The Alembic
The Alembic
Spring 2005
The Alembic is published each spring by Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island. The subscription rate in the United States is $15 for two years.

Please address all correspondence, business, and editorials to: Editors, The Alembic, English Department, Providence College, Providence, RI 02918. Submissions are read from August 1st through December 18th only. Please include a brief biographical note with all submissions. No manuscripts can be returned, nor any query answered, unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope with the appropriate amount of postage. Manuscripts known to be under consideration elsewhere will be returned to the authors unread. The Alembic accepts no responsibility for unsolicited submissions and will not enter into correspondence about their loss or delay. Materials published in The Alembic may not be reprinted, in whole or in part, without written permission from the editors.

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Thanks to Reverend J. Stuart McPhail for all of his support.
Dear Reader,

Please note that the titles of Chris Fahey's artwork should be as follows:

Cover Art: The Red House of Mr. Jerome Glass
Page 115: Hopper 101

Please also note that on Page 132, the author's name should be listed as Anna Meinhardt

Sincerely,
The Editors
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EDITORS' NOTE

An alembic is a device used for purification, removing impurities from water and restoring it to its clear, natural state. The creative word is a human alembic. For centuries it has been a platform for the undressing of human nature. It is everlasting and universal, providing us “momentary stays against confusion” and catastrophe that remind us that our fragments, our poetry, and our stories are an integral part of the whole.

This is the first issue of The Alembic that has found itself “purified” through fragmentation by assembling various poems, works in prose, and artwork with deliberate incongruity; as you peruse, you may notice absurd poems next to tragic ones, and childlike paintings next to isolating photographs. We have striven to create a structure that can remain incongruous and bizarre, while remembering poetry's roots in the consciousness of the oral ballad. As Jorge Luis Borges once said, “Truly fine poetry must be read aloud. A good poem does not allow itself to be read in a low voice or silently. If we can read it silently, it is not a valid poem: a poem demands pronunciation. Poetry always remembers that it was an oral art before it was a written art. It remembers that it was first song.” Our purpose in this issue is to experiment with the creative word; to piece together what shouldn’t be, to read aloud what hasn’t been, to retain the ancient song in what has been fragmented.

Walt Whitman said, “Let that which stood in front go behind, let that which was behind advance to the front, let bigots, fools, unclean persons, offer new propositions, let the old propositions be postponed.” Here, we recognize “new propositions,” that our many images can be purified to one, that our many experiences can reveal a dawning next to what literature has always been. Poetry is the singing of our stories, and in this issue of The Alembic, the conglomeration of those parts is a disjointed whole.

-Victoria Klibanoff, Therese O’Neill, & Juliette Paul
DEDICATION

On behalf of all past and present editors, we dedicate this issue of *The Alembic* to Chard deNiord for his years of hard work and guidance in creating this journal. His talent, humility, and devotion to showing us all how to see and express the beauty of nature in our writing and editing is inspiring and will be never forgotten.
POETRY
Request

Kristine Anderson

Do not read my poem quietly,
your lips unmoving, not a spit of word escaping
as your eyes scan the lines,
your arms bent, elbows parked on the table,
one hand cupping your chin, the other casually resting on the page,
so motionless the lights flicker off, convinced you’re no longer there,
so placid the librarian puts down her books, dusts off her sleeves,
locks the door behind as she leaves,
and the janitor comes in and sweeps around you.

Rather, roll your eyes outright if you need to,
until others look over, baffled by the interruption.
If you must, pick up the poem by index finger and thumb,
hold it out, away from you.
Stand up, brush off whatever has fallen in your lap.
Go ahead: tsk, tsk too loudly.
Groan so noisily
the dog outdoors on the other side of the fence
howls back.
Shake your head vigorously
until the room quivers and the burglar alarm screams,
knowing something is trying to get in.
Noctext

R.S. Carlson

Half a moon drifts half across half a night across a warm world warm as a day buttered in business-day gases aired and burned, gas for hire, for breathing, for moon drift across dusk, moon face half turned, half lost, face set for answers after questions, set in dusk where questions fail in just too many particulates, just too few guesstimates for too few tests for miracles jessed too few times in the falconries of sight, or times buckled too seldom from flight, buckled air to ground in times too quick through air to count, mount or dismount, to muse on or over, not bemuse, moon come, moon go, moon chipped at the edges against night chipped foot by meter by furlong, foot weary, and almost as weary I drift, dreaming toward sleep, as I duskbound, one answer, ripe as dusk, for every dozen askings for leaf, rose droop, lily browning, leaf curl to weevil bougainvillea crimson curl over thorn, dandelion fluff over why, when, how, what for, why, why, moon, half lost, why, why
Privacy

Donald Robert Spector

I saw a field mouse
Just after dawn
And wondered if he’d spent
The night out partying.
He looked like he
Was staggering,
And I thought that I
Would challenge him.
But I asked myself
What right I had
To question him
About his way of life.
Summer List

Jim Daniels

On my son’s list of things to do is be nice.

It’s not on my list. I’ve got painting to do, and yard work. I want to find a turntable for my old records.

He picked sky blue as the color for his room. His sister picked lavender. I selected detached bemusement for our room.

Semi-gloss. He wants to go bowling too. He wants to be 9, and he will be.

I’m not so crazy about 46. It sounds like the number of a benchwarmer—which I was. I gave myself a concussion last week catching a softball. That wasn’t on my list. My children want to know why we don’t wrestle anymore.

They want to help me paint. I told them we’re between wrestling and painting.

I told them each I’d leave them a little spot to finish up. Actually,

I’m not even painting our room. It still looks pretty good in the dark.

When I saw be nice on his list between read 4th grade books and par 3 golf
it cut through every *however* and *realistically*.
I got out the brushes, the rollers,
I got out the drop clothes, and the old underwear
for rags. You can laugh at me if you want,

wiping my tears on the wall, painting them over.
Planetarium, August

Jim Daniels

Crossing the parking lot’s bleeding yellow lines, 
I hope for cool sparkle and comfortable chairs.

The Starman welcomes us like a stoned cheerleader, 
strained enthusiasm echoing over the sparse crowd.

The sky’s clean soft bowl. I once held a girl’s 
wet palm here, inspired by dark possibilities.

Light fades, and stars emerge clearer 
than anywhere. Two small children – ours –

scream at their own disappearance. We rush them 
stumbling up stairs and out the door, ducking

as if we could block someone’s view. The kids stop crying as soon as we hit light,

blaming each other with dark stares. Clutching 
our ticket stubs, my wife and I stand,

embarrassed as if caught.
Meditation on a Photograph of Jack and Tyke

Ed Miller

After the keys of the Underwood fell silent, and the visions went dark, and the mad wanderings fetched up in a blind fog of *Bonanza* reruns, Canadian Club whiskey, and captious jabs traded with unhappy old women, it was apropos doubtless that the portrait of the artist should be made whole by the something only a cat could provide: an air of infinite jest in the suddenly small room of one’s life.
The Medicine Year

Candace Black

Instead of the gradual wade into deeper waters, the gentle walk through green shallows to cobalt rollers, for a year I dropped into sleep so heavy nothing crept under its lead. My husband felt me fall, my body letting go completely, seldom shifting during the night’s passage. I walked the shore each morning, beachcombing sleep’s rubble for a glint of dream winking like smooth seaglass.
Leaving Spain

Jesse Millner

The word bugloss can never be that purple
so plentiful amid the May grass,
nor can the borage begin to speak
the wonder of pink crown and perfect blue flower,
nor can loneliness describe the white burro
that feasts on the wildflowers, nor can beautiful
summarize all these things, nor can sorrow
define my feeling about leaving this world
where each specific flower, each animal,
each hand-made stone wall, each potato field,
each orchard of orange and lemon, yes, each
tangible thing, adds up to miraculous, which
is still only a word, still less than the sum
of all these parts that shimmer now in memory,
the house of stored objects, that museum
of the glittering and the forgotten. So this final

morning in Mojacar, I walk with you to the playa
and talk about sharing Spain with you
and how that deepened my pleasure, how being
with you anywhere is a gift, especially eating ice cream
as we look past the shops toward the Mediterranean,
which is bluer than yesterday, and I memorize your face,
the words you speak, and I think of another word, love,
how it fails terribly when it tries to define:
  ice cream, you, light, sea, sky,

the touch of your fingers,
so softly upon my wrist.
O
house of the glorified body
  phase shifts blocked against
tremens, in pool of oblivion

O
temple of that influence, fire submerged
floor littered with rotting wood
the tree never withers
  watered with dew and singing
but the ladders fall
your architect has fallen

O
house of the body submerged in flame
you carry in your pocket 100 speeches
children build their envelopes of noise
a woman got the bloodstains out of your shawl
  salt, cut apples

O
house glorified
  fluorescent testament
100 speeches infallible, illegible.
A Cannibalistic Deer

Robert Perchan

A cannibalistic deer. Subjects of a scientific experiment, he and his friends had been placed on a small island and left there to devour every morsel of green within reach. At the end of a short summer all that green was gone and soon, famished, they fell upon each other in an orgy of cannibal predation. He was the last deer left standing. I admired the fangs and claws he had evolved in so brief a span – fangs and claws worthy of a Serengeti thinner of herds. Now back in Ohio and returned to his herbivorous ways, he consented to an interview. Sure, he explained, we could have found a way to climb trees and so gotten to the topmost leaves. Or learned to stretch our necks like giraffes. Or grown wings and just flown off the island. We talked about these things. But we were deer, you must understand, and proud of it. Deer. Deer. Deer.
Houseplant

Michael Colonnese

By late October I had little
in the way of choice—
the pale, pot-bound roots protruded,
a sour, fecal smell wafted from the over-watered dirt,
the thinning foliage looked sparser every day,
the stems were becoming brittle,
and each morning, as the days shortened,
a new scattering of brown leaves
circled the oversized clay saucer.

It didn’t seem to want to live inside
though I’d tried all the reasonable remedies—
fertilizer, sunshine, letting the soil air out
completely between waterings.

I’d even talk to it sometimes,
doing my best to resist raising my voice,
seldom letting my bitterness show,
speaking a bit condescendingly perhaps
but with what I hoped
was a sufficiently dry wit,
to humor it along
and attempting to imply
that we were all in this together—

A houseplant enters the cocktail lounge
of a very exclusive country club, and the bartender
says, “Sorry, I can’t serve you.”

“Why’s that?” asks the houseplant, “Is it
because I’m a Wandering Jew?”

“Personally,” says the bartender, “I could
care less, but this happens to be a fern bar.”

Indeed, once or twice,
I’d even tried playing some
popular music, putting aside
my preferences for classical orchestration,
dissonant jazz, or elaborate Italian opera,
having read somewhere
that houseplants plants responded to Top 40,
that a simple honest backbeat
not fancy riffs or vocabulary were what mattered.

Nothing worked,
and in the end I simply dug a sloppy hole
in the thatch of the autumn lawn,
in a sunny spot where the privacy fence
provided shelter from winter winds
and dropped the rotting tangle into it
and cut the stems back flush.

There was the slenderest of chances
that it might lie dormant there, and return
to life in the spring, so all winter long
I kept telling myself to hope
and expected to be disappointed.
American Only

Courtney Suddes

American only because I eat noodles in a box. Chinese takeout, like in the movies. Foreigners are lunatics. This time I am in their country - a playground with 2 lane highways and shoeless mongrels, virginal air. I have never felt more like a whore. I sit by the ocean with my Tui, get drunk and figure my brother to be the only good man I know. I throw my garbage on the sidewalk and put my cigarette out on someone’s dog. No one here does anything wrong. I see a witch on the busline home at night, hunchbacked, hairless, just enough teeth so that I take her seriously. She stares at me smiling. She’d eat me even if I was Canadian. I can’t walk from her fast enough and the whole time we struggle I scream my nationality, I scream my rights, I swear on The United States of America she’s making the biggest fucking mistake of her life. She tells me we all basically taste the same. I don’t believe her. I bet Americans taste like shit.
Mercy

Ruth Holzer

No matter what, Doyle always claimed he felt terrific, even when he passed out at the badge machines and they carted him off to detox. Terrific, he snarled at all comers, spurning flowers and paperbacks, intent only on getting a smoke smuggled into all that oxygen. Sometimes he would shout, apropos of nothing, mercy, of course not begging for any, but as though placing his curse upon the whole lot of dumb humanity he was stuck with. Even after getting mugged in the vestibule of his crummy building, his shopping bags spilling a week’s meager provisions as neighborhood youth beat him with his cane, he rebounded to pronounce the usual verdict; and in the hospital, when the essence of Doyle was evaporating, his gown gaping frankly over withered shanks, his mind messed past redemption, he looked up and breathed terrific one more time.
Big Hair

Alexandra C. Widmann

Big hair really turns me on
Like a crate engine dropped under the hood of a Corvette
I like the race of my fingers through
The mass implosion of black lace curls
Over a tiny popcorn kernel face, eyes
Watching lights, and dice, and kites entangle themselves
In daily living like a high heel in a sidewalk crack
From under his wired sculpture of fried ends and exposed roots

I like big hair that eats half the forehead
And does the Charleston with flailing eyelashes
While pounding heavy metal on the pink of the brain
So that the whole collection is vibrating with the beat

I fall in love with that sort of madness
New chaos theory.
To A Strand Of Your Hair

Len Sousa

I awoke to find you wrapped in a simple coil around two of my back teeth, suggestively toying with my tongue. So I gently prodded you with a finger and tried to pull you in before you gave to my finger's calling

and slid from my mouth. After this careful purging, I held you up to see you more clearly, then let you fall from the side of our old bed; rose and walked to the bathroom basin where I brushed my teeth twice that morning.
New Year’s Prayer

Len Sousa

I hope it’s with more pleasure
than nostalgia or necessity
that you pull the weeds clinging
to my grave, and place a neat rose
beside my name—engraved
as if it were meant to last forever.

Then slowly stand and exhale,
folding your hands together,
and biding your time by looking
to the rose or my name—or,
perhaps, to the rows of stones
laid out in form beyond my own.

Whatever you decide, it’s only
a short while before your hand,
which felt so warm in the other,
falls to a pocket and reveals
your keys with a gentle ring
that signals your soft departure.
Headstones in the breeze—
a wire field fence holds back
the first fallen leaves

Quiet autumn dawn—
the pawnshop awning rolls out
through long swathes of fog

Grey-green; the ocean’s
white crests skimmed by a gull’s wing…
sails billow with breeze

Some crows assembling
on snow-bent branches; at dusk,
mountain shadows blend

Crows cackling from woods
lit with dusk; the axe gleams
over fresh-cut kindling

Crows sit quietly…
pine needles rinsed with drizzle
glint with the twilight

Soft rain turns to snow
where the clouds hover; tombstones
poke through the clover

Warm autumn nightfall...
shadows of barn swallows arc
through the horse stall bars

Cedar and blue spruce-
their ice-splintered limbs catch light
on the outhouse roof
Andrew

Juliette Paul

I waited three years to take Andrew to the mountains. “Say goodbye to Puppy,” I warned. We stood, frozen palm in sticky one, facing west under blades that cut turkey-season air with a swoosh that could kill a man and swung like a phoenix. “And now I will tell you a story.” Wind. I familiarized myself. “Your daddy was here.”

“Let’s say the story of the Polar Express,” Andrew said. “Let’s say the story of Christmas!” He clapped and swung his diaper jeans down to Velcro. “Let’s say ‘Here comes the donkey, trot, trot, trot!’” No, you fool. Wind. You stupid.

But his face looked gone, magical like snow, dark and inviting.
Halloween in America

Juliette Paul

Spiked cider got us so drunk we pretended Jimmy was really a ghost. Cold air brewed the bonfire next to a football game and a hayride on Uncle Pete’s lawnmower. We were our stacked jack-o-lanterns, cut into guts, but the seeds tasted good roasted. Bread bowls of chili, candy corn, hay stacks, and an ominous sky. You said the mad scientist got lost on the way and just didn’t come. Turning tricks, witches, and a goat with a devil’s mask on. We couldn’t even tell what was really haunted. Those woods twisted up like charcoal, bare-naked like bones. We believe only when it can save us. Ghosts of highwaymen and Tom Jones, whose soul went to the devil because he mocked him.
Pip On The Literary Shelf

Askold Skalsky

The rat on my bookshelf is making a racket, crunching slips of paper I've stuck into a row of heavy books, their upward spines marshaled like abstract soldiers impressed into the heavy armor of fine print. She pulls them out, then chews them one by one, the pages lost where I have marked a fleeting, perspicacious thought I wanted to expound, achieving some sleek erudition of my own, added to the heft of centuries.

Shoo, I say, and she stares with bulgy, button eyes, like tiny seeds half sunk in the brown hooded oval of her head, unheeding and starting on another strip: this one, with something scrawled in the corner of the yellow tear, must have been especially significant, pulped now into oblivion under the little buzz saw of her jaws.

I scold her, wagging my finger, which she licks when I poke her, then, resolute, confronts another slip with her undeveloped thumbs, and the inexorable brightness of her fangs.

I let her shred.
I heard de Pachmann in my twentieth year
when cherry boughs were blooming in my eyes
and Slavic *ächs* swept through the velvet gutters
of my throat. He played, what else? a Chopin waltz
or etude on the scratchy track with its rubato
from hell and an unstable tempo raking my ears
weaned on neoclassic dew. I grimaced, held my breath,
paled at the insult to the limpid muse—the wayward
lunges, plunges of caprice, eccentric phrasing,
hyper-rhythms, fluctuated leaps of melody transfixed
by the mustachioed face, a high-turned collar, and black tie.
Could such things be? I gasped for air, my little globe
of music rent like a curtain shielding hallowed sounds.
I needed light—a Rubinsteinian serenity or Serkinesque
aplomb, the pale ascetic touch of monks swishing
their robes astride the iridescent keys.
Immigrant

David Thoreen

At first he worked day-labor, factory help, lined up at the door, a gopher who zig-zagged the day, paid by the hour. He hid what was inside his head. He felt the foreman’s voice like a nail, perfected an eager gait, pretended to believe in saving his pay, spending weekends at home.

Sometimes at random he’d hit the P.O. and send home a money order, not exactly the help they’d hoped for...but given the way a son leaves, given a planet whose orbit measures years, he supposed they were lucky, could turn the door’s bent nail against the night and sleep, dreams coiled in their heads.

Himself, he found it hard to sleep. His head would come alive in the rack: thoughts of home, his mother bereft, his father broken, nailed by NAFTA at fifty, his brother crying for help in the fields, cries of spiraling silence, the minute thrashings of a mind aware of its cleaving.

He turned to work, work as down-payment, fig-leaf. One day in July he went head to head with the foreman, traded only words...but no second chances. They paid him off and sent him home. He sat in a park, the blood of help-wanteds staining his fingers, eclipsing the moons of his nails.

Found work at the ballpark, was there when Gonzalez nailed a Rocker speedball over left field, the reliever’s version of air-traffic nightmare, the statistic he’s helpless, defenseless against. The crowd offered up some skinhead who started singing, *When Johnny Goes Limping Home, Hurrah, Hurrah*. Sang it the rest of the inning.
He’d worn the vendor’s apron for a month, could still assemble the taunts that wriggled like nails urged into flesh, could feel the release of a homer that evened the score and made it hard to believe there wasn’t a God. Fathers and sons headed for exits, their faces cowled. He couldn’t help his grin. That night he dreamed the century’s headlines, the gold star on his sleeve, the absence of help, the sound of a hammer driving a nail home.
That Strange Silent Man

Victoria Bailey

After the war he sat,
That strange silent man in his Windsor chair,

Once, he was the voice of a government telling its people,
“We’re sorry to inform you,”
Later,
He chose silence.
An old man sits on the cement stoop
of the storefront
while Fred strums the strings of his guitar
with the tips of his
still nimble fingers
at the end of his song
he passes his hat, saying
‘You don’t have to be
Rockefeller
to help a fella…’
Meanwhile some other brother
from the kingdom of heaven and earth
hands me a flyer
like I’m really interested in the final call

Sisters wearing majestic robes
offer me dark wood statues
oiled with sweet perfume
in this loud market
their incense competes
with the musky smell of
sizzling barbecued meat
these women tie their hair
with bright printed cloth
yet it is the girls
with more bead than braids
on their heads
barely out from their mamma’s aprons
that remind me of the bygone time
when I wasn’t
just visiting

Allison Whittenberg
You, You Mean

Gail Rudd Entrekin

Working the shiny skeins of hair
into smooth golden braids down to her waist
I ask companionably whether the tooth fairy
brought anything interesting last night.
In a flat voice she says, You, you mean.

And then we are caught up in the storm
of schoolbound forces
as she rushes out to feed the cats
and the others swarm in to fill the void
and the Susan B. Anthony dollar shines
in its own secret mystery under her pink flannel pillow.

All day the dollar shines behind my eyes,
the magic of it, the pink glittered wings of the fairy
who slipped it in by night,
made off with her second molar
in a purple velvet bag.

At the end of yoga class
we lie flat in the dark, shavasana,
and the teacher says, Experience the joy of all you have.
And the fairy flits across the dark bank
of the moonlit river of my heart
on her way to another, younger child.
Run-down house in hurricane alley, 
it’s time—past time—for some retro-fitting. 
Though every nail stabs as they batten 
down overhanging eaves to walls, 
every screw chews as they hinge 
shutters to windows, every last 
joint burns as they rip out hollow-core doors and put in break-in-proof steel — through it all, 
she keeps on taking deep breaths 
and gives ear to the raucous ocean 
and when it’s over she laughs out loud. 
She’s all buttoned up, all her panes 
Xed over. When the next one — 
Floyd, say — charges up from the tropics, 
this time she’ll come through just fine.
children's run - Nebraska Savings Bank, Lincoln, NE 1893

Johnny Masiulewicz

cornhusker children
saw their daddy's newspapers,
heard of the latest
banker's suicide, feared greatly for their passbook accounts

after one schoolday
of bank-failure rumor, they
streamed down N Street to
rescue their nickels, their dimes,
hide them safe in mason jars
the ancient ruins

Johnny Masiulewicz

sitting 'midst the ancient ruins, I attempt a buddha lotus, sand-angel, a jacques de molay crucifixion, then just settle into my patented couch-slouch

a fly attracted to my lunch-breath joins me in the ancient ruins. the wake of his wing-birr shakes a grain of mortar, perhaps. the fly alights

then a stone of the ancient ruins, as if finally done waiting through eons of use and raindrops and earthquakes and breath for the weight of a fly, tumbles to the ground
She sketches me in pencil,  
number three in the series  
and the one I like the best.  
My featureless face, an unlikely portrait.  
Yet, one bent line  
for the shock of hair over my right brow,  
my hand placed flat over the imagined eye  
is her despair and my fatigue.

I see myself a squat insect figure,  
enclosed by the lines of my form,  
the stool on which I sit:  
a web spun from a life of cold damp walls  
unpaid bills, my own paintings  
frameless, for lack of cash.  
My partner, my love, sketches me  
from a lonely place where accolades are rare,  
acclaim will come too late.

I say to her, “Don’t give me color,  
don’t give me dimension – they camouflage.  
Leave me, my love, in pencil lines.”
The Moment She Discovered
She Was Mortal

Tracy Koretsky

Mama's marriage hand gripped tight
the whirling wheel
forcing direction on the back tires
which took direction from the ice

Her right arm steeled like a gate
across my body
Her mouth
wide wails siren ed
One sheer cliff of sound
Trees spun away
then buildings
then trees buildings
treesbuildings
And when we stopped
our tires were already in the woods

Mama swallowed all sound
her arm still
a stiff half-crucifix
then felt me
turned me
front to back
ten fingers ten toes
cooed, "My baby, my baby"
though the first adult tooth
cut freedom at last

Mama nodded
then let her head fall
and coughpuddlesobbed
an unclear rain
on the locked quiet wheel
Self-Elegy for Someone Else

William Doreski

No deadly third-rails in New Zealand, so when the young man saw coins shining beside the greasy black steel he didn’t know that brushing it would stop his heart forever, “We were proud of him,” his parents said.

I’ve often wanted to stroke that feverish rail and absorb all six hundred volts the way desert prophets absorb the divine; but I know how deeply the scald would penetrate, how I’d stiffen until every muscle exploded. If I survived, though, I’d enjoy a blank slate, every byte of data erased from my quivering lobes. Then I would start over with Greek, Hittite, Sanskrit, learning nothing about kamikazes and blitzkriegs, nothing about the hydrogen bomb, heroin, processed cheese, push-up bras, cell phones, the Virginia Reel. But that wouldn’t happen. I’d open my mouth and the smoke of my soul would dissipate in the tunnel dark and I’d become a haunting. No one would be proud. The trains would rumble past the fatal spot and patrons would look with feigned indifference and no one would name me aloud.
Whitman On A Ferris Wheel

Kenneth Pobo

Stop that, Walt,
or I'll puke my burger.
He swings us back
and forth, high
as we can go, even
when we’re at the top—

I had thought he’d like
a calmer ride. The dude’s
186. His white beard
stretches to the ground,
finer than cotton candy.
He asks about

about America. I scream.
He nods. We descend,

rocking and rocking,
his arm around me,
his laugh louder
than midway lights—

and brighter.
Amplitude

Carmen Germain

Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile
Walt Whitman
Song of Myself

In this Lebanese restaurant,
lush buffet spread on three oak tables—

spinach and onions, pasta as fine as the lines
this pen makes, cucumbers, yellow beans,
yams in their buttery roasting pans,
rolls of bulgur coated in fruity olive oil
and sesame seeds, she’s here, too—

in this former flower shop transformed
by kitchen and ovens, feeding this
street, Fiori still on the painted sign.

She struggles to stand, no easy work,
her body planted between herself
and the littered table, crumb-stuck
chair jerking back, belly stranded
with pasta, rivers on a world’s map.
It’s All You Can Eat.

I look away, think of a mirror in a house
with its face turned aside, a woman
with thighs like baked apples.

She brushes hands streaked with sauce
through hair, and I see the floor,
chunks of bulgur scattered
around the island of self.

She turns toward me, a grunt
for what's left, server dumping bread
in her basket, a twist to the bowl of pasta.
Her chins dripping sauce, she hoists
one leg and then the other past me,
flesh bobbing like a fish boat.

Great-hearted man of all-singing:
not an inch is vile

forgive me,
I cannot see.

Great-hearted man of all-singing:
In all people I see myself
The millpond undulates with speech
and the congregation of warblers,
turning heads, as the sun pales,
welcomes the Sabbath bride.
All week she has lived in exile,
but now there is an in-gathering.
Come dawn she will fly—
all the time gazing east.

Amory Street Playground, Brookline, Massachusetts
April 14, 2001
Swallowed a barbed fish-hook by accident,
One overlooked by the cook at a joint
Frequented by drunken down-and-outers
Still stinking of cigarettes and whiskey,
And regulars stinking of fish stench.
Walked uptown with the tickle of the snapped line stuck in the throat, stricken by the thought
The lining of a rotten gut or bowels
Would be torn open by trying to tug
At the string tip under the uvula,
Even to test it. Got to the clinic,
Let the doc take X-rays and disappear and come back with good news. Was told
“You don’t deserve the fact that this one will pass.”
Soft and Not Ready

Victoria Klibanoff

Well shit, what are you supposed to do when you find your soul mate at 20? Dinner at 5, nurse the baby every two hours and make love in between cries. That doesn't work. What you need to do is leave. Sleep with as many men as you can, enjoy each and every one of them, their smooth or hairy chests, their muscled abs or beer guts flapping when they thrust, their straight white teeth or cigarette breath. And kiss em too, this won't lead you to their souls. Get so tired and drunk you can't even tell the difference between sex and sleep. Or better yet, don't bother with any of it, but you are too weak for that. You need to feel the emptiness of your womb, embrace it, and carry it home.
Loud Wet Cows

Victoria Klibanoff

I hear the cows screaming, a window between us, and a painful birth, too busy announcing the night, ripping out its stillness. The bastards ruined us; now your hair pricks my back, your arm supports my head, and I hate it. I tell you this but you keep sleeping. Can’t you hear them? They’re mocking us. Their raw sounds make my ears burn and throb. If only the blood would keep pounding until the stillness was restored and I fell asleep while the sun crept in through the blinds, and then you would see me, when you woke, sleeping, a straight closed mouth, tight body, dreaming of a wet calf milking, right outside across those fields, beyond that dirt road, on the other side of the fence.
Early Risers

Jeffrey Alfier

Across the dim parade field that foregrounds the vista, crows in fir trees wrought like spires watch barracks wake in synchronous lighting where young men rouse to demands for order.

They move out in rows of compliant minds, the last letters from home held close in thought — each caring word faithful to cadenced steps as crows rise, scatter, and merge into clouds.

Grafenwöhr US Army Training Center, Germany
Blue Lines

Sharon L. Griffiths

Six meant first grade.
Real school, big girl, no more
play-all-day soggy rubber hand puppets,
squishy finger paints and warm, waxy milk.

First grade meant
writing—new pencils in my pencil-box
lined up like daddy’s Chesterfields
in his silver cigarette case.

When I sharpened them, wooden shavings
unfolded like Chinese screens from
my purple plastic sharpener.

And my pink rubber eraser
smelled good enough to eat.

I had a big-girl notebook, too.
Blue lines showed me where the words should go.
I wrote before Mrs. Wilde said we could
but I had to. I couldn’t wait
to write her name, my name, all the words I knew
straight, clean, up-down-and-around
like the pictures over the blackboard.
I couldn’t wait
to coat the side of my fat little fist
with shiny gray powder.

Because I knew the code. In the classroom,
I could make lines into letters, letters into words,
words into thoughts that were real—I could see them.
Words that didn’t have to stay in my head
and the blue lines kept them straight.
Shoes

Susan Fuller

When I come back to visit
His shoes are still there
Upstairs in his bedroom
Next to the shelf of treasures from childhood
A pirates’ game box
With a compass rose on a world map and
A small boat out to sea
Learn to navigate
Discover high seas adventure

Empty black shoes
The silver buckles gleam in the afternoon light
The leather is barely broken in
With only a few scuffs
Still wearable
Toes point north toward a wall of pale blue

Small boats with hollow hulls
Silently waiting to be filled
The compass rose points
And the pirates’ cannon fires
Across deep waters
He has sailed away

Downstairs in the kitchen
The father of the son
Who wore the shoes
Quietly asks the male relatives
What size shoe do you wear?
Sam Ramsey Shoots Black Jack Cameron for Cheating at Poker:
Tin Cup, Colorado, 1879

Robert Cooperman

Only thing worse than a card cheat,
a sloppy one: Black Jack dealt himself
five aces, stupid enough to show them,
like a bitch dropping five prize-looking pups.
I shot that careless snake, aces fluttering
from his sleeves like a magician’s doves:
I scooped up his winnings and new boots.

I doubt he left any kin to claim him
with pride, or even out of family duty.
He’d drifted into Tin Cup in a biting blizzard,
and proceeded to clean out prospectors
of their stoop-labor dust and nuggets,
until he forgot there were only four aces
in any deck; I was acquitted on the spot.

Still, he had a shine in his eye I’ll miss,
could tell a bragging tale—to make you
not look too close when cards appeared—
that always ended with him being bit on the butt,
all of us laughing while he raked in the pots,
except this last joke he played on himself.

Nights dreary-on a little quieter, sadder, now.
I’ll ride up to Boot Hill from time to time,
and tell him what a featherhead he was.
But it’s Life that holds all the cards
close to its vest: the biggest cheater of all.
Sestina (Acting In Retrospect)

Chris Fahey

Burning lights blind you on the set
of fake plastic trees as you sweat dinner time
in a small trailer loaded with women
you wish would love you, but are only
willing to look at you once they repaint your face
and rewrap your body in identical clothing.

You remember you wore different clothing
Before your signature was taken on set,
and how you have had to assume a new face
each day since then, and must until the end of time.
The director calls for five more minutes only
and you miss your chance to meet new women.

The new location arrives along with more women
who will get you drinks and iron your clothing
more carefully; but are interested in wages only
since most already have lovers on a nearby set
and are merely adoring you to pass the time
Before they have to disguise another lonely face.

Formulated phrases assign expressions to your face
as shots are edited and discussed by educated women
who think you can do better, but have no time
to explain how, they just offer suggestions on clothing
colors that might contrast better with the green set.
The director brings you to speak with him only
inside his private trailer where naked women only
have perfect breasts and cannot look into your face
when he asks them to give you a massage and to set
aside the wrinkled script that includes no women
either, just some offstage breasts with no clothing
who bounce around complaining how bras waste time.

[stanza break]
Simultaneously, you are spoken to and given the time and you wonder if the years you spent in class were only meant to flatten your character and round your clothing. The director dismisses you and his nudes kiss his face immediately, as though there are other women with breasts out back that might be better set.

*Action!* shouts the director, his glowing face on the set only reminds you of your first time seeing women without clothing.
Blue-Eyed Boy

Gaylord Brewer

You can’t commit to any of this trinity —
Jesus, Wild Bill, Death — but lean for balance
inside the angles of that starry ring,
one boot grappling a stirrup of each trick pony
and gunplay to bring down the big tent.
So the papers said, and history doesn’t lie.

But is that what you really came here to ask?
Whether Cody’s cooked? It’s the sure-sighted,
bull’s-eye syntax of a titillatin’ new world
that confuses you, the rubes on their feet.
Watch feathers fly. Quiz your earthly accountant.

As you polish sequined holsters between shows,
never mind a memory, faint but ever-finer,
of pyramid of bones — buffalo, savage —
high as heaven, William reclined on cushion seats,
barrel on one thigh, glass of sweet bourbon
the other, everything a man needs in his lap.

That train’s riding straight to the future.
Defunct, indeed. Same to you, hero, whatever
your name might be for the final show.
The Wedding

Jane Lunin Perel

There is a woman who wants to marry a tree. She likes the way her skin feels against its bark. The softness of its leaves. She likes the way its branches hold her. Its low moans in the wind. Tree, Tree, will you marry me? Every day she returns and intones her proposal. No reply. Until one day its leaves are burning scarlet. Molten gold. Ambushes of orange rush out at her. She takes this as her Trees’ yes. She tells her parents. They hire a caterer, a klezmer band, and a pagan rabbi. They even have little match books printed that say “Elana and Tree.” On the day of the ceremony at Trees’ park, it turns bitter cold. Trees’ leaves flail in a staggering wind and fly kamikaze. Moving toward the Tree, the guests step on them. They crack and cackle. Not even the klezmeren can drown out the sound. The pagan rabbi is speechless. The caterer’s miniature phylo trees fly off the platters. The woman sobs. Her parents motion for everyone to go home. They usher her to the white limousine. No one collects the green matchbooks. Tree stands naked. Xylem, phloem urgent, surging. Centuries of broken violins playing gypsy melodies hurl themselves up through its roots. The woman dreams of Tree each night. Butterflies alight on its bark. Turning to fire. Absence has its own language that seeps underground. Wild music fills them both like drowning. They do not live to spring.
Daisy Nook Farm

Little Moss, England

Donna Pucciani

Over the stile to the mud-packed trail
we tread on midsummer mornings,
heads reeling from the pollen haze,
the muck-spreader spraying manure on the fields.
Horses stand beyond the barbed wire fence,
half a dozen, brown and soft gray,
looking old and tired as we,
huffing in tattered shoes
to breathe the country air and stretch our limbs.

The farmer, big-boned, energetic,
strides in his green rubber Wellingtons,
gripping the bridle of chestnut mare
whose mournful eyes roll a foot above our heads
as she whinnies, stifling a yawn,
while the farmer’s dimples
light the sun-mottled meadow.

He leads the horse onto a field scraggy from grazing,
pats the animals as if he were one of them,
comfortable among their shy visages.
We, the interlopers, pass awkwardly.

* * * * *

Now on this snowy February day,
the Chicago weather report blares from the clock radio
before daybreak; behind my eyelids
the vision of that man, those horses,
stares me down in my half-sleep.
The ritual hot shower, back exercises,
suits from the closet, fade to the periphery;
the farm becomes reality.
My car creeps down the icy road to school.
Horses, randomly spaced in a stubble-field,
still meander against a misted horizon,
the mare’s coat slick from the bright spray
of noonday shower. The farmer’s face,
the silent rolling of the mare’s eyes
dissolve in the glare of headlights, but, for several miles,
I can hear the squish of green rubber Wellies,
the tinkle of bridle bells on the mare’s neck.
Yorkshire Dales

Donna Pucciani

Through the unlatched window,
a square of thick night absorbs
the bleating of sheep.

Lambs, mist-hidden, baa for their mothers;
rams wander, curly-horned,
on rock-strewn moors.

Surely all should be asleep at this late hour,
shepherded to some safe paddock
by muddied farmer and loyal collie.

But dotting the dark hills,
the flocks clamor, plaintive,
across the black-vallied night.
This is Nowhere

Stephan Delbos

There is one door to heaven,
But it has one million keyholes.
When the night sky is reflected
In the black ocean
Or in the lights of the city
In the valley below,
There are two million
Ways of opening the door.

Eyes shine like keys,
Passing from hand to hand.
Pablo, will you come to me
and explain about plums,
how their sweet juice redeems
even the junta that tried
to silence you? With the juice
of a plum would you paint me
the dreams of the blindfolded?
Explain to me why these plums
bleed so sweetly in the same city
where human blood ran in the streets?

Let me follow you, Official of Odes,
ambling into the market,
palming apples in your hands,
or blowing saxophone riffs on a breadfruit.
Tell me, my bald Chilean Whitman,
when you were eyeing gardenias,
or whimsically naming the beasts,
or lolling on the sand of the beach,
did you ever forget
the blood running in the streets?

I hear in your poems hymns
For the dispossessed,
I smell in your verses the sweat
of the hungry for land.
Ambassador of Avocados,
I imagine you scolding the rulers,
Famine is not only the lack
of bread, but ovens of money
in greedy hands.
Senator of Pacific, speak to me
about those washed-up figureheads
you retrieved from the beach to your home.
Did their wooden tongues
whisper to you about the sea worms
gnawing your nation’s democracy,
did they moan of the undertow
that dragged your people into tyranny?

Neruda, when the colonels tried
to gag you, did they not realize,
as they crossed off names on their list,
that each victim’s disappearance
made the tongues of your poems multiply?
But what I want to know, Señor Plum,
is how did you stuff newspapers
between your skin and your shirt
and not get stained with impermanence?
A Day Without A Name

B.Z. Niditch

They came to your house early
before the full sun
crept on the dusty floors
they wanted information
in their laughing insults
with fathomless muscles
to impress with
bad cop questions
and good giggling answers
but the big man
walked into the kitchen
with deafening dumbness
staring at a Spanish painting
knocking over Mexican postcards
sneaking up on all of us;
sister hides in the pup tent
along the sun-rising road
hearing the cicadas sing;
and suddenly realizing
they have the wrong location
walk out without apology
their helmets adjusted
for a motorcycle roar
along the deserted highway
sister wanting to murder
a red orange
and some plums
losing out on breakfast
she puts overall on for work.
The Fishing Lesson

Barbara Wiedemann

Carefully
they placed the mason jars
in the ring around the fish.
Brook trout
rainbow trout
they didn’t know.
But the fish shimmered
in the shallow water of the stream.

Little girls
who knew nothing about fishing
captured the fish,
herding it into the jar,
head first tail exposed
then brought it home
to their mother
as a gift
but also for the skillet.

But because the colors
did shimmer
there would be no fillet
and the trout was returned
to the water and the pebbles and the sun.
Four swans two dozen yards from shore
glide on the water in this glacial lake.

When they turn to face the rising sun,
a man’s head appears among them,

swimming in the European manner,
wakeless, nearly soundless,

which allowed him, in the first place,
to swim with the swans. The man

seems torn between water and air,
wishing either gills or feathers adorn

his simple flesh. He dips beneath
the water, surfaces as the swans drift

beyond his reach. He paddles back
to the shore, stands in dry air, and walks

to the bathhouse, neck and head
high and full of grace.
"My father was never sober."
That's how you start. We're sitting

on Grace, near the fence,
recent geraniums proof of survivors.

"Kept a jug hidden in the basement.
Filled a cup half with soda,

made excuses to descend,
returned, cup lidded and full.

As if," you said, "he really fooled
anyone." Once your grandmother

pissed in his bottle.
Did he drink it anyway?

We laugh. The truth: he drank
at breakfast, mowing the lawn.

We start walking home.
I leave a pebble by her stone.
Icarus

James Doyle

twiddled his thumbs while he floated.
His father was okay at the planning bench,

but a real bore in mid-air. Icarus leaned
back. His blood had always been the lightest

in the family. He grew up floating.
If the earth wanted to roll away

from underneath him, that was the earth’s
problem. It always had the reluctant types

like his father to give it weight. Icarus
joined a flock of birds for a while,

but they always flew a narrow corridor
down to the smallest of doors, a compass point

north or south. Since his father couldn’t
stop dawdling like the old man he was,

Icarus decided to put all waiting
behind him. He climbed the decades

of his future life, one after the other,
until they released him into a history

wider than any magnetic bounds, much
less that sliver of an earth far below.
The Catacombs In Rome

James Doyle

The tourists are allowed
to sample death,
but with stringent restrictions.

The authorities are afraid
priceless artifacts
like the dust from bone

might leave the catacombs
on a fingertip, might touch
something worldly

and the skeletons
will waver in their meditations,
will sense

it is not God the vaults
are trying to capture,
not the passage of time

which never bothers
the dead, but the still whorls
of a fingerprint

that might be hiding blood,
an airtight box of skin
touch might open again.
Post Modern

Kate Kulenski

All smiles from the plastic people in the shiny box. Gleaming. Adorned. Swirling. Glassy-eyed dance of the sarcophagi. Then they bury you.

Shadows on the wall. The giants were here, as once were the stars; only seen after they’re gone—not seen at all. Light—bounced and broken and whored out, then forgotten.

Severed parts everywhere in this somnambulant war and we can’t slap them on fast enough. It’s all been done, I echo. Made to look. You bought them with holes. You’ll buy anything. It already bought you.

And one time, one time I thought I felt my foot, twitching after an inadequate rain. I knew I could feel it! But I couldn’t. It was dead.
For Czeslaw

Kate Kulenski

Sun. And Sky. And in the sky... St. Jadwiga. The other kids stared at St. Patty and Celtic crosses in grandma’s display case, but I’ve got portraits with unpronounceable names staring down at me from the stale blue ceiling with the orange trim. It’s in the damn last name – I always had to carry it around like a brilliant stupid banner. Did you hear the one about the one-armed Polish man? Yes, dupek, and I’ll shove my Polish arm down your throat if you say it again.

No one else knew the pierogi and the flaky cookies from Lasowiak’s at Sunday dinner, and Dziadek’s jars of homemade pickles every summer. But Czeslaw and I shared all this. We had the World in which Eurydice said St. Jadwiga stared back at us. I had a hero, since Copernicus fucked it up (Circular, honestly!) He tried to abandon us, but we know what his own called him over Christmas golabaki. We laugh – this is a joke Czeslaw and I share. We whispered words with the stars of Copernicus twinkling in our eyes. And I must laugh now still; under the Polish heavens, shining more brightly than ever.

Moon. And Sky. And in the sky Czeslaw. And now everything cries to me: Czeslaw! I’m not sure yet how we’ll fare without you, our redeeming one. But there is a fresh smell of latkes and I hear my Babcia’s quiet humming and I fall asleep with my cheek on a well-worn page.

With respect to “Orpheus and Eurydice” by Czeslaw Miłosz
Wakeful

Margaret A. Robinson

Restless at night
she untangles sheets,
shrinks from light
seeping, creeping
to the toilet. Returned, reaching,
her hand finds his ear,
arm, hair, cheek—
any part that’s near.

After sixty-five years,
he’s failing. She must pilot
their craft with care, steer
through rapids, float

across fear. He dreams.
She studies the stream.
Sweat pants, peach fuzz, Olympian dreams, skin bristling in the early Autumn chill – our gawky crew of would-be track stars lined up at the fence-line of the schoolyard where one by one under Coach McCartney’s stare (his steel eyes wide, peeled for “the natural”) we toed-up to the runway, launched for the pit carved into concrete and filled with sand.

Nothing proved us but our own scarred shins, forgotten childhood falls, the strange beating of wings inside our guts as our arms pumped and pumped and legs took on a life in air – as though we were maidens chased by some swift god, our own limbs branches crackling into bloom.
Joe

Emily Reynolds

I want to be just like you. Coke bottle glasses, worn out V-neck sweaters in colors like nude, midnight blue, sometimes maroon. You told me that once you were building a stone wall with your own father and crushed your thumb with the heaviest rock. Now the nail grows outward like two rose petals, ugly, but distinctly your own.
March 16, 2004

Emily Reynolds

We were eating spaghetti when your heart stopped. To be honest, I was pretty surprised that you’d pull that kind of a stunt right in the middle of dinner. You’re usually more polite, always very considerate of my feelings. I didn’t ask why you did it because there wasn’t really time. And now you’re miles away, a siren cry fading into the night, and I’m picking wet strings of pasta from the rug.
Wind and Water at Twilight

Michael St. Thomas

This world travels in blotches and waves,
moving closer to us now, then darting away at will.
Or is it being pulled, like a marionette, by invisible strings?

I point to a spot on the surface-
I can almost make out the jagged ridge of the mountain.
To you the shadows are crows
flapping at the reflected sky
that dives like a duck and
reappears down the lake.

I know that the mountains are there, along with the fallen sun.
They dance in shadows, trying to hide themselves
from us, but they don’t fool me.

You think the wind and water paint with them,
making new forms from the dying day,
smearing the faint glow of the sun
here and there for effect.

You tremble with the lake,
quiver as you observe
your ever-changing self
in the water.
But you still smile.

I liked it better when it was smooth,
and I could see things.
Fear of Drowning

Melissa McCreedy

Just yesterday, paddling with you
across Boston Harbor, I measured
our weight in ripples and surface breaks.

You on your knees mid canoe, a ballast
to my uneasy eyes ahead. I pull blind
to direction or tide. At my back

your paddle is silent, wordless,
only the soft heave of body behind it:
a doctor incising current.

Low, in a whisper, you offer a dare:
stand. But I am too fearful
of being tossed, overturned –

See how I grip the walls, white knuckled,
as we sway from side to side
your laugh a buoy or calling bell

striped red, a history of jagged rocks
and splinters. But remember,
I’m the wreck, determined to stay the course,

headstrong after all. And here in this water,
you and I deserve one another:
paddling, pulling from each other.
At night we went down to Red Lily Pond.
My aunt Kathy stood on the street,
her flashlight turned off, and she disappeared.

James untied the rope from around the scraggly branches.
We shoved off, sinking in the mud at first.

The dim night comes back;
The lilies like cupped hands,
their long necks thumping on the sides
and underside of our boat.

The water thick black and heavy,
tangled with vegetation;
some prehistoric vat of life.
Breathless August all around us.

I wanted to row, to take the oars,
know like my cousin;
the desire as strong as the darkness.

The oars through the water
the only sound heard
then the spin of the reel
overhead and dropping far off.

The quick movement, flitting things
in the sheen of moonlight;
for a moment hovering above a lily.

And the girl I saw under the water
how I had feared her face during the day,
but she did not stay long enough to frighten,
and sank down into the gloom
her lily face closed up in black water.
And then gone.
Ghost girl, pale-faced,
in the black water
closed eyes,
sinking down.
Pinocchio

David James

Pinocchio got all the girls –
He was built, hard and firm,
A stomach like a 2 x 4.
They were drawn like nails
To his grainy face, the unblinking eyes
That stared through their hearts.
The girls stroked his long, dark curls,
His tanned skin like mahogany.

When he would get them to bed,
And he always would,
He’d begin by kissing their necks,
Traveling slowly over their breasts,
His lips, polished veneer.
Amazed at the softness, the flexibility.

The girls learned quickly what to say.
As they moaned, they’d cry out,
“Tell me you love me.
Go ahead, lie if you have to.
Lie to me, Pinocchio.
Lie! You freaking bastard!”
How to b a man (Part 8)

Patrick Lawler

Except for little black or orange pouches inside them, some of the deep sea animals are transparent. Their colored stomachs hide the flashing. They won’t be vulnerable when they have eaten bioluminous organisms. They won’t have to admit to a turbulent blinking—a lunatic flicker. In case you have swallowed a light along the way, paint the heart black. Fasten inner tube patches to any leak. Order more durable walls. When they come to eat the light, stay hidden.
Zen Garden

G. Mark Jodon

In my garden
there are many beautiful things
I do not know.

Tonight, great joy
to know the yellow blossoms
making their home

in the chicken wire
on the garden wall
are jasmine blooms.
The Water Poets

G. Mark Jodon

They hear their names in the rain
splashing on tin awnings.
They don’t mind getting wet.

They own no umbrellas, rain slickers or galoshes.
They have birdbaths in their backyards,
plastic rain gauges in their flowerbeds.

They know where every public fountain flows.
Late at night they are silhouettes
in the mist.

They enter dark cathedrals,
secretly sipping their pens in holy water
before writing of sacred, moist places.
FICTION
Michael watched the old man walk slowly down the pier in the morning sun. The ocean breeze blew through his vagrant hair and unbuttoned flannel shirt, his face a beached tan and dried like a sponge. In the man’s right hand was a plastic cup of orange juice and a lit cigar. Michael’s older brother, Scottie, and his friend Charles leaned coolly along the railing next to him, also staring at the man against the bright cloudless sky.

“Whatcha doin’?” Scottie asked.

“Havin’ my breakfast,” the old man said, stopping. He took the cigar into his left hand and sipped his juice, then pointed down to the end of the pier where there was a fishing rod fastened to the pole, cast out, a tackle box lying open, and a plastic bag with flies buzzing around it.

Michael looked up at Scottie like he was a soldier, courageous, unflinching in the eye of confrontation. Michael was only nine, five years younger than Scottie, but he tried to tag along with him whenever he could.

“Whatcha got for bait?” Scottie asked.

The old man stared at Michael, his hair and clothes blowing in the wind, but his eyes remaining open and fixed. “You wanna see?” the man asked.

The boys followed him down to the end of the pier and looked into the plastic bag—bloody, thawing butterfish piled like rocks, flies weaving in and out, a hundred eyes wrenched open, staring back at them. Michael remained silent as Scottie held him back from the bag with his left arm. Michael looked up from the fish to the old man’s striking blue eyes. He nervously looked past them and could see the waves of the ocean crashing down on the shore, pushing sand and sea lettuce and crab carapaces farther along the tide line. The line remained as the waters receded, smoothing over the darker sand as a tinsmith might smooth a sheet of steel. He looked out to sea; the ocean moved and the horizon stayed fixed, and boats sailed along it in slow motion. He jumped when the old man started to wheeze. Moving past the boys, pushing them aside, he checked his line. He reeled it in—only the...
float and the waterlogged bait dangled from the hook.

“Good luck catchin’ anything with butterfish,” Scottie said.

“Whadda you know, kid?” he said, meticulously reworking the hook through the fish’s eye. He wound back and cast out again. The boys stood silent for a moment, Michael waiting for his brother to say something.

“I caught eight stripers here last week,” Scottie said. Michael smiled as his brother spoke, watching him stand against the old man, his tall, slender body, becoming a man, handsome, bold. Scottie made sure everyone knew he was the best, the strongest, the fastest, and he did it, most of the time, without saying a word. He did it with his size, his strength, when he ran his hand across his chin in thought, when he spat on the shoes of the other kids in the neighborhood. And even though Scottie would beat up on him, annoy him, ignore him, Michael still had this enduring admiration for his brother. But there were times when he hated him. He remembered when he made a gingerbread house for Christmas. There were green gumdrops surrounding the house that were supposed to be bushes. One day, when he came home from school, he found that Scottie had eaten every single one, and all he had to say was, “That’s what a gingerbread house is for, right?” But Michael was always able to forgive him.

“Eight stripers,” the old man laughed. “What’d you use for bait?”

“Bunker.”

“You chunk it?”

Scottie thought for a second. “Yeah.”

“The blues and the stripers love fresh chunks,” the old man said. “I believe you, if you said you chunked it. The head’s the best.”

Michael just stared at his brother. He knew that all last week Scottie was away at camp, but it didn’t matter to him. There was silence for a while, but for the wind. The old man was looking out to sea, past the float in the ocean. Michael followed the man’s smirking gaze to a large formation of rocks, far out in the middle of the water, waves crashing upon them, gulls circling, clamsheells dropping from their mouths and shattering.

“You see that out there?” the old man said. “Leet’s Island.” He paused, the boys listening closely as he spoke. “When I was your age, a kid died out there.”

Michael looked at Scottie, still standing tall, his broadening shoulders taut.

“I never heard that,” Scottie said.
“You never heard that?” He paused. “When it’s low tide, you could see the whole thing, and there’s big mudflats, sandbars that you follow and walk out there. These big tide pools fill up in the cracks of the rocks with all kinds of oysters and crabs. I’ve heard stories about some of the biggest hauls of blue crab around here comin’ off Leet’s Island.” Michael saw Scottie and Charles mesmerized by the story.

“What about the kid who died out there,” Charles asked.

“He drowned.”

Scottie’s face lit up. “Wait,” he said, “I heard about that place. The kid fell asleep fishin’ and there was a storm and the tide came in on him. It’s haunted.”

“It ain’t haunted,” the old man said. His eyes suddenly brought up a fear in his face that made Michael shiver. “You kids get outta here, let me fish in peace.”

The old man turned away and went back to his line, the sun hot on the pier. Michael looked at his brother, imploring him to let it be done and go home. After a few seconds of silence, a quiet that he knew was his brother’s way of defiance, Scottie turned away with Charles and Michael following at his heels. He knew exactly what his brother was going to say, and he didn’t want to hear it.

“I heard there’s a stone cross somewhere out there,” Scottie said to Charles. “And we’re goin’ out there tonight.”

All Michael could think of was the boy who died. He could see the storm rolling over him, the skies opening, lightning being sucked down into the ocean, the wind roaring cold, pinned on one lone, pitiless rock in the middle of the sea. He pictured what it felt like being underwater, the taste of the salt, the darkness — drowned in an instant, dead, as sudden as the rain that fell. Michael hoped the island wasn’t haunted. He was scared of the ghost, scared of maybe dying out there, but if Scottie was going, then he had to go too, no matter what.

It was the day after the 4th of July, and the annual fireworks had littered the beach with thousands of fragments of shrapnel and dried-out roman candles. The moon shined down on the wet, low tide sandbars, the breeze cool. The sand was raised like a bridge that led out to the island. Michael followed behind Scottie and Charles, and he could see the giant rock almost a half mile out to sea, fully exposed. They walked barefoot, slowly over the sand, the water around the sides of them only inches deep and sparkling and still under the moon.

The tide was on its way in, but they had plenty of time to get
there and back before the sandbars were flooded over. Scottie led the group gallantly across the sand, never taking his eyes off the island. Then he withdrew a knife from his pocket—a small penknife with a pearl handle—and showed it to Charles. Michael could only watch him open the knife, his inaudible, wind-muffled cautions offered to Charles as he wielded the blade, reflecting the moonlight.

Soon they stood before the rock and its gloomy and jagged crest. Scottie wasted no time, jumping from the sandbar right out onto a flat stone and began climbing. Charles hesitantly followed. Michael just stood on the sandbar, wanting to turn around, watching his brother, the only sounds he could hear the soft tide and his own heart beating. Leet’s Island was a lot bigger up close. But, he couldn’t really understand why people called it an island—it was just a giant rock, sharp and covered with barnacles and snails and algae. They must have given it a name after the kid died.

“Mike, get up here,” Scottie said.

Michael stood for a moment staring at his brother, a dark silhouette, persistently still on the rocks. Even his brother’s shadow was big and powerful. Just his shadow, looming over Michael, was enough to make him feel like a coward standing there in the sand.

“Come on!”

Michael crept forward onto the rock, the barnacles sharp under his feet, and he began to climb behind the other two. They came across a small tide pool tucked under a cliff that stretched out over it. Michael stopped for a second while the other two kept climbing. Looking in through the dark, silent water, it was nearly impossible to see. He knew underneath there were all kinds of crabs and sea anemonies and mussels. He wished that they were the treasure his brother sought, and not that stupid cross. They reached the top of the rock and looked out to sea. Waves were rolling white and the waters were steadily coming back in. The night was silent, as if everyone else in the world had gone away, and it felt like there was no sound out on the rock, like if you opened your mouth to yell, “ECHO,” nothing but a muffled ring would come out. The air was blowing through Michael’s ears as coldly as his brother’s words, and in that cold he was sure he felt the boy who died. He had been there—he had been in that very place that they stood.

“The cross is around here somewhere,” Scottie said, as if he’d been there before. He walked around the tops of the rocks, securing each slippery foothold on the barnacle covered stones. Michael continued to follow behind, worried that every step could lead to a
deep gash in his foot, a slippery collision with the ground. He knew Scottie would never fall.

“There it is,” Scottie said. Michael didn’t want to believe what he saw. The cross was about two feet tall, marble, discolored and eroded by years of tidal abuse. It looked like it wasn’t put there by anyone related to the boy, like it had no earthly business cemented to stone on sinking island. And sure enough, from the top of the base, it was covered in generations of carved initials, names, and curses. The three boys stood around it, staring at it like it was a lost relic. Scottie revealed the knife and handed it to Charles.

“You first,” he said.

Charles took the knife into his hand tentatively and dug into the stone. The years of salt washing over it made it surprisingly soft, and Michael watched as the knife scratched through it, leaving behind a small, “C.M.” Scottie grabbed the knife and quickly carved his – “S.K” Michael watched his brother smiling, his teeth glinting and gritted in the moonlight, his eyes passionately fixed on his work of art. He turned to Michael, almost like a demon. There was something inside his taunting glare that he couldn’t recognize, a look Michael had never seen before.

“Okay, Mike.”

The knife drawn, slightly rusted, gleaming, he forced it into Michael’s hand. There was blood on that knife – like it had been driven into an innocent boy’s heart. Michael’s hand was shaking. The boy was there, buried somewhere in his conscience, but his brother was there too.

“Mike,” Scottie said, “prove to me you’re tough. I know you’re tough. We’ll always remember this, we’ll all be carved in this together.” Michael just stared back. He had no choice. There was no way Scottie was going to let him off that island without going through with it. Terrified that his own hands were suddenly gripping the cross, feeling as if they belonged to someone else, he struck it with the blade - “M.K.”

“You did the right thing, Mike,” Scottie said.

Michael handed him the knife, and they went home.

That night Michael lay in his bed, staring into darkness, crying harder than he ever had. He knew they had their differences; they had their quarrels, as all other brothers did. And he always thought he knew at the end of the day, after all was said and done, that Scottie was his brother, and that he loved him. But in the darkness of his bedroom, alone and as cold as the sea, he saw the old man’s eyes, the boy stranded on Leet’s Island, and Scottie laughing at it all.
Time in Blue

Holly Leigh Jacobson

I got the blues, a voice jumps the tracks. I got the chicken cordon bleus, croons the subway singer from the platform opposite. Down in underground tunnels, people spy on the rats busy in the pit below. Going deep, I know how – I've had lots of practice. I wrap myself in blue inside and out. The mood of color permeates and soothes. Blues are dues; blues show off the bruise. We pack ourselves in subway cars where no one speaks.

I spend all afternoon on a park bench in an effort to tame time. You absorb the colors and sounds; the restless stride of a whole other world but barely stir. It takes practice to hold a pause, like floating a long musical note. My eyes follow the pigeons on patrol in their uniform gray with their raw-red feet.

A discarded matchbook reads Lost Horizon on its cover. I am taken by the free words, some kind of coded message more random than a fortune cookie. Matchbooks are scarcer now and I miss the word scraps and designs of tiny art, like those tiny flag pins, that anchor you to places you've been. And that is the scavenge scenario of the park bench faithful; you scavenge odd debris, you scavenge memory the way pigeons go after for crumbs.

I push the matchbox, a small prize for the day, down in my coat pocket, though I have no use for matches. Since the accident, no way can I strike a match; the fire messed up my fingers. I'd light off the oven burner, if I could even hold a cigarette. That's the only reason I don't smoke now. Oh, I miss the rising curl of smoke, wisps of time that offer solace to the inner gnaw of hunger for something more. A mystery matchbook kindles a vision.

I wear the same jacket left from the denim-clad high school years but now the blue is worn down to gray. I remember the jacket still a hard blue, tying the bandannas and carrying a rose, though the smoky haze of Dead shows. All required of the tribe. But wearing a jean jacket with a kilt at private school branded you an outlaw. If you broke the dress code then you also smoked, drove too fast and put in time on detention.

Blue, the blue eyes of Dad, I wished I had. Paul Newman blue and he was so pleased being mistaken for Paul on business trips in Europe. Dad favored blue, the seersucker suit he donned every
summer, his favorite flower blue iris that lay on his coffin. When they lowered the closed box down below our feet, the flowers stayed in place. And I wore a blue summer dress, borderline frilly, with simple blue pumps because I owned no black back then.

Is the airy feel of slipping on a summer frock for a brunch in a cool leafy garden beside the pale face of a shimmering pool a mirage now? Was it the cotton float of walking young, being pretend grown up that catered to our confidence? I subscribed to these enacted rites of passage though they felt like walk-on roles in a play.

Our high school graduation called forth an overblown pageantry display. The mad dash for the unique white dress, white shoes, borrowed pearls, complete with elfin flowergirls who ascended the stage. All in dove white, 29 staged single brides, sacrificed or poised for flight. “You’re all virgins too, right?” joked Dad. Only 29, our number had winnowed year after year, in the rebel class, many were “not asked back.” One dove since has now fallen from the sky, 28 left.

When I find the photos of that hour pressed between old books, I stare at a stranger in the cool cream of her dress with tan muscled arms. She tucks up the dress hem, watching her steps down the stairs. The black and white rectangle of two girls in white is yellowed, already vintage.

Without the time slate of photographs, where is the proof of a lived life? If all is lost in a fire, what is recalled? Memory lapses, erases and creates false facts. I lost my face, not photographs, in a fire but now it is getting harder to reconcile the first with all the asymmetry of surgery.

“Your face looks like a Picasso painting,” remarks a male friend, priding himself on his sincere comment. What if faces never found themselves in mirrors, at least no one could judge. If we lacked reflections, if we punched out all the mirrors, the black-eyed broken glass fallen at our feet would truly reveal the dagger shards they are. Shatter the view and multiply the angles, I say.

How could I know fire would burn on the cusps each time and brand my passage? At Christmas rituals, the seniors wore the mummer’s dark red robes in procession with lit candle globes as the entire school K-12 caroled the drab halls. Assembled in the gym, each class in turn sang circled around the table of burning candle flames set in front of the stage. Light and voices, surrounded by shadows, the yearbook photo frames my face, an echo.

I sold myself on time by the measures of school. But the school hoops become just rings of flames a trained tamed tigress jumps. The night before college graduation, in our robes, 600-odd
seniors lurched down the steep hill wielding hefty torches and surrounded by the lake. The water mirrored a wending uneven ring of flames along the rim fanning from a still dark-eyed center.

I woke after the carfire to time altered, a clouded realm where memory meant nothing. Somewhere my stuff was cleared, emptied from my rented room. The cat, who slept on my bed alone for weeks, disappeared. Stashed letters, a bracelet gone. Mom fixed a room for me. Blue, I insisted, so sensitive now. No digital display, no countdown in red, I could only bear the softer glow of time in blue. For some reason this was important and non-negotiable, a sliver of control. Thirty-five years of breath and sleep and still I wake to dutifully note the time: 1:11, 2:22, 4:44, 10:10.

Lavender, pale greens, grays and blues, my new hues offer some relief. The balmy colors comfort like the traces of pastel lines from an abandoned childhood hopscotch game that wash out in the sprinkle of summer evening rain. All the hopes that came before vanish, evaporate. Gray morning mist erases the river I walk beside but leaves the chill. I inhale the vapor air on the way. So many times I’ve taken this route to hospital for surgery. Six am early, I will the trade cool outdoors for the numbing cold of the OR. A voice in a megaphone carries across the water in echoes as the fog parts its gauze curtains for rowers sculling, stroking the river. Their shape and energy, like huge flat insects, works on propulsion, on breath.

Water draws me by its mirror kiss of the sky’s blue or gray moods. But its no use, the cool cool fever I suffer from threatens to drown me in rage, call me down. In my dreams, before the river caught fire, I still waltz the summer’s breeze wearing the loose blue dress.

If I gave you the moon, you’d tire of it soon, says the song. Headed home from writing class I met a ghostly escort on the hill’s crest. Fog tendrils writhed in each trees’ embrace, while the gray bearded moon suffused the sky. I saw from the circle of howling voices in a living room, city wolves clawing at imagined doors, unearthing secrets in private dens, that I can write myself out of this inner fog. I can howl on the page.

Tonight the clock shines it’s blue-shadow past the bed. The moon leaks its blue shine through the shutters, spilling striped bars on the sills. Submerged in subway tunnels, trolling dreams and lake bottoms with scraps of tattered, enigmatic poems I know what happens when you swallow your words. Such a dark opening, the narrow hollow windpipe hole, a place where words come and go, or
mingle with demons. Journey moon, conjoined in your celestial light,
I scour a journal where all the disembodied scraps float, mysteries are
etched, night notes deciphered.

Where my arm once swung, an invisible hand pens streams
and rivers of words, latches onto phrases in a spiraling notebook
sequence. I draft a new blueprint. I hold the matchbook, fondle the
imagined cigarette, flare of the sulfur flick, the mouth craves, and there
is still hunger, hunger, hunger.
Casting the well-hooked night crawler with your thumb pressed on the button on the closed-faced spinning reel into the great round green lily pads in the shade of the overhanging oaks made the thin clear strong monofilament go whizzzzz through the pole loops, and then there's silence. The bait's in place. The long fat brown relatives of the slimed-together night crawlers whose greasy phlegmy slimy sex was interrupted last night on the wet lawn by Georges and Jimmy and one of which is now out in the cool of the water hanging from a big plastic bobber are for sale in wide-mouthed wooden steel staved barrels in the dark damp cellar of that other Georges' big twostory steel roofed brick sporting goods store with the big red neon name splashed across the front and will also end up cast strongly one by one as big bass bait into the still shade-mottled place under the leaning current-undermined oaks with the moss-draped thick dark brown roots. And later scaling the gutted beheaded unfortunate in the mosquitoed moonlight with an extra sharp knife on a jagged-edged piece of sagging unpainted plywood up on homemade sawhorses covered with paint spatters rudely exposes the pink shiny fishflesh. The clear hot sweat poured from the tall grey haired scaler's brow and dripped onto the fresh-killed fish which would be washed anyhow in a galvanized bucket before the trip to the freezer. Now on to killies, shiners, also known as minnows, little silvery shining fishes no longer than your little finger; hooking these baits the proper way through the eye makes them writhe in pain and is bloody cruel imagine your tender eye so lacerated by great hooks, hanging torn pale from a bled-out socket in your broad swollen pain-sweated face. The Killies swimming in clear water in the dented steel pail on the shaky dock jutting far into the bay have come from the homemade square framed net that swept through their school, which they swim in as do minnows, also known as shiners, already mentioned. Or one can fish with golden salmon eggs, kept in a clear jar with a paper label. Chum wrapped in yesterday's daily newspaper chopped with a heavy black handled cleaver kept in a white cooler to sell by the bay for a few highly valued silver coins is bloody. Big fish are chopped up to make the chum; big, and silvery, large-scaled, crude and
rough, something too grossly oily meated to eat at the evening dinner table, something from and for the salt water, where everything’s strange. And everything rots what’s in the water long enough; moments, seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, or years, or farther, that all tick by as the small grey rowboat rots; the rowboat’s rotten bottom sags, but step in, the oars are rotten and the seats are soft, but sit down, the gunwales and oarlocks are loose, but shove home the oars, and push away from the dock. No heavy rusted lock and chain to undo; it’s pointless to use a lock and chain to attach the boat to the dock so it wouldn’t be stolen — the bright brand new steel eyebolts would just tear loose from the spongy rotten peeling bluepainted dock wood, so shove easily away from the leaning rickety dock and take the rotting leaky often stolen but always found again boat out into the dark meandering channel under the moonlight where it’s always safe. No process servers can find a man here — dusk descends colorless cool humid and hazy swarming with mosquitoes and ticks in the bushes, and if there are long smallheaded snakes in the brush on the shore they will strike, if they stepped on, if disturbed, as anything with common sense will do if accosted. But their teeth are too small and weak to do any harm. They have no venom so the dawn will come again for those they struck, the dawn flooded with sun and thick layers of fresh air. The sleepy people spread across town lie in the shadows of their big square bedrooms wishing for the stars to continue to shine, wishing for the night to continue to hang overhead, because the mornings always slime over them like thick sticky mud. The shiny green rubber hip boots worn by Father fill with water because they’re leaky like the boat, they get heavy, weigh at least fifty pounds each and the rubber strains at the thin leather straps and the cracks of dryrot expand and contract. He spends his nights patching his hip boots in vain; new ones cost big greenback bucks. The leaks always surprise him when they spring again; Father gets soaked no matter what, no matter what. He curses the boots and the water and the heaviness of it all in great oily bursts. Turtles sun themselves on hot dry barkless floating slowly rotting logs that are setting lower and lower in the water each day, and the round shelled turtles grip the wood with their tiny black claws, beside them their children are sunning themselves; the parents are beautifully striped as are the pretty babies. Each has a name known only to the others, not to the fisherman gliding by in his rotting grey rowboat, or the other fisherman in the slowly filling hip boots. Every creature has a name just like all people are Sally, Mark, or Johnny. The big eels as thick as your wrist will bite on a hooked piece of paper, so Johnny found out by the main street dam, the eels are thick and coil
and roll and squirm, a six footer was caught by a boy with a name Johnny didn’t know from atop a rust red train trestle once, and the small ones long and thin as a pencil climb right up out of the coffee can yet their way they are slick, so slick. How they grip the silvery can sides on their way up and out is a mystery. Rotten wood of any kind isn’t good to step on, it yields and will crumble from all its years in the rain, the shed bottom is rotting as bad as sin, as bad as the bottom of the frequently stolen boat, where the dampness always drifts up thick from below. Dry as grey bone, the knotty wood shows the wet footprints, the hot wood, hot from baking in the sun, the wood that over the years has weathered to light grey unpainted to match bones. The reel is ticking as it turns, it’s closed faced; it takes more talent to cast an open faced spinning reel, but both types spools spin and their clamps hold them tight to their rods. They’ll not escape. They turn so smoothly, it seems the line will never snag or tangle, but it does at times; a large white cloud of balled up line shrouds the reel, the rod is cast down in disgust by the impatient, or worked on tenderly by the calm persistent and the loving. It’s best to just cut such a mess away, and go down to the store to buy some more line, the store where the hooks are always Eagle Claw brand, sold sealed in plastic on slabs of cardboard, they are sharp and barbed, they cause pain to the bait and to you if you’re not careful, you crush the soft lead split shot onto the leather with your teeth after getting the new line onto the reel and the new hook on the line and positioning the red and white bobber. You cast, you wait, always early in the morning. Sleep is in the air about the muddy-banked brook with the gnarled toppled trees and the dirtmud smell drifting up from the water. The Jitterbug lure is another way to fish, it’s large most times redheaded and double-hooked, it makes plenty of noise plunging through the water and the silent worm-hookers with their silent bobbers all yell at you from the banks all around and from atop the bridge when you use the Jitterbug, their mouths are wide open big-toothed braying donkeylike, but they stop laughing when the big bass strikes, the noisy Jitterbug’s the best lure for bass much better than the fake worm, which is useless; you’ve never caught anything on it, even after spraying it with that phony redbanned baitspray. And once in a while blood spreads from the prick on your finger clouding over the surrounding skin, you can suck at the wound to ease the pain, it could have been worse you could chop your hand with a hatchet of sharp knife and droplets of blood could be spraying all around across the walls and ceiling, but they’re not. In the end the galvanized pail sit by the wooden steps full of halfdead eels, the gutted fish lie next to the eels in a dented can of ice cold water. Fishing Line is
clear by design, it can also be used to fly a kite, the spool is plastic and you tie a knot to the leader that you can buy attached to the hook. Monofilament is thin but strong, long as the railroad rail, on the trap rock, on the railroad tie. With the locomotive coming he put a justcaught bass on the railroad tracks once, the passing train reduced it to five hundred feet of fish oil slimed down the track. The bass was a largemouth, thick and stubby, a heavy fish flopping and fighting after it hit the lure. Trout are speckled the rainbow is beautiful the colors jump off of it as it flashes jumping fighting, the brown is a fighter too, they have a tough jaw in which to set the hook and some people catch them with phony flies they tie themselves as a hobby. They curse and snarl if the tying’s too rough, if they’re all thumbs that day, if the scissors slip, then the hobby’s down the drain. Pickerel have a snout and tiny teeth, pointed and rough, seem big when fighting but are skinny and small out of the water. We handled the caught pickerel in the near darkness it was the last caught fish of the night. We went home completely spent and climbed nearnaked into our beds. The darkness pressed in all around and we lost consciousness and outside it began to rain and no one was at the brook to see it but the brook always knew no matter what time the clocks said or where the people were, the dark rain was still there peppering the water.
This will be a happy story, I promise. One that won’t let shattered glass cut, shoe laces untie in the rain, and perhaps, one that will pretend Charlie never cries when he sees white flowers.

It shouldn’t be that big of a deal. Shoe laces, that is. You’ve got a bag in one hand, a child in the other; whose child I don’t know, but it figures there would be a child. And your laces become loose. You feel it from the start, the pressure easing around your foot, a tender hardness occasionally slipping under your sole, and what you really want to do is curse these damned shoes and everything they’ve walked on. But you let them drag in the street and pick up pieces of the city people try to leave behind. You are already heavy from the rain and everything else so you tell yourself that dirt could never cause any real damage. But you yell at Charlie anyways, because he made the rain, and he holds your hand when it just doesn’t fit sometimes. Ya know? He just doesn’t fit.

Charlie always held my hand too tight, especially when we drove past the mall on the way to Wal-Mart, where the town jammed white lilies into a vat of pavement. Jesus Charlie, I’m driving, I would say. But he only cried and whispered that he didn’t understand how flowers could be so white.

He wasn’t always weird like that. The crying started four months after our father’s funeral. The ceremony was this huge event, with white flowers that had green specks of something in the middle; probably it’s reproductive organs. We learned about them in Biology class that year. We even got to dissect them and wear purple rubber gloves. Somehow, that year, everything always came back to flower reproductive organs and purple gloves.

No, actually, nothing did. That was just a crazy comment to arouse some sort of reaction in you and perhaps myself. Nothing came back to that at all. It’s a ridiculous statement. Nobody should ever get away with saying something illogical like that.

But there were white flowers with green specks supported by stems strikingly bright. Maybe they stood out because the church was so black, taken over by black clothes, black thoughts, and black silences.
Or maybe I am awkwardly effeminate, suppressing my inner attempt to color the world in rainbows and sunshine.

Well, I'm not. But it would be an alternate explanation as to why the first things I describe at my father's funeral are the flowers.

Psychologists have said that it's my method for dealing with grief. That always made me laugh. I would laugh right in their faces and watch them shift uncomfortably in their beige chairs. They always had beige chairs, always the same model, like they hand out these damn chairs along with their doctorate.

_It's cause I have a thing with colors, _I told them. _I just like colors._

That was never acceptable though. _What is Billy? What is it you are hiding?_ they would ask. I never knew what to say. I wasn't hiding anything. I loved my father, he died and all I just wanted was to paint. I couldn't understand why that wasn't okay.

The world wanted me to keep me in grief, but nobody had any time for it, so I stayed in my basement where I could be whatever I wanted and just paint. I tried to be creative, but all I ever wanted to paint were the flowers that decorated my father's funeral. I must have painted them a million times, or in other words, eight.

I never changed the colors when I recreated the scene, because in my memories colors seemed to have more permanence than people. So I changed the people in the background, making them laugh, cry, high five, shovel snow, dance, sleep, and the original; sitting. I must admit, I laughed when I stepped back and looked at people shoveling snow in church. Partly because it was so damn random it scared me and partly because the image was utter absurdity. Sad too. But everything is always a little sad.

I’d say it is a bit ridiculous, to paint people shoveling snow at your own father’s funeral. I was almost scared to paint it, afraid I might be crossing some societal normality boundary, if that is even an accurate phrase. And I definitely did. People sweat and cringe when they look at it, as they stumble over their words and the door on their way out. But it was worth it. It’s a statement, because maybe, just maybe, the world doesn’t really make any sense. I think statements are a bunch of crap if you ask me, which you did not. But I can make them just as well as anybody else. Doesn’t mean I have to believe in them.

It shouldn’t be that big of a deal. My father, that is, I shouldn’t have to paint pictures about him and try to make myself laugh like there was nothing funnier. My mother keeps trying to get me to talk, to open up, like I am hiding the key to our happiness under my tongue. She saw the painting once, the one of the snow and my father’s funeral, and acted very concerned. She even broke a wine glass
and cried as she asked if I remembered the way my father used to sing, “Hey, hey we’re the monkeys!” in our faces before school. I told her I did not remember and accidentally stepped on the broken glass that made me bleed. But it did not hurt and I did not cry. *Don’t you want to remember Billy, why don’t you want to remember, why won’t you just cry like the rest of us*, they say.

Charlie did. He cried and he remembered just like the rest of them. His tears fell too often and they began to irritate me so I tried to make him laugh. *Hey Charlie, wouldn’t it be funny if Mom named you something ridiculous, something like Napkin Dispenser?* The car window kept his attention. *Come on Charlie, laugh. Napkin Dispenser. It’s a joke, for Christ sakes.*

"Why won’t you laugh, just laugh for once! I wished I could remember what it felt like not to be angry at him."

*I’ve been stained Billy, he said. Why is it always poetry with you Charlie? You are ten years old and you are always talking in poems."

*I am not ten years old, he spoke, his finger to the pane, tapping it like a child would have."*

"Yes you are Charlie, you are ten goddamn years old. I just don’t understand why they are so white, he mumbled over the hum of the engine."

*What is it with you and this white flower crap, Charlie, flowers are white, flowers are blue, flowers are every damn color now what is the big deal?*

And then he was quiet. My tone always seemed to hush him. We sat in silence and I wished I had words that knew how to take the pain away, ones to paint over his eyes in new colors, neon colors that drown out whiteness and all things pure that have not been destroyed; the way he was.

When we arrived home, my mother was waiting and we ate off our new Harley Davidson motorcycle plates that she made us pick up from Wal-Mart. *A fresh start,* she said ripping open the box to reveal a bald man and a gorgeous girl riding on a motorcycle, *with nothing better than new plates!* I hated how she spoke like plates excited me, like this bald man and this beautiful woman belonged together in a world outside of a Wal-Mart plate, like it wasn’t awkward to eat potatoes off them every night.

But they didn’t excite me. Actually, I thought they were the saddest thing in the world. Charlie was right. Sometimes it’s nice to pretend that other families were eating off of Harley Davidson plates, that other mothers have not completely lost their perspective on the world, that wine glasses do not dent and shatter against their walls, the
way they do in mine.

But then we get in the car, and we pass those white flowers. And Charlie begins to cry because he is only ten years old and thought he would be happy forever.

*I just thought if you sat out in this world long enough everything white became stained,* he finally said one day, looking at me instead of the window-pane.

And that is when I began to cry because this would have been a happy story, if only untied shoelaces made me sad and broken glass hurt the way it was supposed to, and if only Charlie’s hand felt right in mine.

But it’s these white flowers. These white flowers should not be that big of a deal. This should not be that big of a deal.
ARTWORK
Long Way to Go
Benjamin Klibanoff
The Red House of Mr. Jerome Glass

Chris Fahey
Conor and Chris

Whitney Claflin
Conor and the Deer

Whitney Claflin
Jed, Veronica, and Casey
in October
Whitney Claflin
Photograph
Whitney Claflin
B is for baby blinking in the sun
Paula Marston
Sim Chung and Her Father
Paula Marston
Hands

Paula Marston
Inside the Peach

Paula Marston
Photograph
Kelley McGinnis
Photograph
Kelley McGinnis
Be Still My Bleeding Heart, Detail

Jenna Mastroianni
Empty, Detail
Jenna Mastroianni
Between Us, Detail

Jenna Mastroianni
MEMOIR
Sap Season

Anna Weinhardt

“When the wind’s from the North, the sap flows forth,
When the wind’s from the East, the sap flows least,
When the wind’s from the South, the sap’s a drought,
When the wind’s from the West, the sap runs best.”

I have found no reason to believe this little ditty, I don’t even believe any New Englander made it up, rather some love-struck sailor referring to something completely different. So I have modified the saying more to my liking, which I am apt to do with many things. Now, in my book the saying goes: “The sap runs whenever it feels like it.” This is more often true than not, especially since it can’t be proven. If the sap is not running, one would have to assume that it doesn’t feel like running. It is simple, true, and involves no memorization of rhymes. The problem begins with man-made interferences, such as vacuum pumps. There are guys around who’ll stick a vacuum pump on the end of their lines, and pull sap from trees all day long, even if the sap would rather stay in the tree that particular day. I don’t associate vacuum pumps with real sugaring though. Oil powered evaporators and reverse osmosis machines also don’t win any prizes from me. I am unimpressed unless suffering is involved.

Tourists, who have no concept of labor or suffering, believe that syrup is made one way. They like to picture Farmer John in plaid, wool pants and red suspenders. He is a quiet friendly old dear, who offers samples of hot syrup in little paper cups as gifts. In his red-painted sugar house, clear sap boils in an immaculate evaporator, which is fired by hand split ash logs, harvested two summers prior, and stored under cover. Sap is gathered once every day from wooden buckets hanging on perfect trees, and Farmer John makes rounds, gathering into a large barrel on a skid, pulled by a docile yolk of Brown Swiss oxen.

Once in a blue moon would you find some old timer – the last of a dying breed – actually doing this. Some farmers may gather wooden buckets for show, or drive a team of horses so tourists can get the “real” atmosphere, or boil over ash logs, but generally this is not
the case. There is a balance between the tourist ideal sugarmaker and the one who turns the dial on his reverse osmosis to 60 percent, and then boils for an hour before going to bed, and this is where I stand. You need not be lazy, but there is also no need not to use any new sugaring inventions. Fatigue and suffering are plenty using some tubing, and gathering with a tractor instead of horses. I will tell sugaring as it is to me.

It is a misconception that sugaring happens only during the spring. I’m not saying that this is not when the sap runs, or that this is not when the majority of labor is needed, but I am bringing to attention that farmers (myself included) are working on preparations for the mad frenzy of those few weeks in March, for a good part of the year.

In December I start stringing tubing. It is a discouraging job because it often needs to be done on snowshoes. This is not a huge problem for many people, but I was not blessed with gracefulness when I was born. I have found out that “Anna” means graceful, but recently a friend pointed out to me that since “Anna” is read the same backwards as forwards, my parents probably named me “Anna” backwards, ungraceful, or lufecarg (graceful backwards). Due to this uncoordination of my legs, I find that in most cases, I am best off to leave any snowshoes in my truck and proceed stringing lines trudging through the snow. The actual stringing is a relatively easy job and can be fun. I enjoy, and always have enjoyed, being in the woods by myself. This comes from my childhood, where with no electricity to run a television or toy train, I turned to the woods for entertainment. Although I have an older sister, she was not one to play with me. We are as opposite as two sisters can be. Whereas I would rather roll in the mud and build forts from fallen trees, and watch foxes, and milk cows, my sister would prefer sitting in the house or yard, absorbed in a book, or doing her schoolwork, or cooking dinner. After unsuccessful attempts to bring her with me to our woods, I became content to play by myself as a child.

Stringing lines, I am again by myself. I weave in and out between the trees, using my weight to pull the lines tight, and using the lines to hold my weight to pull the lines tight, and using the lines to hold my weight so as not to fall. I weave this bush as a sparrow weaves a single strand of horsehair into the jungle of its nest. I stop now and again to check my work, and to see which tree I should next go to. Fatigue comes in the arms and the legs. The arms from pulling, the legs from constant trudging and tripping, however, it is not too bad.
One of the negative aspects of this plastic capillary way of gathering sap, is that there is considerable damage done to the lines throughout the year. Trees fall on and pull lines apart, deer run through and stretch the plastic, and most annoying, squirrels find it necessary to chew open and destroy miles of lines. Repairs are inevitable. I hate squirrel repairs the most. From a distance, downed trees on lines, and downed lines can be seen. I can walk to each location and fix what is wrong. Squirrel damage is virtually invisible, since their teeth are tiny. This means walking through the entire length of all the lines in the snow, checking for a ruffled up place in the plastic, or waiting until the sap is actually running, and watching for where you can see the sap actually fountaining out of the lines. I usually fix what I can see and ignore the rest.

Repairing lines involves carrying many tools, fittings, torches, nails, string, and a ridiculous amount of scrids and scraps from the tool bench. Armed with this odd assortment of things, I wonder about my appearance. Around here, I am usually passed off as “some hick” or something of the like, but I can’t help wondering about the faces of people if I was to walk around Boston like that. I’d no doubt get arrested. Making repairs is tedious work but not optional. It is also infuriating. Without lines to support me when I fall, I do so frequently. My tool apron is instantly emptied of its previously sorted parts and pieces. A large metal tool designed to cut and join lines, proves useful to cut and join hands, knees, faces, whatever lands in it. During repairs, by the end of the day, I am bloodied and bruised, tree bark in my eyes makes them bloodshot, and dirt covers my face. I am a miner of coal, a tar layer, a mechanic — I would not be half such a mess had I chosen one of those professions.

Working slowly in the daylight between chores, stringing new sap lines and repairing the old ones can take all winter. One day it’s just barely January, and the next day it is the second week of February and the mud is beginning to show in a few spots, and a robin is sighted downtown. It is time to perhaps, maybe, possibly, timidly, to start thinking about tapping out. It is worse than deciding when to cut a field of hay. It is torture and agony. A tap is only good in a tree for six weeks. This means a farmer must predict the weather for the next six weeks rather than a few days, like during haying. One way or another it is decided. The last week of February, the second week of March, each decides their own day. Some farmers will only tap on town meeting day, regardless of the weather.

Once decided, the tapping frenzy begins. Each year, my parents regale me with horror stories of people dying from being
impaled on drill bits. These are not your ordinary Farmer John hand drills. These are whirling whining 15/16 inch drill bits mounted on chainsaw motors, which belch blue exhaust and deafen the sounds of the birds singing and snow melting. “Well,” my parents begin, “I do hope you’ll be careful. You know, I’ll bet you could find someone else who could do this for you.” As if saying, “I’ll bet,” would get me excited for competition, and I’d rush out and find someone who would run the drill for me. Not in a million years. They continue: “Did I ever tell you that Isaac Bills died when he fell on one of those things? It drilled right into him. He was dead before the ambulance got there.”

Every year I am unimpressed by their stories, and convinced that Isaac Bills must have been a blithering idiot. And every year I have to refuse the hand drill my parents earnestly offer. I’m no Farmer John. Tapping is monotonous but fun. Tapping line bushes is a light load. A hammer in one hand, and the drill in the other. You keep the motor running the whole time, but only spin the bit when you get to the tree. The line has to run down hill the whole way, so some holes have to be drilled high on the tree to help gravity along. I was blessed with being fairly large, so I never end up having to balance on one tip-toe trying to drill holes, but even so, the drill is not straight. For three straight days, all I do is walk and thrust the drill at the tree and hammer in the tap. I am so tired that I’m not a real person, but more a robot, pushing my weight against the tree to drive the bit in. And then it’s over, as abruptly as it started, and it is sugaring season — sap season. I go home to rest before boiling and my parents welcome me with unenthusiastic glares.

Yes, I smell like gasoline, yes, I’m mud covered and shit caked, and my eyes are half swollen shut with fatigue, yes I am their younger daughter. My sister is perfect in pretty much every way my parents would want their child to be. For five blissful years, they had her, an angel, green eyed and golden haired. They expected something, some flaw some little problem that other parents had with their children, but there were none. Then I came along. I had every problem they expected in their first child and never had, plus quite a few of my own little quirks. I lied, I swore, I was dirty, I hit my father, I was rude to guests, I cut my cat’s hair, which, when I was tiny was my only redeeming quality. I ran off, I rode in stranger’s cars, I made a pest of myself at the neighbor’s, and I went to farms on my own quite frequently, so I smelled like pigs and cows and horses. I still have most of these problems, plus I have chosen a way of life which is not okay. My sister is a secretary in Philadelphia. I am a farmer in Vermont. I am proud, my parents are not, but I can still sleep in my own bed there,
which is needed during sugaring. I am grateful.

Once you tap out, the sap does some running. There is sap and sap and sap and more sap. This means time in the sugar house boiling. This means making syrup. With the tractor, I can bring over a cord of wood at a time, which only lasts an hour at most, once the fire gets going. Unlike Farmer John, I don’t start the fire with matches and newspapers. I lay sticks in the firebox and pour diesel fuel over them. I use a torch to start a flame, and then keep adding wood. Once the fire is going, you can throw an ice encrusted log in there, and the fire doesn’t blink an eye, but burns it right up. There is this other problem though. The fire is hot. This is no hot like haying in August hot — this is hot like a burning house hot. If I don’t wear two pairs of long underwear, the rivets in my pants burn my legs. If I don’t wear a jacket my arms will burn and peel like a sunburn. My eyebrows turn black at the ends from being singed. Yet to make this watery sap turn to thick syrup the fire needs to be roaring, and the pan boiling furiously. If you think about how long it takes for a ten gallon pot of water to boil on the stove, you can have some idea of the size the fire needs to be to boil these hundreds of gallons of sap. I am fascinated by the fire, by its heat and whiteness, its ability to be painful. The doors to the firebox are also hot. If you touch them with a leather glove, a hole will instantly appear in the glove. If you spray the door with a hose, the water evaporates so fast that there is never a wet spot. I feed this fire, and sit and watch the thermometer in the sap creep towards syrup.

With the same fascination, I sat when I was two and lit a match in the bedroom of my parents. Quickly the fire consumed the stick, and, to my great interest, began eating on my fingers. I dropped it and watched as the rest of it burned, and caught the fuzzy bits in my parents’ blankets, and then grew to burn sheets and mattress.

I went to my mother, downstairs, and informed her. “Light,” I said, and went outside. She hollered after me to quit playing with her flashlight, that I’d wear out the batteries.

Months later I saw the infection running from my father’s elbow. His hands had healed from the burns fast, too fast, and the infection had spread up his arms and was drained out. Now I show the same tendency, one cut, one skinned knuckle, a hole from a splinter, all heal too quickly and open again nights later after nights of fever in my hands.

After the fire we moved. The house was too much a mess to live in. Five miles south of home we lived with a couple in a farmhouse with a few extra beds. The farmers grow vegetables now, then
they raised beef. However, they were never meant to be beef farmers. The steers were comical black shaggy beasts, mean and self-righteous, never hesitating to kick anyone or anything. They were named after mistakes in the farmer’s crude surgery – One-Ball Fred, Bumpy Horned Pete, and so on. The steer raising didn’t last, and was quickly taken over by vegetable growing. The fields of peppers, lettuce and cabbage prosper under the trained eye of the farmers, with none of the growths or abnormalities the steers showed.

It was there, in the panic after the fire that I learned the monotony of farming. Where grasped in my sweaty two year old hands, I transplanted hundreds of strawberry plants, side by side with the hired man Joe. It was there, later in the year where I saw five acres of strawberries glistening wet-red in the heart of the summer. I learned patience from those hours of planting strawberries, I learned what labor can yield. Now I can stand for eight, ten, thirteen hours at the side of an evaporator full of boiling sap without tiring. I work and I watch sap turn to syrup over the fire I have fed, and every minute is worth it when I see my labor in gold form spiraling into the silver bucket bottom. I’ve always wondered why the underwear company always knew this and I had to figure it out. Fruit of the Loom. So what is this? Fruit of the Evaporator? It’s not catchy enough. Fruit of labor is already a saying – I try to stray from being too cliché. So, for now I’ll just have to settle with sap season, as just that – sap season, while I work on what to call this that I have made.

There is always selling syrup and cleaning up after the frenzy. It is insignificant compared to the sap season part of sugaring. Here, again, I am not Farmer John. Mark your syrup with a “certified organic” sticker, and it will sell twice as fast. Tourists don’t know that virtually all syrup is organic. They’re the ones who think it’s all made one way.
With Our Thumbs Out

United States: February 1968

Orman Day

On the night a drunken man holds a blade above my sleep-curl ed body, my parents are back in the smoggy Southern California suburb of West Covina, sitting contentedly in the glow of a television set, sipping coffee from mugs bearing their names. If they’re able to relax amidst the knickknacks and framed postcards that help clutter the family room — a monument to souvenir shops from Tacoma to Tijuana — it’s because they think their two youngest daughters and lone son are crossing America cocooned within the walls of Greyhound buses and modest motels, shepherded by kindly drivers and paternal night clerks.

But Laurel, Candy, and I don’t intend to see the country through tinted glass from reclining chairs. Before we “settle down,” we want adventure, not a series of bus terminals with pay toilets, sodden cheeseburgers and flaccid French fries. We’re determined not to become stick people staggering inside a hamster cage from 8 to 5 at a debilitating job day after day. Dad’s been working at the same numbing clerical job for decades, and Mom — who’s got the talent to design costumes for Hollywood productions — sells patterns and unfurls bolts of cotton and rayon in the J.C. Penney basement. It’s easy for us to see where caution leads.

No suffocating jobs, then. No bus schedules, either. I’ve been reading a lot of Jack Kerouac, John Steinbeck, and Thomas Wolfe, and they’ve given me the hunger to “hit the road” and write about it. My first novel’s collecting rejection slips, but I’m determined to be a famous author someday and I need experiences to recollect on my Remington portable with the busted carriage return. And I want to travel now before I get drafted like my friend Rich. An aspiring marriage counselor, Laurel is taking a break from college — with its late-night No Doz cram sessions — and Candy’s on a month’s leave from her job as a file clerk.

Even though I’m 21 and a college graduate, Laurel’s 20 and Candy’s 18, our parents would be worried sick if they knew we were
hitchhiking. For their piece of mind, we purchased bus passes, kissed their cheeks and boarded an eastbound Greyhound in Los Angeles. On the outskirts of San Antonio, after we spent the night at Fort Sam with Rich, my folk-singing buddy who’s now in the Army medical corps, and his wife Sunny, we put out our thumbs to flag our first ride.

We’re not traveling light. We’ve got so much luggage – two duffel bags, a large fold-over suitcase, Laurel’s cosmetics bag and a food kit packed by Mom – that we can’t walk more than one block. No wonder: Mom insisted the girls pack a bottle of vitamins and three nice dresses. I wear the same Pendleton shirt and pants, but my sisters need different shades of eyeliner, so we await a driver who’s willing to make room for three of us and our mound of baggage. I’m counting on my sisters’ vivacious good looks to be the deciding factor.

Candy – the only one of us with any hitchhiking experience, having thumbed for rides to the beach with girlfriends – holds our “CALIF. TO DALLAS” sign, which is nearly torn from her fingertips by the slipstream of a speeding car. It’s Candy obsessive idea that we go to Dallas instead of heading due east to New Orleans because she’s enamored of the outlaws Bonnie and Clyde, maybe because they were rebels like the class-cutting kids she hung out with in high school.

After 10 or 15 impatient minutes at the side of the road, we gasp when a blue station wagon stops on the shoulder. Gary has longish brown hair and he looks to be Candy’s age. We crowd into his car and he turns the ignition. Dead. He curses and I wonder if someone’ll stop to pick up four hitchhikers. He has Candy put one foot on the brake and one on the clutch while he hammers away beneath the hood. The car starts, but it’s gonna be finicky.

Laurel’s a bit suspicious of him because he’s acting nervous, so she takes $40 out of her purse and pushes the bills into her knee-high boots.

Gary doesn’t believe tat we’re brother and sisters, especially since Laurel’s a bouffanted brunette and Candy’s a blonde, so we fan out our drivers’ licenses. He tells us he doesn’t go anywhere with a relative if he can avoid it. But the three of us grew up in a lower-middle-class household that revered sight gags, anecdotes told with dry humor, drawn-out discussions of the human psyche, and water fights, and we’ve always been close.

After we’ve run out of small talk with Gary, he says, “Y’all know, if this was a movie, y’all would be carrying shotguns and be fixin’ to rob and shoot me.”

Laurel whispers loudly, “Alright, Candy. He knows. Get out
the rod and let him have it.”

Candy reaches into her purse and says, “Okay, baby.”

Gary shudders and says, “Aw c’mon.” And then he explains, “Once my brother picked up a hitchhiker. They were driving along when the guy pulled out a gun and told him to stop. He did. Then the guy made him empty his pockets and shot him. He almost died.” Gary sighs. “Boy, my parents would kill me if they knew I picked up three hitchhikers.”

He wonders if we aren’t afraid ourselves of being picked up by a psycho, but the three of us are optimists who can’t imagine that things could go terribly wrong on our trip. We believe what we learned in Sunday school – God looks out for good people – and we want our uncharted journey to refute the skeptics of the world.

Gary – I can tell – is growing infatuated with Candy and he doesn’t want the ride to end, so he offers to take us as far as Austin. He doesn’t want to ride back by himself, so he finds a friend and convinces him to join us.

Gary admits he’s a bad driver and then proves it by turning around to say something and nearly running into a truck in front of us. When we get out in Austin, Laurel demands that everyone pose for a photograph to celebrate our first ride. Gary apologizes that he can’t us to Dallas. He has a wistful expression – something I’ve seen in my own mirror – when he waves goodbye.

We’re talking about how close you can become to someone in just a few hours when a battered green pickup pulls alongside and a man with a coarse beard shouts, “Hop in, kids. I’m not going too far, but the ride’ll put you in a better spot.”

His face lights up telling us about his own hitchhiking days back when he was in the Navy. Now he owns a small business and he points out the building where he manufactures rope. Candy says he doesn’t have to take us out of his way…it’d be fine if he let us right here.

“Nonsense, little lady,” he says. “I’ll just take you a little ways farther. I’m enjoying myself.”

When he does let us out, he hands Candy a plastic bag of Forever Yours candy bars and says, “Here, maybe you kids could use these.”

Candy nearly tells him we can’t take all of them and then she remembers words from Kahlil Gibran’s “The Prophet,” a book she’s wedged in her pack: “There are those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward.”
With us at her side, Candy pays her respects at the Dallas graves of the gangster Clyde Barrow and his brother Buck, who are being mythologized in the movie “Bonnie and Clyde.” Impersonating Faye Dunaway, Candy poses for our Instamatic with a beret atop her blonde hair and a cigarette (not having a cigar) at her lips. Candy’s disappointed that Bonnie was half-wrong in “The Story of Bonnie and Clyde,” her poem prophesying that they’d go down together and be buried side by side. They were riddled by the same fusillade, but Bonnie’s grave lies across town.

Between Bossier City and our destination – Louisiana Tech in Ruston – a guy inexplicably drives us off the main road and lets us out at a country crossroads with only an hour or so of sunlight left. Somebody has told us Bonnie and Clyde were ambushed and gunned down in their ’34 Ford around these parts and they saw the slumped bodies. Bonnie in her blood-splashed red dress.

We’re standing at the edge of a road when two teenagers – a boy and a girl – aim their car right at us and veer away at the last second. They’ve got shit-eatin’ grins. I identify with Warren Beatty’s version of Clyde as a rambler and questioner of authority, but I don’t want to die in the same place.

I figure if we’re going to get out of here alive, I better do more than stick out my thumb in this nearly deserted place. I approach a gray-haired black man standing beside a rusted car. Bib overalls. Soft brown hat with the rim up. I feel comfortable talking to him because – even though I grew up in Glendale, a city with a real estate covenant that keeps it “lily white” – I formed friendships with blacks at church camp and college.

It’s hard understanding him with his broken teeth and drawl, but he says his name’s Fish, an account of his livelihood. He doesn’t look me in the eye and I hope it’s not out of deference. I ask him for a ride and I can’t understand his answer, but I wave over my sisters and dump our things into the backseat, next to his poles, nets, bait and tackle box. He seems skittish when we get into his car and he doesn’t drive us a mile, but he puts us on our way to Ruston. Later, we pray that Fish doesn’t get beaten or lynched because of our ignorance.

When Rich got married in Pasadena, I met Chalna – a childhood friend of Sunny – and discovered we were both born Feb. 12. She’s a student at Tech and my sisters and I surprise her there a few days shy of our common business. We go with her to a dance and then my sisters sleep in her dorm room and I sleep in the boys’ dorm. The
next day she drives us home to El Dorado, Arkansas, for a birthday cake baked by her mom.

Laurel figures that we went to Dallas because Candy wanted to see Clyde’s grave and we went to Ruston to see my friend, so we should thumb north to Pine Bluff to visit the 85-year-old grandfather of Russ, a community college classmate. Russ told her he’s the friendliest, kindest, most generous person we’ll ever come across. He’s not gonna want us to leave. Fried chicken. Catfish. Grits. Okra. Black-eyed peas. Pecan pie. All the Southern hospitality we could ever want. And he’s got soft beds to spare. Laurel has us picturing “Pa” Cartwright, the patriarch of the “Bonanza” TV show.

Chalna asks us, “Why on earth do you want to go to Pine Bluff? There’s nothing there.”

“Yes, there is,” answers Laurel. “Russ’s grandfather.”

We get a ride with Barry and Wanda, a married couple about our ages. He’s a roly-poly guy and she’s a redhead, who’s damn pretty and petite. We ask how they met. Barry was peeking through a crack in his door one warm afternoon while Wanda was washing her car in front of her house in a skimpy swimsuit. Barry’s brother snuck behind him and shoved him out the door and locked it. Stranded and beet-faced, Barry struck up a conversation. He’s a lucky bastard.

They love listening to our stories and telling us their own, so instead of just driving a few miles up the road, they take us all the way to Pine Bluff. They offer to wait and say we can stay with their relations if things don’t work out with Rusty’s grandfather, but Laurel confidently sends them on their way.

No one answers in front, so we go around back and he finally comes to the door. He looks like a cadaver and he’s either deaf or senile or both. If he’s 85, he’s an old-looking 85. Laurel’s forced to shout at him that she’s a friend of Rusty from California and that we traveled here from California.

“Rusty isn’t here,” he says, scratching his head. “You’ll have to write him.”

“Rusty,” says Laurel, “told me we could stay here.”

“Rusty’s here?”

“No,” says Laurel, “he’s in California. He said we could sleep here at your house.”

The grandfather says we can’t stay in his house. The sun’s going down behind the pecan trees and I ask if we can at least roll out our sleeping bags in his backyard and shiver through the night, and he seems like he might agree to that until his cranky housekeeper interrupts to tell us we better get on down the road. Laurel can’t believe
what she’s hearing, not after we’ve thumbed more than a hundred miles out of our way.

I excuse myself to get the camera from our bags on the front yard. When I return and aim the Instamatic; my hands are trembling with suppressed laughter. I expect the photo’ll be out of focus.

The three of us return to the front yard and collapse to the ground with laughter. We laugh and laugh. We howl and I hammer the grass with my fists and I ask, “What are we going to do?” And we laugh some more.

A girl about 12 asks us why we’re laughing so hard and I can hardly sputter out the words. Instead of scratching her head like you’d expect, she says we can spend the night next door at her house.

“Really?”

We’re welcomed by the girl’s mother, a blonde milkmaid of a woman: a solid frame with large arms. In the front room, she serves us lima bean soup in chipped bowls. Eventually we’re joined by Mr. B., who’s shorter than his wife, wiry and dark-haired. In a shabby overstuffed chair, Mr. B drinks whiskey and tells us about his career in the Army and how his son chose a girlfriend and a job at a gas station over an athletic scholarship and how one daughter ran off to San Francisco with her hippie boyfriend and then another daughter took off to join them. He hates California, he says, because it’s overrun with hippies and civil rights “agitators.”

I study the family dog: a whimpering, droopy-tailed German shepherd that flinches when we try to pet it. Myself, I’m not nervous at all. I’m pleased that we asked for a place to stay and it’s been given. I even consider celebrating our good fortune with a shot of Mr. B’s whiskey. Better not: it’ll just make me thirsty and might keep me from getting an early start.

Mr. B. offers us his extra car so we can ride to Maine instead of hitchhiking and I say we couldn’t take it and he tries to force it on us. I ask if it has any problems. Just needs a new battery, that’s all.

During a discussion of sleeping arrangements, Mr. B. suggests that one of my sisters share his daughter’s bedroom, but we say there’s plenty of space in the dining area on the other side of the decorative counter. Several times he asks us to go out for drinks with him and his wife, and we say we’re too tired, so he sets a whiskey bottle in a prominent place and tells us to help ourselves and then the two of them leave. The daughter says she doesn’t mind when her dad gets drunk like this because he gives her a bigger allowance.

After awhile, Mr. B. returns for a few minutes with two of his
bar cronies to drop off some soft drinks, which he says we can mix
with the hard stuff. He smirks when he introduces his buddies to my
sisters. They leave and then with my sisters and the girl in conversation,
I excuse myself and lie down on the cot in the dining area and fall into
a deep slumber that—with the exception of one groggy moment—
will end only in the morning.

My sisters are sleeping in their clothes on the fold-down
couch a couple yards across from me when Laurel feels a hand moving
across her face in the near dark. Mr. B. is wearing a sleeveless T-shirt and
boxer shorts. Laurel says, “Please don’t.”

He pads to his bedroom and Laurel hears his bed squeak. He
implores his wife, but she says, “No! I’m too tired.”

The bed squeaks again as he rises from it and he tiptoes
between our beds on the way to the kitchen. Laurel glimpses a knife
beneath his undershirt. A long blade. A weapon you’d get in the Army
to kill a Commie with one thrust. Laurel promises God that she’ll read
the Bible from Genesis to Revelation if He gets us out of this. She
gently nudges Candy, but she dares not try to rouse me. Too risky.

Candy stirs and responds with words appropriate to her
dream: “We’re going to Mississippi.”

From the kitchen, Mr. B. demands, “What’s that?”

“Candy’s just talking in her sleep,” answers Laurel.

“Uh-huh.” He returns to the front room and his easy chair
creaks with his weight. “Fraid?”

“Of what?” says Laurel.

He doesn’t answer. He strikes a match, creating a burst of
light. “Cigarette?”

“No thank you,” says Laurel.

“Why don’t you come in and talk to me.”

“No thank you.”

She can hear him exhale cigarette smoke. “Come ‘ere!”

His loud voice and Laurel’s soft replies awaken Candy. Laurel
whispers to her that he’s got a knife.

“Are you comin’?”

Laurel’s always been horrified by knives and swords, but she’s
willing to sacrifice her virginity and even her life to give Candy the
chance to wake me and somehow escape. “I’ll have to go in there,” she
whispers to Candy.

Candy grabs her wrist and says, “You’re NOT going in there.”

‘Comin’?” He’s getting more emphatic.

I awaken just enough to understand vaguely that something’s
sleep with your wife?"

"Humph," he answers while my sisters cringe beneath their blankets.

Even in my groggy state, I sense I need to change the subject. "Those friends of yours were sure nice guys," I say and return to a deep sleep.

He grunts. "Yeah."

For the next few hours, my sisters hold hands and wonder when we’ll be murdered. If they fall asleep, they know, they may never wake up. Candy argues that we should make a run for it and Laurel answers by shaking her head and putting her finger to her lips. Candy regrets not following up on a premonition: earlier she had thought she should drop a letter bearing Mr. B.’s address into the mailbox. Laurel feels sorry for our parents, lulled by our bus passes.

On one of his trips to the refrigerator, Mr. B. hovers over me with his knife out. Candy kisses Laurel’s cheek. They restrain themselves from crying out. If I had been warned, I would’ve been forced to go hand-to-hand with a man who spent a dozen years in the infantry. His knife versus my nail clippers.

Laurel and Candy hear the long, sickening whine that you’d expect from a stabbing victim. They’re ready to jump up when they realize the sound’s coming from the German shepherd. I shift on my bed and Mr. B. walks away. My sisters exhale. Finally he falls asleep in the front room. My sisters hear him toss and turn and snort. Bad dreams.

After a few hours, Mr. B. awakens and stands up. My sisters see his darkened image staring at them over the counter. Finally, he disappears into the bedroom.

At dawn, with Mr. B. now in his bedroom, my sisters rush me out the door with our luggage. Laurel doesn’t even remove her acne cream first. I leave behind my journal, but they won’t let me return for it. I don’t understand why they’re so upset. Mr. B. seemed nice enough. They describe snippets of their ordeal in the minutes before we hitch the first of the day’s rides that will take us to Jackson, Mississippi, to Millsaps College, where we feel safe amongst Methodists who let us sleep in the building that houses the chapel.

The next day, we’re hitching south toward New Orleans when we’re forced to wait longer than usual for a ride, so — for our Instamatic — Laurel lies on her back in the center of the road with her arm up and her thumb out. Soon we’re picked up in a luxury car by Mr. Justin, a distinguished, gray-haired man, who says he’ll drive us down the road.
a spell. Drawing out the tension, Laurel narrates the story of our near-murder in Pine Bluff and makes Mr. Justin laugh (by describing Mr. B. as he pranced past our beds in his undershorts and was scorned by his wife) and wince (by describing the hidden knife and Candy’s farewell kiss). Laurel tells him that she promised God she’d become a nun…but, of course, she’d have to become a Catholic first.

He’s a business executive, but also hints that he’s been involved with the CIA when I mention that when I’m drafted into the Army, I might enter intelligence. We discuss Kennedy’s assassination and he says with a voice of authority that there are elements of truth to the theory – argued by Jim Garrison, the New Orleans district attorney – that there was a conspiracy that included former CIA employees.

My sisters get him to open up about his life: his marriage is breaking up and his three kids hardly know him because he spent so much time on his career. In a way that seems paternal, he treats us to lunch and expensive cigars, and promises us free room at the Carriage Inn in Hattiesburg if we’d meet him there in a few days. Going 200 miles out of his way, he takes us to New Orleans before turning around. He leaves us with $10 to buy ourselves steak dinners.

That’s enough money for four dinners, so when we meet Herman, a head-banded hippie who’s two minutes from boarding a bus to his home in Texas, we invite him along. Our treat. During the meal, between bites that leave morsels in his wispy brown beard, Herman continues to braid a whip that stretches more than three feet.

Afterward, he takes us to a tavern where my sisters amuse and horrify a group of hippies and would-be hippies nursing drinks to save a few dimes. Laurel and Candy make their listeners imagine the glinting knife that could’ve been pushed into our hearts on a cold night of long shadows and eerie animal sounds. Pausing for effect, my sisters let the audience envision the fate that could’ve been ours: the sinking of our weighted corpses into the murky moonlit folds of a swamp.

When the story ends with a collective sigh of relief, Laurel – wearing blue Ben Franklin glasses I once wore at a costume party – presents herself as an emissary from California come to encourage Louisiana’s fledgling hippie community with visions of strobe lights, LSD trips, free love and student demonstrations, none of which she’s experienced.

At another table in the smoky near-darkness of this tavern in the French Quarter, I turn to a young woman – also sitting alone – and try to start a conversation she doesn’t want. She gives curt answers to my questions and creates a wall between us with cigarette smoke.
I let my intuition speak: “You’re running away…Your parents don’t understand you…They don’t know you smoke.”

She studies me briefly, tilts back her head and draws on her cigarette.

“You just broke up with your boyfriend.”

Steadily she blows out the smoke, which clings briefly to her brown, shoulder-length hair.

“You’re thinking about suicide,” I say. “You’ve attempted it before.”

She pulls up a sleeve of her coat. A scar on her wrist. I shrug. Her name’s Marilyn and she’s 20. “Today,” I say, “is my birthday. I’m 22.” I point out my sisters: Laurel, the brunette, who just graduated mid-term from junior college, and Candy, the blonde, who works as a clerk. “Believe it or not, we’re hitchhiking across America.”

Marilyn and I go for a walk in the French Quarter. After she stares through windows and doorways of certain cafes and taverns, she says she needs a place to crash and I answer that Herman knows where we can sleep. “He’s got a crush on Laurel,” I say, “so he’s staying until tomorrow.”

As we toss pebbles at rats on the rocky embankment of the Mississippi River, I tell Marilyn about my life: my year as editor of the Cal State Los Angeles paper, the serious novel I’ve written and the new one I’m writing, the folk singing career I hope to resume when my friend Rich leaves the Army… As I’ve always done with girls, I want to tell stories that’ll impress Marilyn, so that she’ll find me more attractive than I think I am.

After midnight, Marilyn and I return to the tavern and Herman leads the four of us to a waterfront warehouse. We climb the stairs to the drafty loft and by the light of a candle stub, clear away empty wine bottles and pull blankets from our duffel bags. Marilyn and I carry our blanket to the far end of the room. I crumple my jacket into a pillow. After she and I kiss for maybe 15 minutes, I reach into her dress to cup her breast and she presses herself against me and rocks back and forth. Never does it cross my mind that I should try to lose my virginity with Marilyn. Even if this is my birthday. I believe that lovemaking is a sacred act that should be saved for my future marriage to my Dream Girl.

But now, I’ve lost a bit of my idealism. Pushed by the greedy demands of my body, which finds periodic relief in bouts of passionate kissing and light petting at the Edgewood Drive-In, I know I can’t confine my kisses to girls I love. I’ve never had a steady girlfriend, but it’s only a matter of time, I think, before love and sex are forever...
entwined in marriage. So I neither expect nor seek any more than what that passionate embrace with Marilyn gives me: relief within the confines of my trousers. After this surge, Marilyn sighs with a frustration I don’t understand.

Cuddling with her on the floor, I’d be content except for fears: that the cops will arrest us for vagrancy or that we’ll be attacked by derelicts who want to rob and evict us. Herman swears his whip will keep any marauders at bay. I ask about the cops and he says that every night they drive through the warehouse. Sometimes they climb the stairs to the loft with their batons and flashlights; sometimes they don’t.

Several times that night, I tense at the crinkle of gravel beneath automobile tires in the cavernous room beneath us. I wait. No footfalls against the stairs. Safe. So I’ll have to wait two years before I land in the New Orleans jail.

At daybreak, before workers report to the warehouse, we lug our belongings to Jackson Square. Herman talks to friends who let us nap inside their car with the heat turned up high. When I’m drowsy with sleep, Marilyn gently touches my shoulder and says she’ll come back in awhile. I never see her again.

In the afternoon, we walk Herman to the bus depot. He dreads a confrontation with his parents, who he knows will be disheartened and angry when they discover their son’s a hippie.

That night my sisters and I sleep beneath a high ceiling filigreed with intricate water stains on the crowded floor of a flophouse in the worst part of downtown. We’re guests of a motorcycle gang headed by Squirrel, a lean guy with a single gold earring. Squirrel offers the stained mattress to my sisters and in the middle of the night, sacrifices his blanket to them. Before we take to the road in the morning, the bikers usher us to a rescue mission for gruel, toast, and thick coffee. A meal designed to purge the body of bile and demon rum.

We thumb to the motel in Hattiesburg, but the businessman isn’t there and he’s made no arrangements for us. The manager listens to our story, alerts the Hattiesburg American newspaper and gives us a complimentary room. After the warehouse and the flophouse, we can’t believe our good fortune. We laugh and bounce on the king-sized beds and take snapshots of each other luxuriating in this splendor.

That evening we’re interviewed by a middle-aged reporter who has a certain sadness around his eyes. He asks us where we’re hitchhiking and we answer: to Maine. As we narrate our trip, he seems to pay particular attention to Candy. Later, someone tells us that the
reporter lost a daughter not long ago. A blonde.

In the morning we’re photographed for a front-page article that describes our adventures in Arkansas and New Orleans, our breakfast with deputy sheriff John Quincy Adams and our rainy morning departure from Hattiesburg in a police car.

In Montgomery, I bunk in a roomful of homeless guys at the Salvation Army and my sisters are provided free shelter elsewhere. In the morning, two guys – I’ve been told they’re ex-cons – serve the three of us oatmeal, biscuits, orange juice, and coffee with the kind of gallantry you’d expect in one of those ante-bellum mansions.

For the next two weeks we thumb lifts and are offered free housing, all in exchange for our sympathetic ears and stirring anecdotes. Some drivers want to tell us about their busted marriage or bad heart; others want to laugh at Laurel’s incisive description of Herman the Hippie.

We never know who’s gonna pick us up. In North Carolina, two guys hauling empty automobile trailers stop for us. They want me to hang on for dear life on one of the trailers while my sisters sit beside them in the cab. We’re trusting, but not that trusting. A quick swerve and I’d be flicked into oncoming traffic and my sisters would be at their mercy. The three of us crowd inside and we laugh all the way to Virginia.

At night on the New Jersey Turnpike, we’re riding with a Puerto Rican when Candy accidentally drops her burning cigarette under the front seat. He says he can’t stop because the car’s stolen and he doesn’t want to stir the suspicion of state troopers. When the upholstery doesn’t burst into flames after a few minutes, I think to myself that God really does protect fools.

A few hours after a snowball fight in Massachusetts with Ellen, a pen pal who I’ve surprised, we snag a ride with three hippies. They take us into Kittery, Maine, where we feast on lobster in celebration and scribble a stack of postcards to people who helped us along the way, including the Hattiesburg American reporter, who writes a follow-up story so that his readers will know that we arrived safely.

A day later, we’re heading home on a Greyhound bus out of Boston. On the bus, I write my first poem of free verse, “Marilyn,/ did you find your boyfriend/ in the dark/ when we held hands…” When I’m done, I mail it to the tavern where I met her.

Back in my cluttered bedroom in the family home in West Covina, I weave that poem into the novel I’m writing about an 18-
year-old guy who’s caught in a dilemma I’m enduring. He wanted to be pure, but his body sabotages his ideals. He’s forced to seek relief from girls he doesn’t love because the girls he does love — girls he thinks of in literally poetic terms — reject him because they don’t want to perch precariously on a pedestal.

Sometimes, late at night, I slip away from my portable Remington and pick up the map from our trip. I follow the inked route and whisper the names of the states as we crossed them: Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina...New Orleans is Marilyn and Herman and Squirrel and the gaudily dressed guy who calls himself Tinkerbell. North Carolina is the woman at Camp Lejuene who’s having an affair while her husband fights in Vietnam. New York is my uncle, Robert Day, the New Yorker cartoonist, who gave us a ride in his blue Mercedes, a car so sleek and rare that people on the sidewalks of Manhattan stared at the three of us as if we were important. And Springfield, Illinois is the elderly woman who accused us of clogging her toilet after she warned us to be careful.

But these roads and people aren’t enough. And once I traced where I’ve been, I tap my finger against the places that I haven’t.
CONTRIBUTORS’ NOTES

Kristine Anderson's work has appeared in Phase and Cycle and Inside English. She has taught English for the past 13 years at Riverside Community College in Riverside, CA.

Victoria Bailey has traveled and lived in many different parts of the country, but finally settled in the place she always dreamed of - a farm in rural Kentucky, where she writes poetry and short stories and enjoys a close relationship with the natural world around her. "That Strange Silent Man" was written about her grandfather, the Rev. Ernest Hoyt, who was the pastor of St. Peter's by the Sea in Narragansett for a number of years. She barely remembers him ever speaking. After he died she learned that he had been a chaplain in the Army Reserve during the Vietnam War. In this poem she speculates as to the reason for his silence.

Although he professes socialism, Lee Ballentine is an art dealer out on the bleeding edge of capital. His poems have been published in Abraxas, Caliban, Mississippi Mud, and lately, 26 James Laughlin once wrote that he was “pushing up the Amazon of the new poetry.” His most recent book is Medusas (Hilltop Press), which was published back-to-back with the Psaller Ecclesia Mater Illabata, by the 9th century poet and monk Nokter Balbulus.

Rachel Barenblat holds an MFA from the Bennington Writing Seminars. She is a co-founder and executive director of Inkberry, a literary arts organization offering writing workshops and a reading series in the Berkshire region of Massachusetts. Her first poetry chapbook, the skies here, was published by Pecan Grove Press; her second, What Stays, was published in 2002 as part of the Bennington Writing Seminars Alumni Chapbook Series. Other publications include Lilith, The New Orleans Review, Confrontation, The Texas Observer, The Jewish Women's Literary Review, and an anthology of poems and drawings about Texas, Is This Forever or What?

Candace Black's poems have been published in many magazines, including The Seattle Review, Quarterly West, Three Rivers Poetry Journal, Iron Horse Literary Review, Passage North, and Folio. Her first book of

**Gaylord Brewer** is a professor at Middle Tennessee State University, where he edits *Poems & Plays*. His most recent books are *Barbaric Mercies* (Red Hen, 2003) and *Exit Pursued by a Bear* (Cherry Grove, 2004).


**Whitney Claflin** is originally from Rhode Island. She will graduate in the spring from the Rhode Island School of Design with a BFA in painting. She plans to move to Los Angeles to continue her studies.

**Michael Colonnese** directs the Creative Writing Program and serves as the Managing Editor of Longleaf Press at Methodist College in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

**Robert Cooperman**’s collection, *The Widow’s Burden*, was a finalist for the Forward Magazine Book of the Year. His work *In the Colorado Gold Fever Mountain* (Western Reflections) won the Colorado Book Award for Poetry in 2000.

**Jim Daniels**’ most recent books are *Show and Tell: New and Selected Poems* (University of Wisconsin Press) and *Detroit Tales: Short Fiction* (Michigan State University Press). Both were published in 2003. He holds the Baker Chair in English at Carnegie Mellon University, where he directs the creative writing program.

**Orman Day**’s short stories, poetry, and essays have been published in such journals as *Zyzzyva, Creative Nonfiction, Red Wheelbarrow, Poetry Motel, Weber Studies, Portland Review, Bitter Oleander, Red Cedar Review, Oyez Review, Concho River Review, and Third Coast*. His memoir is part of a book he is writing about his backpacking experiences in 90 countries and the 50 states.
Stephan Delbos is a senior English major at Providence College. His work has been featured in *The Alembic* and *The Murine*. Currently he is planning to embark on a self-propelled exploration of the world. Through writing, he hopes to honor the blooming possibility inherent in each moment of existence.

William Doreski’s work has most recently appeared in *Notre Dame Review, The Alembic, Natural Bridge, Barrow Street*, and *South Carolina Review*. His most recent collection is *My Shadow Instead of Myself*.


Gail Rudd Entrekin holds an M.A. in English from Ohio State University. She has taught English and Creative Writing at several colleges and universities, currently at Sierra College in Grass Valley, California. Her previous poetry collections are *John Danced* and *You Notice the Body*. Her newest collection, *Change (Will Do You Good)*, has won the “Slim Volume Series Selection 2004” from Poetic Mix Press. She has been the Poetry Editor of Hip Pocket Press since 2000, and edited the anthology *Sierra Songs and Descants: Poetry & Prose of the Sierra*. She lives in Nevada City with her husband Charles and the youngest of their five children.

Alison Espach is a sophomore English major at Providence College.

Chris Fahey is a senior at Providence College who plans to resume the pursuit of happiness away from the East Coast for a while.

Susan Fuller lives in Lafayette, California. She is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University and holds a M.A. from California State University, Los Angeles.


Sharon Lynn Griffiths is originally from New York City, and has lived in Northern New Jersey for the past 13 years. Her work has been

**Liz Hawkes-deNiord** is an artist who teaches ceramics and sculpture at Brattleboro Union High School in Vermont.

**Ruth Holzer** works as a translator. Her work has appeared in various journals, and her chapbook, *The First Hundred Years*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2004.


**David James** teaches at Oakland Community College. His latest chapbook is *I Will Peel This Mask Off* (March Street Press, 2004). Five of his one-act plays have been produced off-Broadway.

**G. Mark Jodon**, an attorney in Houston, is widely published throughout Texas. He is a past juried poet in the Houston Poetry Fest and his work has appeared in *Blue Violin, Arrowsmith, Buffalo Press, i.e. Magazine, and Gopherwood Review*. His work most recently appeared in *Sulphur River Review*.

**Benjamin Klibanoff** is a student at Wheaton College pursuing optometry. He is from Rehoboth, Massachusetts.

**Victoria Klibanoff** is originally from Rehoboth, Massachusetts, and is a senior English major at Providence College. She plans on completing an M.F.A. in creative writing in poetry.

**Tracy Koretsky** has received two Pushcart Prize nominations and several first place citations. Her first novel, *Ropeless*, has received awards from PEN Woman, the Writers’ League of Texas, awomanswrite, the Santa Fe Writer’s Project, and the River City Publishing First Novel competitions. *The Body of Helen*, her second novel, recently placed second in the California Writers Club Contest.
Kate Kulenski is a junior Humanities major at Providence College and intends to milk it for all it’s worth. She strongly advocates the use of crayons and doesn’t believe that black and brown together will ever work as a color scheme.

Janet Tracy Landman's poetry has appeared in many anthologies and literary journals, including The Dickinson Review, Icarus, Northeast Corridor, Phoebe, Rattle, and Washington Square. Her poem “Blue Fire” won first place at the 2002 National Writers Union annual poetry competition, and her poem “Anniversary at Middle Age” won third place at the same competition in 1999.

Patrick Lawler is a creative writing instructor at LeMoyne College, and an Associate Professor at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, where he teaches writing and nature literature courses. His novel, Dream House Dancing, is currently seeking a publisher.

Donald Levering works as a human services administrator in Santa Fe, New Mexico. His most recent poetry book is The Fast of Thoth from Pudding House Press. His previous poetry collections include Horsetail (Woodley Press), Mister Ubiquity (Pudding House Press), The Jack of Spring (Swamp Press), Carpool (Tellus), and Outcroppings From Navajoland (Navajo Community College Press).

Rebecca Lilly's work has appeared in The Iowa Review and International Poetry Review. She has two poetry collections, You Want to Sell Me a Small Antique, winner of the Peregrine Smith Poetry Prize, and a book of haiku, Shadwell Hills.

Natalie Lobe is the Poet-in-Residence for the Maryland State Arts Council. Her work has appeared in George Washington Literary Review, Ekphrasis, Chiron Review, and others. Her most recent award is from the Blue Unicorn poetry competition.

Jenna Mastroianni is a 2004 graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design. She is currently starting a shared studio in Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

Aislinn Martin is a senior English major at Providence College.

Paula Marston is studying children’s book illustration and natural science illustration at the Rhode Island School of Design, and she is
also interested in portraiture of people of all ages. Paula comes from Washington State and while she admits that autumn in New England is spectacular, she really misses mountains and forests with pine trees.

**Johnny Masiulewicz** is the author of the poetry collections *keywords: a dada experiment* (Happy Tapir Press), and *professional cemetery* (Puddin’head Press). His poetry has appeared in numerous literary periodicals, including *Curbside Review, Letter eX, Blue Sugar*, and *Indelible Ink*. A native Chicagoan, he now lives and works in Florida.

**Melissa McCreedy** received her Bachelor’s degree from Williams College and her MFA from New England College. She lives and works in Concord, Massachusetts.

**Kelley McGinnis** is a senior Psychology major at Rhode Island College. Originally from Cumberland, Rhode Island, this is her second publication.

**Anna Meinhardt** works as a lumberjack and lives in Saxtons River, Vermont.

**Jim Meirose** lives in Somerville, New Jersey, and has had over 80 stories published in various literary magazines and journals. One of his stories was honored in the 1997 O. Henry awards anthology, and his work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. His novel, *Claire*, has recently been released.

**Gary Metras** retired one year ago after thirty-one years of teaching high school English to devote more time to writing, fly fishing, and antique printing. He has had work appear in recent issues of *Quercus Review, Tar Wolf Review, Rosebud*, and *5 AM and Tears in the Fence* (UK). His work is forthcoming in *Color Wheel, Hurricane Review, and Snake Nation Review*. His book of poems, *Until There Is Nothing Left*, was published by Ridgeway Press and The Writer’s Voice of Detroit in 2003.

**Ed Miller** resides in Fresno, California, where he is employed in civil service. His poetry has recently appeared in *The Laurel Review, Poet Lore*, and *The Antigonish Review*.

**Jesse Millner** is an instructor in the English department at Florida Gulf Coast University. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Willow Springs, Third Coast, The Mochila Review, Gulf Stream Magazine,*

B.Z. Niditch is a poet, playwright, and fiction writer, as well as the Artistic Director of “The Original Theatre” in Boston. His work has appeared in Columbia: A Magazine of Poetry and Art, The Literary Review, Denver Quarterly, Hawaii Review, Le Guepard (France), Kadmos (France), Prism International, Jejune (Czech Republic), Leopold Bloom (Budapest), Antioch Review, and Prairie Schooner.

Juliette Paul is a senior English major at Providence College. She plans to continue her studies at the University of Missouri in the fall.

Robert Perchan has had poems and stories appear in recent issues of The Prose Poem: An International Journal, 5 AM, Runes, and many others. His prose poem novella, Perchan’s Chorea: Eros and Exile, was published by Watermark Press in 1991, and has recently been translated into French by Quidam Editeur. His poetry manuscript, Fluid in Darkness, Frozen in Light, won the 1999 Pearl Poetry Competition and was published by Pearl Editions.

Jane Lunin Perel is a professor of English and the Director of the Women’s Studies Program at Providence College.

Kenneth Pobo’s book of poems, Introductions, was recently published by Book’em Press. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in many journals and anthologies, including Queen’s Quarterly, Red, White, and Blues: Poets on the Promise of America, Bryant Literary Review, Mid-America Review, Rattle, Nimrod, Hawaii Review, Colorado Review, Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine, The Fiddlehead, and Appalachee Quarterly.

Donna Pucciani has a Ph.D. in Humanities from New York University and has published over 150 poems in the United States and Britain, including National Catholic Reporter, International Poetry Review, JAMA, Mid-American Poetry Review, Hawaii Pacific Review, Wisconsin Review, Maryland Poetry Review, and Phoebe. She currently serves as Vice President of the Poets’ Club of Chicago.

Emily Reynolds is a junior English major and writing minor at Providence College. She is originally from Princeton, Massachusetts.
Margaret Robinson teaches in the Creative Writing Program at Widener University. She has had recent publications in *Fiddlehead*, *Heliotrope*, *Cider Press Review*, *California Quarterly*, and *Bathtub Gin*. Her chapbook, *Sparks*, is available from Pudding House Publications.

Tony Sanders lives in New York City. He is the author of three books of poems, most recently *Warning Track* from Turtle Point Press.

Askold Skalsky has been published in numerous small press magazines and journals, most recently in *Northeast Corridor*, *Chiron Review*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. His work has also appeared in publications in England, Canada, and Spain.

Len Sousa is a 21-year-old writer currently living in Boston, Massachusetts. His work has appeared in *The Emerson Review*, *Gangsters in Concrete*, and *Gauge Magazine*.

Robert Donald Spector resides in Brooklyn, New York.

Michael St. Thomas is a senior at Providence College.

Courtney Suddes is a sophomore Philosophy major at Providence College.

David Teodosio is a senior Humanities major at Providence College. He hopes that his passions for writing and filmmaking will soon come to fruition. This is his first publication.

David Thoreen is an Associate Professor of English at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he teaches courses in creative writing and twentieth-century American literature. He has an MFA from Bowling Green State University and a Ph.D. from SUNY at Stony Brook. His fiction, creative non-fiction, and poetry has appeared in *South Dakota Review*, *American Literary Review*, *The Journal*, and *Slate*. He is also the recipient of *Minnesota Monthly's* Tamarack Award.

Daniel Tobin is the author of three books of poems: *Narrows*, from Four Way Books; *Where the World is Made*, which was co-winner of the 1998 Katherine Bakeless Nason Prize; and *Double Life*, which has been nominated for several awards including The Pulitzer Prize, The National Book Award, and The Kingsley Tufts Award. He has also authored a book of criticism, *Passage to the Center: Imagination and the*
Sacred in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney, and numerous essays on poetry. Among his awards are the “The Discovery / The Nation Award,” The Robert Penn Warren Award, the Greensboro Review Prize, a creative writing fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Robert Frost Fellowship from the Bread Loaf Writers Conference. Widely published in journals, his work has been anthologized in The Bread Loaf Anthology of New American Poets, The Norton Introduction to Poetry, Hammer and Blaze, and elsewhere. He is presently Chair of the Department of Writing, Literature, and Publishing at Emerson College in Boston.

Allison Whittenberg received her B.A. in Writing and Literature from Southampton College, where she also minored in sociology; she received her M.A. in English from the University of Wisconsin. Her novel, Sweet Thang, is to be published by Random House in 2006.

Marc Widershien, Ph.D., is a native Bostonian, and began writing poetry at 18. He studied with Samuel French Morse, John Malcolm Brinnin, Robert Lowell, and Daisy Aldan. He has been published in over 200 magazines, journals, and newspapers. He is a poet, translator, book reviewer, essayist, teacher, and editor. Currently on the faculty of Springfield College, he is also a member of the advisory board of the distinguished international magazine of ideas and opinions, the new renaissance (tnr). His current book, The Life of All Worlds, from Ibbetson Street Press, is now in its 4th edition. He has reviewed for Library Journal, Small Press Magazine, and others. Recent work can be found in Neovictorian/Cochlea, Adirondack Review, Bellowing Ark, Catalyzer, the new renaissance, and The Connecticut Review.

Alexandra Widmann is a student at Mills College studying French and International Relations. She is an editor for her school’s literary magazine, The Walrus.

Barbara Wiedemann, a professor of English at Auburn University Montgomery, earned her B.A. from the State University of New York at Buffalo and her M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of South Florida. She is the author of the critical study, Josephine Herbst’s Short Fiction: A Window to Her Life and Times (Susquehanna University Press), co-author of Short Fiction: A Critical Companion (Locust Hill Press), and co-editor of “My Name Was Martha”: A Renaissance Woman’s autobiographical Poem (Locust Hill Press). Her poems have appeared in many journals.