"

Every night I preen in the mirror. My heart speeds because I am imagining what might happen when I go out. I might have an adventure. My life might change. I might fall in love. Instead we just keep driving. Jane asks, "Are you mad at me?" and I say, "No."

We go back to Jane's. This is where we always seem to end up. Her house is at the end of a dead-end street. From the outside it looks not-quite-loved and inside it looks like a wreck. Foul, stained carpet underfoot, a ratty pool table in the center of the main room, covered with stacks of CD's and movies scattered and separated from their cases. Jane's friends were happy to hang out there. It was the sort of place where girls got pregnant and boys drank from a beer bong in the shower. Her mother was rarely home in the evening because she was sitting behind bulletproof glass at her gas station job.

Jane's brother was there with a bunch of his friends. We called some more kids and told them to come over. The music was up so loud that we had to shout. Sometimes Jane would yell, "Yaaaay!" and throw her hands up and that's because it was a celebration. I'd throw my hands up too, forcing a smile. Boys with skateboards showed up with some girls we knew from school. The girls sat huddled and talked about how ugly and stupid the boys were. The boys went outside to skate up and down a plywood ramp, or stand to the side chewing on generic cigarettes and talking about how stupid and ugly the girls were, but they seemed to really mean it. They said the girls were fat with rotten smelling coochies and too-small titties. They asked for favors like a sip of your big gulp, a piece of watermelon gum, a few spare dollars . . .

Jane's mother came home with bbq chips and expired chicken sandwiches to heat in the microwave. She was a woman with race horse legs and a body like fruit. The skin on her face is weathered and wrinkled. Her jowls danced when she spoke. Her front tooth is lined in silver. Not covered, just outlined.

Jane should have loved her—everyone else did. Her mother was a whole lot of fun but also disgusting. Her wispy blonde hair stayed pinned into sort of a wing on her head. The blue, homemade tattoos

Poore

on her hands and neck, the folds of flesh that spread to encircle her as she sat, her musty smoke-stained voice with its spooky slow cadence ...all of these things Jane found unlovely. The boys on the couch loved her beer and companionship. There were times Jane came home and found them already inside, sometimes in front of the tv smoking cigarettes together. It was the worst put-down in that circle of friends to suggest that anyone would sleep with Jane's mother, but surely someone was.

A pizza was ordered, a curtain rod fell down, a neighborhood dog howled like a coyote. Someone carved a watermelon into a grotesque jack-o-lantern face and poured vodka into it. People ate the watermelon meat and get sloppier and louder. The house clouded with cigarette smoke that stuck in your clothing and hair and smells so bad in the morning, but no one cared. Except I cared a little. It made me feel like crap to be breathing it all in.

Kids leave in shifts. First those with curfews and then the hangers-on. The real hangers on don't leave at night, they eventually fall in their places and sleep an unexpected sleep. They roll up in rugs or slump on the sofa. I walk home in the dark, checking to see if Johnson is sitting on the porch.

This is what you do when you are fifteen:

You do nothing. It happens to you.

You wait.

Make up stories to pass the time.

The Sea That Has Become Known

Abigail Lee

*“For full indeed is the earth of woes, and full the sea.”
-Hesiod*

Little rovers plumb
the white depths above
looking like insects
or microwaves on treads.
Now I’ve gone and done it—
put a microwave in a song
about the moon!

I’ve launched some things
up there as well:
coat of colors,
bitter herbs,
the letters I didn’t light,
used tissues, a plaid scarf sodden with tears.

That’s what they’re talking
about when they say
the moon is full.
A bright knob
that I’ll reach up
and pull
if I’m brave enough
or liquored up—
button of tears
or a brilliant bullet hole.

Exit Strategy

Melany Nietzsche

As you sit on a snagged tweed chair in a waiting room
One receptionist tells the other about last night's dinner
How her husband didn't want pot pies again

When she turns to check you in
Her expression becomes more heartfelt
...The doctor will be with you in a moment

And those moments float by in a fog
Glossy gossip magazines go untouched
While your thoughts drift to darker places

Meanwhile, the minutia rolls forever on
Because without the distraction of pot pies
How could we ever face the day?



Turned His Eyes Away

James Seals

Southern New Hampshire University MFA Prose Winner

The dream came to me on a Wednesday in September of 1975. It showed that I would find my husband during deer-hunting season. The details were unclear: where would I find him; what does he look like; and so forth. But I dreamed about my deer-hunting husband a second and a third time. So I knew that I needed to find him.

And why not a deer hunter? A man from out of town? I had a lot of love to give but there was just no around to accept it. Older townsfolk grumbled that I was a nigger lover, since I had married Kenny – my ex-husband – perhaps trying to keep their white sons away from my half-Asian grasp. Though, I often reminded everyone that I was an American. Plus some townspeople still believed that even thirty years



Siracuse Bike | *Claudia Rippee*

since the peace agreement my Filipino mother had something to do with World War Two, which means by default I did too.

Hundreds of hunters trickled in and out of our small Indiana town and in and out of Toby's Hotel from November through December, hoping to bag a white-tailed deer and a beautiful woman. The hunters danced and partied through the night. They were real men. They put food on the table, and I needed me a man-of-the-house.

'Could you watch the kids tonight?'

'No!' Mrs. McCann replied.

Mrs. McCann used to watch my kids all the time, fed them and helped them with their school work. She was a nice, old, Irish lady who lived alone after her husband had died in the quarry, rocks had tumbled down then crushed him. I stood shocked outside Mrs. McCann's door. I had on my tight jean shorts and an even tighter tube top. I looked and felt pretty. My thinning hair was styled nicely. Mrs. McCann had never once told me 'no.' She started to close the door.

Her harsh refusal confused me. With my hand I stopped the door from closing.

‘I will no longer watch your kids,’ Mrs. McCann said.

I looked at Vereen and Eddie. Stevie was a good boy; my oldest son reminded me of Kenny. I never worried about Stevie acting out.

‘What did you two do?’ I asked.

Mrs. McCann leaned forward. I leaned in too.

‘You’re a whore,’ she said. ‘I won’t be an accomplice to your whoring.’

Then she slammed the door.

‘Fuck you!’ I yelled, slapping her door.

I couldn’t believe Mrs. McCann called me a whore in front of my children. If she thought me a whore I knew that people in our neighborhood must have been telling her lies about me.

So I turned around and yelled out, ‘Fuck all of you.’

Then Stevie punched Mrs. McCann’s door.

‘You’re the whore,’ Stevie shouted.

Stevie punched the door three or four more times. I stood watching as my thirteen-year-old son’s loose basketball shorts and white T-shirt swayed back then forth. Vereen cringed at the violent sounds and foul words. My ten-year-old daughter held the hem of her dress in her right hand like she was a scared preschooler. Eddie joined Stevie, kicking Mrs. McCann’s door like some wild child. Then my six-year-old son stopped kicking the door when his big brother stopped, then Eddie smiled at Stevie.

Stevie agreed to take charge of Vereen and Eddie. He said that they three would go to bed at a decent hour. Eat sandwiches when hungry. Stay inside the house. Stevie promised that Vereen and Eddie would obey his orders. ‘We will,’ both Vereen and Eddie said. I told Stevie to use the boxing gloves if need be. Teach them a lesson if he must. Then I kissed each one goodnight. Then I walked to Toby’s to find my husband.

SMELLS LIKE RAIN,’ I said.

The tall baby-faced man turned to face me. His Reds baseball cap mostly covered his stringy blonde hair. He had tucked in his green-and-black-striped flannel shirt. His tight blue jeans revealed the bulk of his manhood. I liked what I saw.

‘How about a drink?’ I asked.

Raleigh ordered two whiskies, Friday night’s two-for-one special. Raleigh held up two fingers as though the bartender were deaf. ‘Neat,’ Raleigh added. He glanced at me a few times, smiled. I thought he looked and sounded cute, trying to impress me. Raleigh told me that his name meant ‘roe deer’s meadow.’ I giggled, told him how ironic. Then he ordered two more ‘neat’ whiskies. Raleigh and I danced. He moved well. He knew how to swivel his hips. Raleigh didn’t say much.

‘Get us a couple more drinks,’ I said. ‘Then we can head out if you like.’

I watched Raleigh walk to the bar, hold up four fingers at the bartender. I noticed Tommy in the casino portion of Toby’s Hotel. My little brother was playing cards and drinking beer. Tommy’s deceitful squaw wife stood behind him, rubbing his shoulders. Then I noticed Kenny, playing cards too, seated to Tommy’s left. They all laughed at something Kenny said. Tommy and my ex-husband touched their bottles together. Laughed once again. Kimi’s hands continued to rub Tommy’s shoulders.

Raleigh led me to his hotel room. His dirty clothes were scattered everywhere. Chip bags and food wrappers cluttered the floor. ‘Sorry ’bout the mess,’ Raleigh said. I told him it was alright. That it wasn’t his fault. That he needed a good woman to care for him.

‘I agree,’ Raleigh replied, grinning.

Raleigh showed me his rifle, his camouflage, other hunting gear. I took off my clothes, showed him parts of me, danced around, did things to Raleigh I hadn’t done for anyone in years. I screamed his name during high points of our sex and asked for more when Raleigh seemed tired. I fetched our whiskies from across the room, caressed his bare skin with my finger tips.

‘That feels good,’ Raleigh told me.

Then I cleaned his room as he slept.

IN THE EARLY morning Raleigh kissed my forehead, told me to sleep as late as I pleased. ‘I hope to see you later,’ Raleigh added. He left twenty dollars on the table, told me to buy something to eat, to stay all day. He thanked me for last night. Then he tucked me into the sheets. I liked him giving me money. I stayed all weekend. My youngest sister’s new car was parked in the driveway that Sunday evening when I returned home. I shook my head at the car as I walked past it. I had told Julie that she wasted her money. She disagreed like always. Julie stood in front of the kitchen sink. Vereen stood on a chair beside Julie. She and Vereen splashed soap bubbles as they washed plates. Eddie hollered, ‘Mama’s home,’ when I walked into the cleaned house.

‘What’s going on?’ I asked.

‘Helping out,’ Julie said.

Julie’s sundress displayed flower prints, white like dahlias. Her hair had been pulled into a ponytail. Vereen had a French braid.

‘Who needs help?’

‘Vereen –’

‘Vereen what?’ I asked

Julie cupped Vereen’s armpits, helped her to the floor. Then Julie wrapped her arm around Vereen’s shoulders.

‘What did you do, Vereen?’ I asked.

‘She called me,’ Julie said. ‘Stevie took off. There’s nothing to eat.’

'Stevie!' I yelled. I walked into the living room. 'Stevie come here now.'
'He's not home,' Vereen said.

Julie blocked my path as I hurried to smack Vereen's face. Vereen was wearing one of her 'cute' dresses. I drew my hand back. Vereen's high-and-mighty attitude again pissed me off. I squared to Julie. Julie looked down at me. Julie stood six-feet tall. I knew better than to tussle with Julie.

'Fine,' I said. 'You think you can parent better than me?'

I ran to my room, packed a bag. What did Julie know about raising kids? I thought. Julie needed to finally learn her lesson.

'They're yours,' I said, leaving the house.

RALEIGH AGREED TO take me on a road trip. He had planned to bring his Airstream trailer back to my small Indiana town anyhow. 'It costs too much living in this hotel,' Raleigh said. 'The trailer's got a kitchen and everything.' Raleigh explained that we could pick up the trailer from Cincinnati, Ohio. Only three hours away. Be back in a day. He said that we could cook deer steaks, grill vegetables, instead of eating at the Hotel's diner or out of chip bags. Raleigh suggested that I could bake banana bread and other things. I told him that I could play house while he hunted meat.

'The only thing I know how to make is sugar sandwiches,' I told Raleigh.

Raleigh found that funny.

'Let's make this a vacation,' I said as we sped out of town.

Raleigh remained quiet. He had on camouflage: pants and button-up shirt.

'We could sleep at truck stops,' I said. 'Have sex in the car. Under the stars. Just two parking spaces away from truckers.'

'You're wild,' he said.

Raleigh agreed to take our time driving to Ohio. Then he promised that he would show me the home that he had grown up in, just outside Cleveland's city limits. He promised to stop in Louisville, Kentucky for a day or two; though he wanted to hurry back before all the bucks were killed. I told him that I hadn't been to Louisville before. Raleigh didn't believe me.

There wasn't much to see leaving my small town. Raleigh and I traveled along Interstate Sixty-Four, stopped at Harrison Crawford State Forest, walked around Wyandotte Caves. Raleigh told me that the caves were once an excellent source of saltpeter. 'Which is a component of gunpowder,' he explained. I told him that he sounded smart. That I liked smart people. Raleigh continued on about other cave things.

'There are so many black people,' I said as we walked about Louisville's streets.

Protesters lined the streets of Louisville, Kentucky. I sat inside the car amazed and scared. White people were shouting, chanting,

picketing alongside yellow Jefferson-County-School-District buses. They held signs that stated: STOP BUSING, PIPEFITTER LOCAL 522 IS AGAINST BUSING. Those same white people waved Confederate and American flags. Hundreds of black people had assembled close to the protesters. I was surprised to see light-skinned, some almost purple-skinned, and every shade in between, black people.

'This place is out of control,' I said. My heart raced. Onlookers leaned from their Fourth-and-Broadway-apartment windows to watch the commotion. Some black people were yelling back at the white picketers. There were also white people who stood amongst the black people, yelling at the white crowd.

Police officers carried long, white batons. They wore helmets with face shields. They were shouting at the picketers, avoiding the rocks that the white people threw. They ordered everyone to disperse but everyone seemed to ignore their commands. Then the police rushed into the crowd, seized two white males and one white female. They threw the three protesters to the ground then hauled them away. The picketers became angry. They surrounded the police vans.

'Is it like this everywhere?' I asked.

Raleigh seemed too nervous and too hurried to reply. But I want see everything.

I couldn't stop watching the events. I couldn't stop staring at the black people, their short-sleeved shirts, men in fedoras, women holding umbrellas. My eyes darted all about. I wanted to take in the big buildings, the commotion, the hairstyles and the people. I felt like a child at the circus. I'd never seen anything like this.

Then the white crowd flooded the streets, blocked cars from traveling in either direction. They slow-marched to Sixth Street, sat in the shadow of a federal building, started making speeches.

MOVE THIS WAY,' I said. 'No, it's not going to work like that.' Having sex in a car at thirty-one was much different than having car sex at seventeen. Kenny used to call me a spinner when we were younger; I easily could turn around to face his feet then turn again to face him as he lay on his back enjoying the view. But at thirty-one I couldn't bend like I used to. Raleigh wanted my legs in ways that hurt the backs of them. He told me to turn around then everything seemed to become sloppy and embarrassing.

Raleigh kept saying, 'I'm gonna ...Let me ...I need to ...' He seemed unable to finish a sentence. Eventually we gave up. Raleigh appeared deflated, so I finished him off with my hand, moaned alongside him, whispered encouragement into his ear. Then I wiped the mess on the back of his passenger seat when he had finished. Raleigh fell asleep with his pants around his knees. I pulled out my bottle of blackberry brandy, the one that Raleigh bought me,

took a sip each time he snored. I passed out then woke up in some bush a hundred yards from the parked car.

‘Where’d you go?’ Raleigh asked.

‘Don’t know,’ I said. ‘One minute I’m having a drink, the next I’m waking over there.’

‘I looked for you,’ Raleigh said.

He sounded upset.

‘Louisville’s an unforgiving city,’ he added. ‘You don’t know what these black people will do to you.’

Raleigh refused to believe that I had blacked out. He insinuated that I may have found another man to hang out with. I called him ridiculous, told him to stop acting childish. He threatened to leave me. I dared him to. We barely spoke the rest of the way to Cincinnati.

DURING THE DRIVE home, Raleigh talked about his family. He said that his parents were Polish but were classified as German by the Immigration Services. ‘People hated them during World War Two,’ Raleigh said. ‘Called them Nazis.’ His parents had packed the family up and moved them to Cleveland, Ohio, to Slavic Village from New York City. Raleigh said that his family attended St. Stanislaus Church, on East Sixty-Fifth Street and Baxter Avenue.

‘My sister’s divorced,’ Raleigh said. ‘Lives with her son.’

He explained that his sister received free money from the government. That the government gave her coupons to eat, paid for her house too. Raleigh said that his parents basically disowned her. ‘Polish people are known for working in steel mills, refineries and slaughterhouses,’ he said. ‘They call my sister lazy.’ Raleigh’s sister just sat around all day, getting fatter and fatter.

Raleigh wanted to park the Airstream at a campground.

‘You can park it in my driveway,’ I suggested. ‘I won’t charge you much.’

Raleigh laughed. I grabbed hold of his hand. I liked him laughing at my jokes.

Raleigh said that he liked the thought of living in the wilderness, the thought of listening to the crickets and searching for firewood in the morning dew. I told him that I was afraid of bears. He said that I talked nonsense. But he agreed to park the trailer outside the house after I promised to do some of those things that he and I did our first night together.

‘Where’s everyone at?’ I shouted.

I walked around the house. Raleigh followed. He fingered the kids’ books, their thrown-about clothes and Eddie’s truck.

‘You got children?’ Raleigh asked.

‘Hello?’ I shouted.

Raleigh’s eyes followed my movements.

‘They won’t bother you.’ I said.

Raleigh took a seat at the kitchen table, ran his hand across the plastic table covering. I phoned my Father's house.

'Where's Julie?' I asked.

'Julie at store,' Mother replied in her broken Filipino-English.

'Where're my kids?'

'They here,' Mother said. 'You run away.'

Mother believed that I had disappeared forever. Julie believed it too. I don't know what they were thinking. Julie had packed the kids' clothes then moved them into Father's home. The kids were sharing a bed. 'Stevie bad child,' Mother said. 'He don't listen no one.' I told her that I wanted my kids back. That I was coming over. That Stevie listened to his mother.

Eddie shouted, 'Mama's home,' when I walked into Father's house. Vereen stayed quiet. She watched Raleigh standing in the doorway. Eddie said that Stevie was running around outside. That Stevie had refused to take Eddie with him. Mother sat in her kitchen. The house smelled of vinegar, bay leaves and soy sauce. Father was nowhere in sight.

'You bad,' Mother said. 'You bad mother.'

'I was teaching Julie a lesson.'

'We take kids from you. You awful mother.'

Mother explained that she had been to see a lawyer. That she had asked about adopting the kids. The lawyer asked, 'Why?' Mother had explained that I had run away. That I was never to return.

'They're my kids,' I shouted

Mother stood up, walked to the kitchen doorway.

'You whore,' she said, pointing at Raleigh with her wooden spoon then she looked at me. 'And you bad mother.'

'You're a whore and a horrible mother,' I said. 'You're the reason Father's a drunk. The only person who likes you is Julie.'

Eddie stood in the kitchen doorway, hands in pockets, watching Mother and me. Vereen stood next to Raleigh, her hair in braids, flirting with him. Vereen was stealing away from me Raleigh's attention likes she stole away Father's.

'You get out house,' Mother said. 'You go. Now.'

Eddie chattered in the backseat of Raleigh's car. He said that Julie had cooked pancakes and sticky rice and fried chicken. 'Do you want to live with Julie?' I asked. Vereen and Eddie said nothing more. Stevie hadn't yet returned from running around. Mother said that Julie would bring him home.

'Are your kids black?' Raleigh asked.

'And a quarter Filipino,' I replied.

Raleigh turned his eyes away from me.

'Is there a problem?' I asked.

Raleigh didn't answer.

At the end of deer season, Raleigh and his Airstream were gone.

Empty

Amy Fontenot

Southern New Hampshire University Undergraduate Prose Winner

My lungs ache as I suck in the frozen air. My knee throbs and threatens to give out, but I refuse to slow down. The 2400 calories in an Oreo package equals two-and-a-half hours of hard running. The shame from the calories gives me the push I need to finish. I complete my run and the comforting sense of emptiness—no guilt, no shame, no food—envelops me.

I jog down the driveway after paying my penance. Tom's truck sits in front of the house. My steps slow. I catch my breath and wipe the sweat from my face before opening the front door. Tom sits on the couch watching TV. He turns and grins as I shut the door behind me. "There you are," He says, "I was starting to worry that someone kidnapped you." Tom holds up his cell. "You didn't answer your phone."

I laugh stiffly and shrug. "My battery went dead during my run." I collapse beside Tom on the couch and ease my shoes off my blistered feet. "Sorry, I thought I had another hour before you'd be home." "I finished my meeting early and thought I would surprise you." Tom squeezes my knee and kisses my nose. "Go get showered. I want to take you out."

I groan and lean back against the couch. "Okay, but I don't think I can move."

"How long did you run?" Still grinning, Tom squints his eyes and tilts his head, studying my drenched sweatshirt. "Are you training for a marathon I don't know about?"

I shift away from Tom and push myself off the couch. "No marathon. I just fell into a good pace and forgot about the time." Walking toward the bathroom, I add, "You should come with me next time." He curls his lip into a wry smile and gives me an amused look. I laugh at his aversion to running and shut the bathroom door.

I lean against the door and close my eyes, rubbing my knee. I wish I ran for the love of the wind against my cheeks, or the steady rhythm of my feet against the pavement, but I run because I need the control. I control everything when I run: my breathing, my stride, my speed, my thoughts, my direction. In school, my gym teacher couldn't get me to run. I would defiantly walk every lap, glaring at him as I passed. When I was twelve, my mom force me to come on early morning runs with her. It went on every day for a month. "This is so much fun! Isn't this fun?" she'd ask as she glided ahead of me down the predawn street. I'd huff along behind her, refusing to run and give her the satisfaction

of making me lose weight. When my mom left us, I ate to spite her. I ate and ate and ate, trying to fill the hole in my chest and somehow punish her for abandoning me.

I can't remember when I first felt the overwhelming need to leave, too. It became unbearable, so I put on my shoes and for the first time I ran until I could barely stand. My underarms and thighs chafed so badly I bled. I was hooked. Weight started falling off despite my binge eating. People seemed to notice me for the first time.

I shower quickly and reluctantly leave the stream of hot water. Pain shoots up from my knee when I step out of the shower. I towel off and enter the adjoining master bedroom to dress.

"Babe? You almost ready?" Tom calls from the kitchen.

"I'm almost done." I say, zipping up my dress. I slip on boots as Tom appears in the doorway of the bedroom.

"Where are the Oreos I bought yesterday?" He asks, leaning against the door frame and clutching his stomach. "I'm starving."

I shrug. "I don't know, but I'm ready." I stretch up to kiss his cheek. "Let's go eat."

In the truck, I charge my phone and check my voicemail. Tom had left me two messages. The first let me know he was home early and the second, directed at my imaginary kidnappers, promised to pay any ransom. With my ear still pressed to the phone, I tilt my head toward Tom, rolling my eyes and laughing. The final message is from Dad. I choke down the lump in my throat at the sound of his weak voice.

"Hey, Katie. It's me, your Pops. I'm just checking in on you. It was good to see you last weekend...I—I noticed you've lost a good bit of weight. I know you're going to get mad at me for saying this, but I'm worried you might be falling back into old habits. Don't be mad—I just want to make sure you're okay. Anyway, I'm finishing up this round of chemo soon, and I want to go out and celebrate. Give me a call."

I shove my phone down onto the seat and turn toward the side window.

"Hey," Tom says, grabbing my hand, "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah," I clear my throat and shove down the anger and shame. "Just worried about my Dad." Tom squeezes my hand, and we ride in silence.

Tom picks a new pizza joint downtown. I barely eat two bites. Tom chats about work and orders us cannoli for dessert.

"Did you hear what I said?" Tom asks with anticipation on his face.

"Um, sorry. I was distracted." I say and offer an apologetic half-smile. "What did you say?"

Tom leans in toward me, smiling. "They want to transfer me to Chicago so I can head up my own division! I told them I needed to talk to you first. What do you think? Should we make the move?"

I stare at him not knowing what to say. After a moment, I shake my

head and smile. “Wow! That’s awesome, Tom! Of course you should take it! Chicago...Wow!” Panic quickly fills my chest, but I don’t let my smile slip.

“I guess we have to be Cubs fans now. Your Dad will eventually forgive you for converting to a new team, right?” I nod and smile a beat too late. The waitress packs up the remaining pizza and cannoli in a to-go box as Tom talks about Chicago. “I’d love to find a place near the water. We could learn to sail. You can run on the beach every day. A townhouse near Grant Park would be great...” He continues talking as we walk to the car, and on the ride back to the house. “That pizza place we really liked is in that area. Just think, we could have Chicago deep-dish every night if we wanted.” He parks in the driveway and leans in to kiss me. I want to share his excitement, but my lack of control suppresses the joy I should be feeling.

“Hey, I left the paperwork at the office. Do you mind if I go grab it so we can look at it together?” Tom asks, kissing me again.

“You go ahead. I’ll get the food in the fridge and get ready for bed.” I squeeze his hand. “See you in a minute.”

As he pulls out of the driveway, I rush in the front door and drop to the floor. I frantically grab a slice of pizza and stuff it in my mouth. I choke it down and mentally tally the calories: 450. I eat another greasy slice: 900. Then another: 1350. I choke down the cannoli, swallowing it before my tongue can taste it: 1900. Tears drip from my chin. Desperation consumes me. I sob on the floor. I have an overwhelming need to get it out. I need to be empty—numb. I scramble to the bathroom and fall to my knees in front of the toilet.

“What are you doing?” I freeze, unable to make myself turn and look at Tom in the doorway. My mind tries to reconcile the shame with the need to be empty. Tremors run through my body at the thought of stopping. I clutch the rim of the toilet, trying to gain control. “Kate,” Tom takes a step toward me. “What are you doing to yourself, Kate?” His anguished voice claws at my chest. He doesn’t seem surprised. He doesn’t ask how long, or why. I remain silent, not willing to share my secrets with him.

He pulls me against his chest. I count his deep, shaky breaths: 13, 14, 15.... He leads me to the bedroom and tucks me into our bed. I wait for the disgust and condemnation, but he just kisses my forehead. He curls his body around mine, stroking my hair. I don’t feel comfort. All I can feel is the food left in my belly along with the shame and helplessness that comes with it.

Tom’s breathing slows, and soon he’s asleep next to me. I slide out of our bed, pausing at the bathroom door. I glance back at Tom and walk out of the room. I slip on my shoes in the dark living room and sneak out the front door.

I run in the darkness. No moon lights the sky. No sun pushes against the horizon. I run in the dark until I’m empty again.

California Nails

Natalie Jones

Southern New Hampshire University Undergraduate Poetry Winner

You draw one hundred dollars from your savings account. The bill tastes like a rich dessert you eat after you are already full. It feels like buying an expensive dress you'll never wear. It will eventually rot in your closet; the names of the designers are crammed close to each other like names on graveyard tombstones. It smells like how the upholstery of a shiny sports car smells in your dreams. You dream that your fingernails are perfectly painted. Your eyebrows are perfectly plucked. Your hands are not stained and burned as they are in real life. You are not in your dreams. You crouch to pull the pan of brownies out of the oven. You tie your bandana a little bit tighter around your head, hoping your husband does not walk in and notice your imperfections. You wipe your sweat covered forehead in defeat, wondering when this Lucille Ball bullshit will end.

Brush it Away

Kelsey Jarvis

New Hampshire High School Poetry Winner

Mama used to comb my hair,
her delicate hands swept
long auburn locks from my cheeks;
fragile fingers untangled little knots
that the brush alone couldn't undo.
She and I would laugh together
as we made up stories about cars
driving by the bathroom window,
talking about
where they had come from
and where they were headed.

Now I comb my own hair,
and I cannot figure out
how to brush the knots without
pulling out strands of hair.
Silently standing alone
under florescent lights;
no longer creating tales
of grand journeys; but
instead, sealing the window tight,
keeping the thoughts of her
from being brushed away.

Houston, I Have So Many Problems

*Or; I Learned to Read Before My Brother and
it's Basically All Downhill From There*

Emily Bascom

New Hampshire High School Prose Winner

If I'm being honest, my love affair with writing started with a haiku. "Women are weaklings" the first line touted. "I'm strong enough to carry" the second line retorted, before the final line, "Your body to the woods." I have got to say, the dark twist hooked me. It hooked me so much in fact, when my teacher told us to pick one of the free writes we penned in Sophomore English last year, to finalize for the final exam, I chose to take a list of things I hated, and proceeded to make it into a giant compilation of hateful haikus. If we're going for specifics, I wrote nineteen mean hearted haikus, while the rest were a compilation of apologies for the list in the first place. It was undeniably the most fun I've ever had taking an exam, though most of them were poorly constructed and made no sense if you hadn't read the list... but I digress. It was the form of writing I loved most, over the many years of my literate experience. Poetry was a way to passive aggressively mumble about how I felt, and as a mumbly teenager, this had endless appeal. To learn why speaking quietly and rudely, with a hint of disinterested aloofness is my preferred method of communication; we must first explore my history with the written word.

I taught myself to read when I was three years old. Even as a young child, I was constantly suspicious that people were doing things without me. My house was filled with books that many people have never even heard of. This is not because my parents were underground book dealers or eclectic collectors of the rare and beautiful, but because they were weird. Really, the books in my house were collections of obscure child novelists that never took off, Magic Tree House books that were too hard, then entirely too easy for me to read, and journals on holistic healings and finding God in your teens that are better left undiscussed. My envy of people who could read these books knew no bounds. After all, my father and sister seemed to get endless hours of entertainment from them, and as a toddler who took it upon herself to be the center of attention all the time, I needed to know what was more interesting than I. I was intensely jealous, and demanded that my sister teach me the alphabet. In all her ten-year-old glory, she complied, thinking she would humor me. Once I had mastered the sounds each letter made, I tore into the first book I could find. It was about a worm named Worm, and he was trying to find a way to beat the heat.

I must have read that book twenty times before I understood what a worm was, and then what “the” meant, and then that f-a-n meant fan, but once I got there, I went crazy. I tore through the series of basic picture books showing Worm doing mundane activities that to someone not allowed to use the stove, was like reading about someone doing wheelies on a motorcycle and setting things on fire for fun. I read about a cat named Tabby, and other animals whose name were more of a definition. I read Mr. Putter and Tabby, then Henry and Mudge, and all the books in their respective series. By the time I finished, I was four, entering kindergarten, and firmly back as the center of everyone’s attention. To put it simply, I had never been happier.

I remember that fateful day in Kindergarten when my teacher challenged another student with particularly nice writing to transcribe a whole sentence. Fueled by tiny toddler fury that I had not been put in the spotlight instead, I proceeded to write two paragraphs about my weekend, complete with scribbled illustrations drawn by broken crayons I snapped at the unfairness of it all. My teacher, when she came over to check on me, (I assume because my face was splotchy red with rage directed at the fickleness of life) looked at my journal, back at me, and left the room. She came back with the learning skills teacher, and from then on I was branded with a title that would bring me both great pride and embarrassment: Gifted.

Progressing through elementary school, my mother always read me bedtime stories. We would switch off who read, often choosing a book she had been meaning to read. This explains my immense discomfort with knitting mysteries and colonial teenage romances, and my burning hatred for Anne of Green Gables. Although poor Anne never did anything to me, my unstilted reading voice separated me from most of my peers, who were all sounding out each word, letter by letter. I was so self-conscious I once tried imitating their slow, separated reading, until my mother repeatedly told me how proud she and my dad were of how well I read. This, however, did nothing to deter me from intentionally bombing spelling tests. These failings eventually turned into a real problem, and to this day, I can’t pass anything handwritten in to my teachers, because my stupendous lack of phonetic skill is truly mind-boggling.

It’s not that I didn’t like writing. I loved to write, and when we made poetry books in the first grade, despite the poor spelling, my teacher was so impressed with the fact that I was using personification and metaphors, she kept my book and brought it to a convention. After reading my cute little poems about the different times of day and weather, many people asked her what grade she taught, and if one of her students did this. When she said yes, and first grade, she took immense pride in the dumbstruck looks on their faces. While this only inflated my ego even more, it also exiled me from the other kids. They

did not welcome the special assignments I had to do in addition to their work. It made them feel stupid, and they were not afraid to tell me how mean I was being by being smarter than everyone else.

Being in second grade and knowing you're smarter than everyone, and that they all hate you for it, kind of sucks. It's the kind of suck that makes you blame yourself, which makes you kind of grumpy, which makes you kind of mean. And while we're being honest, being mean doesn't make you too many friends. Having a really grumpy and borderline offensive sense of humor however, does make you hilarious. And being hilarious sets the foundation for great writing.

Now, this isn't to say that just because someone's funny it makes him or her a good writer, or that people who don't write with constant humor aren't great writers. You can kill off every single character that your audience loves, put them through great pain, write a fantastic piece, but for god's sake, if you're going to do that, you can tell at least one joke and make everything a thousand times better. Being a grumpy kid with an awful sense of humor myself, I started to read some books with narrators or authors with dry wits. Then I read some more, then even more, and then I started to write.

Or at least, I tried to write, before learning that trying to write is awful and that when you read over what you've done, there is possibly nothing else in the world that you hate more than that piece of writing. I tried to write, but could never find words that I didn't immediately regret. Then, I found poetry.

The beauty of the haiku is that no matter how much you hate it, you can always just make another one. If you don't like the word choice in line one, fine, change it, but do it in another haiku. You not only write more, but you finish with something that doesn't make you want to throw your computer out a window. Once I started writing haikus, I wrote other poems and before I knew it, I was writing sprawling pages about a multitude of different events and ideas—but they all had one thing in common: they were all about women.

Something I constantly mumble at my dad when we're watching TV is that the show needs to do it again, but this time with more ladies. Is it a show about pirates in space? How about lady pirates? A high intensity drama about an ex-addict turned beat cop? Guess who the main character should be! That's right, a lady. It overflowed to the point where the following conversation became commonplace in front of the TV.

"Do it again." I'd growl. By this time, he'd learned the automatic response. More ladies would undoubtedly be the answer, but more often than not, I felt like no one was hearing the problem to begin with.

So I started writing about the girls and women that I could imagine on my TV screen. Women who could rip a door off it's hinges, and those who would rather not because they just got their nails done.

Women who cried, women who went down fighting, women who wanted someone to love, women who didn't need anyone. I wrote about women who got up and moved on, and those who couldn't help but be stuck in the past. I wrote about all of these things, and the radical notion that all of them could exist in one woman.

The lack of diverse and multifaceted women in media is extremely disturbing. So disturbing, in fact, that I sucked you into this with the story of how I came to literacy, only for you to be stuck on the end of an essay about gender representation in the media that you definitely didn't sign up for. The most important thing I have learned—be it through books, movies, TV, or poems, is that there is not one character who doesn't matter; Harry Potter matters, Katniss Everdeen matters, even the people on 30 Rock matter, and they do terrible things to each other every week. The flattening of women as a gender, through stereotypes and broad generalizations goes directly against this notion of universal importance, no matter who someone is.

The story of my rise to literacy is one plagued with hard facts. As a grumpy teenager who sees the problem, with no one willing to listen to her answer, being literate is endlessly frustrating. Hearing people say feminism (There, I did it, I said the f-word, we can all relax now that we know I hate men.) is a waste of time and that feminists are both killjoys and against men in general, doesn't only get disheartening, it gets boring. I'm not three years old anymore, and whatever the big secret is about why we constantly need to degrade women in the public eye is something I'd really like to know. The complete double standard society has created for women is insane. Celebrities are paid to get our attention. When a male celebrity takes his clothes off, he's just having fun, but as soon as a starlet has a wardrobe malfunction, it's a national headline, and whoops, now she's not a good role model for children. This weird set of rules no one ever thought to tell me about is why I am endlessly frustrated when someone tells me they hate feminists. It's why I've stopped yelling and started mumbling.

Contributors' Notes

Abe Aamidor has had short fiction published in *The Gettysburg Review*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Amoskeag*, *Garbanzo*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *The Poydras Review* and, forthcoming, in *The Worcester Review* and *The Arkansas Review*. “Sacrificing Isaac” is adapted from a semi-autobiographical novel in progress, *Unconditional*. His website is aamidor.com.

June Frankland Baker, originally from upstate New York, lives in Richland, Washington. A former teacher, she has published poetry in literary journals and anthologies since the 1970's, most recently in *Common Ground Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Slant*.

Emily Bascom, our New Hampshire High School Prose Winner, is a junior at Dublin School. Her hobbies include being right and wearing more sweaters than is humanly possible.

Aileen Bassis is a visual artist in Jersey City working in book arts, printmaking, photography and installation. Her artwork can be viewed at aileenbassis.com. She's exploring a new creative life as a poet. Her poems are published currently and upcoming in *Blue River Review*, *Gravel Magazine*, *the Literary Bohemian*, *Milo Journal*, *Red Branch Journal*, *Specs Journal*, *Spillway*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly* and others.

Anemone Beaulier's poetry has appeared on *Poetry Daily* and in journals such as *The Southern Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Cream City Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Cave Wall*. She lives in Alabama with her husband and two daughters and writes about motherhood on the blog *Bloom, Baby*.

Robert Begiebing, founding editor of *Amoskeag* (*NHC Journal*) and professor emeritus at SNHU, is the author of eight books, a play, and over 30 stories and articles. His fiction has been supported with grants from the New Hampshire Council on the Arts and the Lila Wallace Foundation. He is the recipient of the 2003 Langum Prize for Historical Fiction and was appointed by Governor John Lynch in 2007 to the NH Council on the Arts. “Bad Boys” is a chapter reprinted with permission from *A Berkshire Boyhood: Confessions and Reflections of a Baby Boomer* (Anaphora Literary Press, 2014).

Deborah Brown's book of poems, “*Walking the Dog's Shadow*,” is the 2010 winner of the A. J. Poulin Jr. Award from BOA Editions and of the 2011 New Hampshire Literary Award for Outstanding Book of Poetry. The title poem won a Pushcart Prize. Brown is a translator, with Richard Jackson and Susan Thomas of *Last Voyage: Selected Poems of Giovanni Pascoli* (Red Hen Press, 2010) and an editor, with Maxine

Kumin and Annie Finch, of *Lofty Dogmas: Poets on Poetics* (Univ. of Arkansas Press, 2005). Her poems have appeared in *Margie*, *Rattle*, *The Alaska Quarterly*, *Stand*, *The New England Review*, *the Mississippi Review*, *Nimrod* and others. Brown is a professor of English at the University of New Hampshire-Manchester where she won an award for Excellence in Teaching. She lives in Warner, New Hampshire, with her husband George Brown and four cats.

Michael Charney lives and writes in Bedford NH. His short stories and essays have appeared in such publications as *American Short Story* and *Eotu*, and he is a member of the New Hampshire Writer's Project. Mr. Charney is also the owner and editor of Riddle Brook Publishing, a small company dedicated to publishing narrative non-fiction by beginning New England writers.

Jack Cooper's first formal collection of poetry, *Across My Silence*, was published by World Audience, Inc., New York, NY, 2007. His work has been nominated three times for a Pushcart Prize and chosen as a finalist in *North American Review's* James Hearst Poetry Prize. His poetry has also appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *The Evansville Review*, *The MacGuffin* and many other publications.

Allison Cummings teaches composition, literature, and poetry writing at Southern New Hampshire University. She writes poetry and essays and has published in journals such as *The Literary Review*, *Passages North*, *Earthspeak*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *So to Speak The Madison Review*, and *Flyway*. She lives in Manchester, NH.

Sarah Flause has been photographing since childhood. She has studied photography at the New Hampshire Institute of Art and the Maine Media Workshops. She is a board member of the New Hampshire Society of Photographic Artists and a juried member of the New Hampshire Art Association. She works predominantly on images of historic architecture.

Amy Fontenot, Southern New Hampshire University Undergraduate Prose Winner.

Isabel Wolfe-Frischman was born in New York and grew up in New Jersey. She has been an actress - doing mostly television - and has written for television. In recent years, she has been writing fiction and poetry, and has published haiku. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband, younger daughter, cat and pot-bellied pig.

Judith Goedke became a seeker at the age of 4 during a tantrum, and has been living the big questions ever since. Writing clarifies and hones the experience of being alive. It opens, stretches and heals. She is in awe of this magic. Her poems have appeared in regional, national and

Contributors' Notes

international anthologies. She and her husband, Charlie, share a posh tree house in N. Laurel, Md.

Mark Hage is a maker of stories and a visual artist based in New York City. His fiction has been published in *Confrontation*, *Juked*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Smokelong Quarterly*, *The Madison Review*, *Word Riot* and others. He is completing a book of short stories and a novel.

Kelsey Jarvis, our New Hampshire High School Poetry Winner is a senior at Gilford High School. She loves to draw and write, and hopes "Nothing is greater than the feeling I get when I help someone else understand something challenging."

Natalie Jones, Southern New Hampshire University Undergraduate Poetry Winner is a student in the university honors program and is majoring in English Language and Literature. Her work has been published at Housefire Books.

Janet Krauss, a widely published poet, has two books published, *Borrowed Scenery* (Yuganta Press, 2005) and *Through the Trees of Autumn* (Spartina Press and the Faculty Development Fund Committee of St. Basil College, 2007). She was twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She teaches writing and literature at Fairfield University where she received the Adjunct Award of the Year in 2006. She also enjoys being a volunteer as a mentor and teacher of creative writing in the Bridgeport, CT schools.

Abigail Lee, originally from Chesapeake, VA, spent the past year doing home rebuilding in New Orleans after recently graduating from the University of Virginia. She is currently pursuing an MFA in poetry writing at UNC Greensboro. Her work has or will appear in *The Evansville Review*, *The Aureorean*, *Gadfly*, *Blood and Thunder*, and other publications.

Nathan Alling Long's stories and essays have appeared in a dozen anthologies and over fifty journals, including *Glimmer Train*, *Story Quarterly*, *The Sun*, and *Crab Orchard Review*—as well as on NPR. He teaches at Richard Stockton College and lives in Philadelphia, PA, where he writes, bakes bread, and bicycles along the trails of Wissahickon Creek.

Sandy McCord's poems have appeared in *The Aureorean*, *Cider Press Review*, *The Listening Eye*, *Plainsongs*, and *Poem*, among others. She was a featured poet in *Tiger's Eye 2012*, Issue 22. Her chapbook *Dragon Well* was published by Finishing Line Press.

Amy Irvine McHarg is a sixth-generation Utahn and longtime wilderness advocate, who for seven years worked for the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance. Her second book, *Trespass: Living at the Edge of the Promised Land* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux/ North Point Press, 2008), received the *Orion* Book Award and Colorado Book Award—while the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that it “might very well be *Desert Solitaire*’s literary heir.” Her essay “Spectral Light” (*Orion*, January-February 2010 /*The Best American Science and Nature Writing* of 2011), was a finalist for the Pen Award in Journalism that year. Her next book, *Terra Firma*, about motherhood, madness and dreams, is in progress and will be published by Counterpoint Press. She is currently the faculty fellow in the SNHU MFA program.

Melany Nietzsche studied English Literature at Webster University and University of Missouri-St. Louis. She is a long-time member of the Heartland Women’s Writers Guild and is co-author of the book, *Orchids in the Cornfield*.

Michael Onofrey was born and raised in Los Angeles. Currently he lives in Japan. In addition to having previously appeared in *Amoskeag*, his stories have appeared in *Cottonwood*, *The Evansville Review*, *Natural Bridge*, and *Road to Nowhere and Other New Stories from the Southwest* (anthology, University of New Mexico Press), as well as in other literary journals and anthologies.

Mark Pawlak is the author of seven poetry collections and editor of six anthologies. Pawlak’s poems have appeared widely in anthologies such as *The Best American Poetry*, *Blood to Remember: American Poets on the Holocaust*, *For the Time Being: The Bootstrap Anthology of Poetic Journals* and in the literary magazines *New American Writing*, *Mother Jones*, *Poetry South*, *The Saint Ann’s Review*, and *The World*, among many others. His work has been translated into German, Polish, and Spanish, and performed at Teatr Polski in Warsaw. For more than 33 years, Pawlak has been an editor of *Hanging Loose*, one of the oldest independent literary journals and presses in the country.

Malaina Poore is a writer, keeper of artist’s journals and a mother. Her writing has been published in numerous anthologies, blogs and academic journals, including “The Journal Of Participatory Medicine” and currently writes about mothering on an ongoing basis for *Mutha Magazine*. She lives in rural Virginia.

Donna Pucciani is a Chicago-based poet whose work has been published on four continents and translated into Chinese, Japanese, and Italian. She is the author of five collections of poetry, including the most recent, *Hanging Like Hope on the Equinox* (virtual artists collective, Chicago)

Contributors' Notes

2013). She has won awards from the Illinois Arts Council, the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, and Poetry on the Lake, among others, and has been nominated five times for the Pushcart Prize.

Claudia Rippee has taught Color Photography in the Certification Program at New Hampshire Institute of Art since 2005. Her large format canvas prints in the “Graffiti” series won the Photography Award in 2011 at the Currier Museum of Art exhibition of the New Hampshire Art Association. She splits her time between photographing and co-owning and running the gastropub, Republic, in Manchester, NH.

Cynthia A. Roby is a copyeditor and freelance writer. Her works of fiction and poetry have appeared in journals and chapbooks including *The Manatee*, *Voices of Brooklyn*, and *Writers from the Web*. An SNHU alumnus, Roby is currently working on her MFA in writing at Lindenwood University.

David Salner's writing appears in recent issues of *Poetry Daily*, *Threepenny Review*, *North American Review*, *River Styx*, *Poetry Northwest*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and many other journals. His second book, *Working Here*, was published by Minnesota State University's Rooster Hill Press in 2010. He worked for 25 years as an iron ore miner, steelworker, and general laborer.

Terry Savoie is a husband, father, and grandfather who writes out of Iowa City. Over the past thirty years more than three hundred of his poems have appeared in literary journals, anthologies and small press publications across the country. A full-length manuscript is now in search of a publisher.

Edythe Haendel Schwartz is the author of two poetry collections, *A Palette of Leaves*, Mayapple Press, 2012, and a chapbook, *Exposure*, Finishing Line Press, 2007. In 2012, she won first prize in the Friends of Acadia poetry competition for her poem “A Natural Phenomenon. Her poems have appeared widely in journals including *Cave Wall*, *Spillway*, *PMS*, *Natural Bridge*, *Poet Lore*, *Potomac Review*, and *Water-Stone*, among others.

James Seals, winner of this year's Southern New Hampshire University's MFA Prose Writing Contest, is in his third semester in the MFA

program in Fiction and Nonfiction at Southern New Hampshire University. His stories have been published in *Amoskeag Journal*, *Forge Journal*, *Rio Grande Review*, *Pithead Chapel*, *O-Dark-Thirty* and *The Apeiron Review*. His story—White, Like You—was selected as the winner of SNHU's graduate writing contest in 2013.

Murzban F. Shroff is a Bombay-born writer. His stories have been published in over 35 literary journals in the U.S. and UK, including the *Gettysburg Review*, the *Louisville Review*, the *Minnesota Review*, and the *Southwest Review*. His debut collection of stories, *Breathless in Bombay*, was published by St. Martin's Press in 2008 and shortlisted for the 2009 Commonwealth Writers' Prize in the best first book category from Europe and South Asia. He is the recipient of the John Gilgun Fiction Award and has three Pushcart Prize nominations.

Aaron Sommers' work has been featured in *Lifelines: the Dartmouth Medical School Literary Journal* and *The Emerson Review*, among others. He adapted his short story from *Lifelines*, "A Cross Section of the Hirschfelds" into a one-act play that was produced in 2013 at the Player's Ring in Portsmouth. He lives in NH with his wife and daughter, in a house set deep in the woods, on the more inaccessible side of a mountain.

Emily Strauss has an M.A. in English, but is self-taught in poetry. Over 140 of her poems appear in dozens of online venues and in anthologies. The natural world is generally her framework; she often focuses on the tension between nature and humanity, using concrete images to illuminate the loss of meaning between them. She is a semi-retired teacher living in California.

Qian Sun

I was born in Hangzhou, China. I love drawing – I've been drawing since I was four, and I always win when I join drawing competitions. I realized that I have an inherent ability to realize and capture compositions to show the world what the naked eye can sometimes not see. So I decided put my passion into photography. I have four years of hands-on experience in nature, city and portrait photography. I usually bring Nikon D800, 50mm lend, 14-24mm lend, and a Polaroid, when I am on vacation. I also use different types of cameras: 120mm, 135mm, POLAROID. I want to be a fashion or wedding photographer in the future, because I love to catch people's expression and emotion.

Kristina Wright is an assistant professor of English at SNHU. In her interview with Mark Pawlak she references the following sources: Pawlak, Mark. Excerpt from "Hart's Neck Haibun, Book V: 2004": OFFICIAL VERSION, Hanging Loose Press, 2006. "Take Me Home." *Consequence Magazine*, 2010, Vol. 2. and Finkelstein, Norman. "An Interview with Harvey Shapiro," *Smartish Place* 19, 2013.