



Purpose

by Stephanie Sowell

Once upon a time
Words glided across
Crisp pallid sheets of paper

Faculty Advisor's Letter

This is HOWL's eighth edition, thanks to the numerous submissions of poetry and prose from our college community. Though CMC is small, we are not wanting for talented artists. With each passing year, the call for submissions goes out, and I always wonder if we will receive enough work to sustain the magazine – and this year, as with every year – we received more than we could possibly print. This tells me that there is a niche for HOWL in our community and for the efforts of those who make our magazine possible.

This year's HOWL staff was directed by Donald Wyatt and includes Lisa Cerda, Evelyn Haggard, Savya Lee and Les Rogers. Their determination to assemble a magazine worthy of our college has involved many hours from their weekends and evenings, and I am grateful for their diligence. While a magazine, such as HOWL, cannot come to fruition without a committed staff, there is also the matter of funding. For many years, CMC's Foundation has covered the expenses associated with the publishing of HOWL so that it can continue to be a gift to our community. This year is no different, and one person deserving of special appreciation is the director of CMC's Foundation, Owen Gillick. Thank you, Owen, for your kind support.

The contributions of our foundation and staff represent an investment of faith not unlike the scattering of seeds. One cannot know where new life will flower, but we believe that investing in the arts furthers the creativity and beauty that uplifts us all.

Greg Gilbert

Editor's Note

"Thank you" cannot adequately express my gratitude to the many authors who submitted their work and to the HOWL staff for their expert editing. I also want to give a big thanks to John Kidwell for his help with the front cover graphics.

Thank you everyone.

Don Wyatt

Table of Contents

Purpose	Stephanie Sowell	1
A Mysterious Visitor	Les Rogers	5
It's The Thought I See	Mike Green	7
Thank You	Savya Lee	12
Hard Light	Greg Gilbert	12
If I Only Had A Brain	Ronnie Land	13
The Fortunate Few	Melody Blake	17
Seventy Two	Carl Crosby	18
Common Ground	Aurora Ashton	21
Those Times In The Park	Katherine Roberts	22
The Stone God	Savya Lee	28
Fourteen Ways of Looking at Coyotes	Lois Valero	29
Reconnection	Nell Sehestedt	32
When Aunt Rosa Came To		
Live With Us	Gloria White	35
Hobie, 333 Stunt	Ellen Monroe	40
The Last	Cyndera Quackenbush	45
On Art	elise sky	46
The Maharaja of Monotonous Mayhem		
And Miniscule Mountains	Ryan Rainstar	47
The Sound Of Drums	Paulina Raeschelle Woods	48
Religion Reinvented	elise sky	48
Tears of Loneliness	Jennifer Bradshaw	48



Table of Contents

A Mystical Experience	Savya Lee	51
Doodling	Richard Lee	53
Jumprope	Sharon Terleski	54
A Reflection	Fabiana Borghese	59
A Biological Anomaly	Sean Blau	60
A Man With References	Evelyn Haggard	61
Good Old Dad	Jennifer Hill	64
The Twisted Face	Sandra Griesmeyer	67
A New Perspective	Jillian Burkett	72
Dharma Day	Richard Westman	75
Something Alive In The Deadness	Cheryl Colson	76
We Are Savages	Caroline Badel	77
The Anticipated Cure	Roderick Hurtt	78
The Commute	Angela Callister	80
And With A Fish For My Teacher		
Fear No More	Scot E. McKone	82
Swami	Sharon Terleski	84
Shadows On The Wall	Sean Blau	85
Prelude To Autumn	Travis Puglisi	93
The State Of State Art In America	Tom Lorett	93
A Day Too Soon	Sandra Griesmeyer	96
Tears Of Loneliness	Jennifer Bradshaw	98



A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR

by Les Rogers

It was a cloudy day in January with gusts of wind singing along the side of the house, a good day for working in the comfort of my study, an opportunity for productive hours of writing. I had just immersed myself in words and images when I heard the urgent voice of my wife calling from the kitchen.

You know the type of call I mean. One of those breathless calls, somewhat below the level of panic and reflecting self control, but announcing the possibility of real danger. Alarmed words about a strange thing on the floor. As I jumped up from my desk, I imagined some uniquely unattractive creature, hopefully something a lot less than a foot long, which would neither attack nor try to stare me down. Perhaps just another scorpion.

I mused on the advantages of a valiant warrior wife, much feared by insects, bugs and those other creatures of the crawl that make exploratory entrances into our home from the acres of sand and rock around us. She would glide through the kitchen, light reflecting from golden boots, long, black hair flying from under a gold head band, graceful thigh muscles flexing below the flare of an Amazon skirt.

Invaders would know the stomp of a boot, and nothing more. Only later, after carnage of the battle was cleared away, would I hear about the unfortunate creatures fated to a hostile meeting on the plains of our kitchen floor, their dreams of a secure haven ended in an arena of death.

Entering the kitchen, I mobilized my own resources of courage, decisiveness and action. My wife was pointing down at something, and so far I couldn't even see it. I felt my body relax. It was time now to assume the panache of the scientific investigator, and that was easy when I spotted the invader. No legs, no wings, no menacing stare, no eyes at all. Only three-eighths of an inch long and an eighth of an inch across, it looked like a piece of small animal scat. That was her concern: what unwelcome creature had so crudely left behind this evidence? Was it just a passing visitor or did we have a new resident sharing our house?

I studied this “thing” and wondered if instead of scat it might be an insect larva encasement. My wife accepted that possibility, but how could it materialize in the middle of her kitchen floor? Having neither an “encyclopedia of insect larvae” nor an “illustrated North American directory of animal defecation” I was left to my own resources and finally declared my definitive conclusion: either it was the fecal matter of an unpopular critter, or it was the self-constructed enclosure of an insect larva now in its third stage, the pupa stage of metamorphosis (i.e.: egg, larva, pupa, insect).

Having made a positive decision, I now evaluated. This thing had a reasonable shape and color for scat, basically dark brown with the faintest tint of amber, but there was a rhythmic pattern of rings on the surface, equally spaced and concentric about a longitudinal axis. When I studied it with a magnifying glass, I saw that these rings spiraled from one end to the other. I was looking at an insect cocoon.

Well, I could take my X-Acto knife, carefully open it and peek at the creature inside. The negative would be never knowing for sure what it was—unless it was at the conclusion of its cycle and ready to look me in the eye. I decided to place it in a plastic zip-lock sandwich bag, along with a dated slip of paper. If I had a biology teacher, I might get an “A” for that decision. I picked a good place to leave the experiment. On the kitchen counter, next to the mixing bowls. (Heck, you don’t want something like that lying around on your desk.)

Eleven days later, my wife alerted me that something had squeezed out the end of the enclosure and was moving around. I saw a small opening at one end of the cocoon and a piece of material hanging to one side, like a door left open. The freed resident was obviously an insect, with six legs. In fact, it looked very leggy, and there appeared to be no wings. Could we have discovered a new desert insect? Probably not. In fact those two huge compound eyes on the front of its head looked suspiciously familiar, and an hour later the body filled out greatly and there were two large, translucent wings. Hard to believe the thing had fit inside the cocoon.

No doubt about it, we had become the caretakers of our very own mature house fly. But my wife hates flies, so I moved it to my desk where I could admire it from time to time. I eased a ball of

cotton in the sandwich bag to create volume, added some breadcrumbs and freshened the air each day. In less than a week my new pet was on its back, feet in the air, just like any old windowsill fly. I didn’t grieve over it, but I missed the little guy.



It’s The Thought I See

by Mike Green

it’s the thought I see
in another’s face
like a city glimpsed from a hill
that teaches hope and fear

behind my house
there are steep hills
which in this country
are to the north
aren’t hills always to the north
and then a vast bear backed range of mountains
snow-clad in winter
but they burned this autumn in a furious fire
and now the rains have come
filling the city at their feet
with rivers of ash
and the air with the damp smell of death

my face is no longer the handsome one
that made the girls in poodle skirts
smile
there in the Garmar with their buttered popcorn fingers

waiting for James Dean
of course I'm angry
aren't we all
everything costs too much
and my father's dead and my mother seems to have a
broken back
the world spins like a loony bird's head
and I cannot reach the hills
where I need to walk in silence with my son

we are at arms length now
even lovers
in the streets without smiles we cannot touch
drained of our humanity by advertisements and pleas
for personal space each face wears the mask
of a dying species like this woman's I saw in Macy's
a croc sinking in a gray-green river

to be alone that's the best
my father said tightening the spark plug
with the torque wrench
to walk alone into a city coming from the barren hills
and sit in a quiet bar even better
a side walk café in early morning
drinking a coffee and watching the poor saps
race off to work feeling a little sorry for them
but not so much you can't enjoy a tiny cookie
you see he had been in Italy during the war
and could remember the hills above Turin
and the city in the morning when a soldier is really
alone

to think that the boy whose face is like rain water
like the damp morning sun
only wants to be old enough to buy cigarettes
drink beer and reach his hand down a girl's shorts
and if he's blessed roll in her warmth all the dark night
if he's blessed

don't you hate it that everything's dirty
wouldn't you just like to get a fire hose and blast away
clean it all to the bone and let the eyeless skull of things
whiten in the sun

now that I am older than either got to be
I hear Cesar Pavese's voice call to me
from the blackened hills sounding like my father's
telling me to watch out for women and the exhaust
manifold
as I handed him the Phillips Head across the Piazza Navona

what can the South Seas mean to me
I've spent so much time looking for success
under somebody else's rock and now go to the gym
three times a week when I feel the gift of my
grandfather's angina prodding my mortality to life
or walk out into the night at two
looking for my cat
the trees still dripping like my nose
from a heavy rain that stopped at one
cats will fight and it all seems so long ago
when my grandfather told me hand on his heart
how he really only loved once
and that last he heard she was still in Baltimore

what can any of us say
that late March is like a young girl whose dress
clings to her body and flutters
what do we have after so many years of work
and now the children are gone can we sit and enjoy
our decay like a basket of pears or
do we turn our noses up at our own fermenting

at a certain time in his life
a man cannot help but make a woman cry
like Nick more goat than man a billy-goat
who butts the bitch-goat before he penetrates
her quivering body and then goes off to drink

in a dark little bar running headlong into a tree

the dawn is nearly green
because the new grass on the burnt hills is like breath
if I hadn't been out drinking and lost my car keys
how would I know about this

why is it cars pass more quietly
in the early morning
it can't be that everything is damp
nor is it only the darkness giving way to light
like a girl giving you her hand in the movies
what is it that makes the drivers hold their breath
as they corner down shift and then head into the valley
where lights are ripening softly and nothing is dirty yet
sometimes doing nothing is the best medicine
most of us don't know a field we can walk in until dark
where we would enter the woods to lie down in the damp
evening
that is why we lack reservoirs of kindness
and our brutalities are so petty

a woman can sleep with cats
my wife has three
and their night long purring
is like the warmth of her blood
that through her flesh heats the sheets
and makes my dreams to glow

why is it that none of the streets
in this god forsaken town run to the sea
only the sewers and there's no shortage of churches
First this and First that St. Whose-it and St. Whats-it
but not much that is Godlike (only a girl's smile) who
has probably
gotten himself lost this god trying to find the off ramp
to the sea
where the air is cool and clear and the women don't
scream at you

and shake their booty on Foothill Blvd. while some fat assed
shaved head gang-banger jacks your car at the Arco Station

our veins have taken root in us
like the seed fallen on barren ground
our blood is warm with daughters and sons
work has made us tired and dumb
what can these young men say to a woman
to make them want sons
women whose faces
are as weary and lonely as theirs

to sleep on a park bench you have to have
faith in the world like a child
who would lie down in a street he's so tired
knowing that the cars would flow around him
and that at dusk a woman would pick him up
and take him home and hold him close

drink always drove Pete to an inner silence
a place of private anger making of his face a mask
that frightened the women away from our table
beautiful young women who only wanted to laugh
and be stared at by our wolves' eyes
slow down we'd tell him but he was gone
before we knew it stomping over the barren hills of his rage
what's up with that guy the girls would ask
their dresses clinging
we'd just shake our heads and try to laugh it off ordering another
pitcher
when he stood up they could see that he was tall
and straight something to be thankful for
after the war
and then he was gone without a word
sometimes we would find him key in the ignition
head on the steering wheel waiting for himself to return
from his lonely brotherless walk



Thank You

by Savya Lee

the perfect shape of this morning
opens my heart.
“thank you,” I say, to
no one in particular
“thank you--” my prayer
for the day.



Hard Light

by Greg Gilbert

A point of hard light
Venus in the morning sky
Doves brood on black lines



If I Only Had a Brain

by Ronnie Land

After being diagnosed with an ABI (acquired brain injury) almost three years ago, the prognosis was shocking and unfavorable to say the least. It was at this time I decided that if my brain wanted to take a vacation, I would keep its memory busy in hopes of removing any extra time for “days off.” Immediately following the diagnosis from the Mayo clinic in Scottsdale, Arizona, I journeyed home puzzled and confused. Once the shock had worn off, I began to research everything I could get my hands on concerning memory loss and neurology. With the assistance of the Internet, I was able to embark on a learning adventure that would change my perception of those challenged and disabled. I now was among those affected with a disability, and decided to take charge of my life.

Days and even weeks passed before I noticed what was happening to me. Reading books on neurology and researching web sites, I discovered that I was using a broader vocabulary and understanding complicated medical journals relating to acquired brain injuries. I then made the decision to expand my learning abilities with the assistance of magazines and newspaper articles that were challenging and interesting. I watched as my depression faded, and my overall sense of well being improved from these new memory games. Who knew?

Now, granted, I was a little apprehensive at the start, but realizing that education was my new weapon against my brain injury set my wheels turning. What if I went back to college? Could I comprehend the classes and make a passing grade? On a hot September day in the California’s high desert, my attention was drawn to a Copper Mountain Community College catalog. I was overcome with excitement and started making phone calls immediately. After some investigation, my research revealed a program that assists those with disabilities during their tenure on campus. The program offers learning aids and supervised guidance to those who qualify. Later that evening, I sat down to write some short and long term goals, and ironic as it may be, everything led to attending college in the spring.

After reading manuals and studying college catalogs, I began asking for help by making my first phone call to the college. I was instructed to stop in and take the assessment test, which would place me in the appropriate classes. The next morning I awoke from a restless night's sleep, obviously nervous about visiting the campus. Breakfast for this day was out of the question as my stomach was in much turmoil. Before leaving, I needed a quick walk with the dog to help calm my nerves and collect my thoughts. Driving to the campus, I had music blaring in hopes of overpowering the nervous energy that had decided to tag along. The campus is located thirteen miles from my home, today the drive seemed as if the campus had been relocated to another state.

I arrived at the campus nervous and anxious to take the assessment test. In the past, test taking was never a good thing for me and it made no difference whether it was for credit or not. Arriving at the student center, I was greeted with courtesy and professionalism, and then instructed on where to go for the assessment test. I was told to take advantage of the full two-hour time limit if needed and to inform the desk person if I had any problems. The door closed gently behind the staff member, and I could feel the sweat dripping from my forehead. Breathing deeply and trying to relax, I took a minute to familiarize myself with the computer, collect scratch paper and then began the test. During the first few minutes of the test, I could not help but recall the words of the specialist from the Mayo clinic declaring that I would lose short and long-term memories "in the near future." My fingers acted as if I had never touched a keyboard before in my life. Nervous, and clumsy, I guided the mouse to the correct answer and pushed to proceed from there. Before I knew it the two hours had passed and I needed some fresh air.

Standing in the courtyard under sycamore trees, the wind humming a tune, I was overcome with sense of accomplishment. I did it; I had taken the first step to registering for college. While outside, I was approached by a couple of students asking if I was registered for classes. Red-faced and shy, I replied, "I am working on it as we speak." I was given a pat on the back and an "it will be alright." It felt as if the winds had sent caution and then strangers appear with kind words and support. Leaving the campus for home, I was on top of the world. Full of life and dreaming of a

future in a new career, for a moment in time I had forgotten I had an acquired brain injury.

The day I arrived for the intake, I was full of excitement and emotions. Spending an hour or so with a counselor answered most of my questions and I was able to leave the campus feeling informed. On the way out the door, I was handed a piece of paper and on the top was written Spring Semester Schedule. I was in a dizzying state for a second and I managed to fight back tears until I was safely alone in my car.

In preparation for class, over the next few months I began to reconstruct my daily schedule, starting with watching less television and creating a place where I could study and prepare homework. Planning ahead with the assistance of a calendar and note pads, I sat down and made lists of chores that needed my attention and started completing them immediately. To soften the shock, I started mailing memos and note cards to friends and family explaining that I would be attending college full-time. Daily phone calls and appointments kept me moving and helped take the anxiety away. To-do lists and post-it notes decorated my refrigerator for weeks and then, days before class began, the lists had been completed.

While in Georgia over the Christmas holiday, I broke the news to my parents that I would be attending community college in the spring. They were a bit surprised, as I have had millions of great ideas and have seen few of them mature. This time I was for real and more serious than ever. I told them the good news on Christmas Eve and then asked my mother to take me shopping to purchase my backpack for school. The initial look of comedy graced my mother's gentle face and then a look of intrigue prevailed. She gracefully smiled and replied "OK!" We began to collect our things and plot a course to the Samsonite luggage outlet, ten miles from the house. While driving to the outlet, my mother began asking small and casual questions about college classes, schedules and future goals. She was curious, how would I be able to keep up and stay on track with an acquired brain injury? It was at that moment I felt her sincerity in the way she was responding and knew she was proud of her son.

Over the last two weeks before class, I worked on organizing supplies and study area, stocking up on bottled water and notebooks. Over the Christmas holiday, I was given three

backpacks for school and spent several days hauling and lugging around books trying to evaluate the performance and mobility of each one. At last a bag was chosen, red in color and with mesh pockets on the side; it included an organizer and the pièce de résistance, wheels!

'Twas the day before class and the projects complete, I started the day off with some scholarly reading and a hot cup of coffee. I wanted to dedicate a majority of this day to my best friend with four legs and a great sense of adventure, my dog. Hours of fun with the puppy stirred up quite an appetite. What would I do for lunch? Alas, the lunch was complete; puppy and I took a well-deserved nap and dreamt about being on the honors list.

The morning of my first college course, nervous and anxious, flooded with enthusiasm, I made my way to the campus. "Arrive Early" was printed on the literature, along with more detailed information that the first-time college student would need. My first professor opened the class and explained now that we were attending college; society would recognize us as leaders. Although the words were beautiful and motivating, without warning the overwhelming realization of "Oh my God, I'm in college now" sent chills down my spine. Trying not to show reaction to the comment, I began to thumb through my textbook and wipe the sweat from my hands, hoping no one would notice.

I now have an education plan, which lays out the classes and units needed for me to reach my educational goals. At this point I have no time to worry about the memory loss or the acquired brain injury; I'm focused on my future and my college degree. With my first homework assignment in hand, notebooks and textbooks stacked around me, I now feel like a college student. I will read this paper years from now and hold on to it as my motivation during rainy days, while at the same time remembering how excited I was the day I sat and wrote it.



The Fortunate Few

by Melody Blake

It is my first Monday off.
From now on, I will have a more civilized
schedule. A 4-day week.
Long coveted – and so elusive.
Work was always too busy,
Bosses too unwilling.

Now I'm growing old –
a condition much resisted here in Los Angeles.
I'd like to save some of me
for me. I relish the possibilities.

I decide to celebrate – my new quasi-freedom,
lunch alone in a fine seafood restaurant.
The elderly host greets me with a smile and
proclaims it is nice to see me again.

I play along. I'm by myself this time, I reply.
I'm by myself a lot, but that is TMI –
too much information.

I sip ice water, pondering what to order
and whether I ever could have seen the host before.
Conversations buzz around me.
The waiters are tiresomely handsome.
I try to pick out which ones act and which are writers.

The host is white haired now.
Perhaps I dated him 30 years ago.
If so, things must have gone amiss.
Perhaps one of us was already in love with someone.

I wonder what color his hair was.
I was decidedly much thinner back then.
So, life didn't quite work out for either of us.
Yet, here we are, both still working
and counting our blessings.

Seventy Two

by Carl B. Crosby

“ . . . parts of Islam’s holy book are derived from pre-existing Christian Aramaic texts that were misinterpreted by later Islamic Scholars . . . ”

“ . . . the famous passage about virgins is based on the word hur . . . tradition insists the term hur stands for ‘hourī’ . . . virgin . . . a forced misreading of the text.”

“In both ancient Aramaic and . . . one respected dictionary of early Arabic, hur means ‘white raisin.’”

New York Times, March 2, 2002

Mahir settled into his first class seat and waited for the jumbo jet to reach its cruising altitude. He fingered the handle of the polycarbonate plastic knife and waited for Hakeem to give the order.

He and his confederates had easily passed through the supposed security of the airport checkpoints. Hakeem, their commander, had watched the security checkers for a few minutes and selected the most lackadaisical checkpoint. The Great Satan’s idea of security was laughable. Did not the well-guarded book say, “And when the misbelievers plotted to keep thee prisoner, or kill thee, or drive thee forth, they plotted well; but God plotted, too. And God is the best of plotters.”

It helps God’s plotting when the enemy is foolish.

Just as the jumbo jet reached cruising altitude, a stewardess with beautiful, big and lustrous eyes leaned over Mahir. She had been asking passengers if they wanted anything to drink or read.

Mahir looked up at her. A slight frown crossed his feature as he took in her bared head of raven hair and the exposed flesh of her arms and legs.

She could, be one of the ‘Companions’ only she is not virtuous.

Just as she opened her mouth to speak, Hakeem cried out, “Now.”

In one smooth motion, just as the instructors at Tora Bora taught him, Mahir pulled his knife and jammed the strong plastic blade into the stewardess’s belly.

She gasped out, “Why?”

Mahir looked into her eyes, eyes that were already losing their luster.

“Because you are an infidel whore.”

He jerked the knife upward until it hit a rib. Then he pulled it out as her body collapsed. He ignored the blood that splashed over him and rushed forward toward the jumbo’s cockpit door with Zafir and Hakeem. With the hard to detect explosives provided by a good and godly leader of men who had sacrificed several hundred thousand of his nation’s citizens resisting the Great Satan, they blew open the jumbo jet’s cockpit door.

Zafir was first through the door. He wore a sweatshirt under his dress shirt and heavy jacket. The darts from the stun gun, fired by the copilot, didn’t make contact with his skin. The copilot tried desperately to get another shot off from the ineffective stun gun as Zafir closed in. Zafir’s knife slit the copilot’s throat before the stun gun recharged enough for a second, probably futile, attempt. As the copilot gurgled his last breath through the bloody hole in his throat, Zafir did the same to the pilot.

After dragging the dead pilot out of his seat, Zafir said, “It is clear.”

Hakeem swept his arms in an exaggerated motion sweeping the now cleared way into the cockpit for Mahir, who, smiling, took, over the pilot’s seat.

Soon I will strike a blow against the perverted decadent unbelievers. Then I will get my reward in the garden of paradise, Seventy-two . . .

Hakeem went back into the cabin to help the rest of the team control the passengers. Zafir settled into the copilot’s seat.

A short while later Zafir called out, “There it is.”

The tower loomed up arrogantly into the sky.

Mahir said, “Yes, God is great.”

Mahir pushed the throttles forward and the big fanjets responded. As more fuel flowed into the engines, more thrust pushed the jumbo faster. Mahir pushed the yoke forward. The plane’s nose dropped. The tower wandered slowly to the left in the jumbo’s windscreen. He applied a little left rudder and left yoke, just like the infidel instructor had taught him in the simulator. The tower centered in the windscreen and grew large . . . larger . . . larger still. Then it filled the windscreen.

Mahir yelled, "God is great! Seventy two . . ."
Impact.

* * *

Mahir found himself wandering in a forest. After a while, he came to a clearing in the woods. Rows of trees, laden with various fruits, paralleled a burbling stream of cool water.

Mahir knelt by the stream, cupped his hand, drank from it. The water was the freshest and sweetest he ever tasted. He shoved his face into the stream and drank deeply. As he came up for air, Mahir heard someone chuckling behind him. Whipping around to confront the stranger, Mahir found himself staring at a luminous golden man.

The golden man said, "Welcome to paradise."

Mahir smiled as he thought about what those words meant. After a lifetime of denial and dedication, he would get his reward. Seventy-two . . .

His smile grew as he contemplated the pleasures soon to be his. The combinations that would be possible were staggering. He would even get to teach them all the exact things he liked, dreamed about. The fantasies he was about to fulfill made it all worthwhile.

"If this is indeed paradise, where are the seventy two . . ."

The golden man held up his hand. Then he pointed at a rustling at the edge of the clearing.

"Here they come now."

Mahir was shocked by who appeared. It was the stewardess he had murdered . . . no, sacrificed.

"But she is no virgin," Mahir objected.

The golden man agreed, "No, she is a servant. She is bearing God's gift to you."

As the stewardess walked up to Mahir, he noticed she was carrying a small bag.

When she reached him, she said to Mahir, "Hold out your hands in a cup."

As he did so, she opened the bag. She poured the contents out of it, filling Mahir's cupped hands.

The golden man said, "There is your gift, as promised in the well guarded book."

Then the golden man and the stewardess left Mahir alone, forever.

After they left, he stared at the rare white raisins piled in his hand. Without counting, he knew exactly how many were there. Seventy-two.



COMMON GROUND

by Aurora Ashton

We are, gentle souls, guided by our compassionate hearts.
Through the trials of a dying world.



Those Times At The Park

by Katherine Roberts

Her mother was drunk. Her father was in a tearing rage. It was a familiar scene at the house of the twelve-year-old girl. There was yelling. There was screaming. Mother was crying and something was broken. She'd heard it all before, and she knew she'd hear it again. It was all the same. It never changed, and she had long ago stopped expecting it to.

Her father, Robert Sr., was a workingman. A middle aged, middle class man working a blue-collar job in middle management. Robert had been working for the same company for over ten years, and in all that time, had barely risen in position. He worked ten-hour days, from eight in the morning until six at night. Everyday, like clockwork, he'd wake up at five thirty, be in the shower at five forty five, have his coffee at six thirty, and be out the door at seven. Everyday Robert was fifteen minutes early to work, insuring he never marred his spotless record by being late.

Her mother, Carol, was a housewife who had taken up drinking to ease the boredom of the passing days. Each morning, she would wake up at seven thirty, put on her pink bathrobe, pour herself a glass of red wine, which she would immediately down, then quickly refill the glass, as if feeling bad she had emptied it so soon. She'd then pour cereal in some bowls, put the milk on the table, and promptly sit herself on the couch and watch her favorite soaps. *The Young and the Restless* was on at nine o'clock and she couldn't miss it.

This was of course on the good days. Usually she forgot to get the children's cereal, heading straight for the tube with a wine glass in one hand and the rest of the bottle in the other. She'd have to put the wine bottle down to hold the remote, but it was never far away, certainly not out of arms reach. She had to wake up early to catch *The Price is Right*, but usually she fell asleep halfway through, the half bottle she had already consumed by that time already

affecting her system. Fortunately, the VCR was set to record all her favorite shows, on the off chance that she fell back to sleep before they came on.

On these days, which were quite often, it was the young girl's responsibility to get her brother and sisters up and dressed for the day. The bus came at eight thirty, so she was up at six, getting ready for the day. An hour later, she woke her siblings, and while they were getting ready, she set up breakfast, usually cereal, sometimes bacon and eggs, if there was time. She'd go back in to help the younger ones dress, then herd the bunch into the kitchen to eat. While the others ate, she set to the task of picking up the house, putting everything in order and back in its place. After, she'd clean up her siblings, wash the dishes, wipe down the table, and set the kids up for the day. Usually she'd take them to their room, turning on some music, and bring down games and toys for them to play with. By then, time was usually running out and she'd have to catch the bus. She'd make sure there were snacks on the table, and, if she had time, make lunch for them, 'cause sometimes "Momma" forgot. She'd kiss them all on the head and tell them to be good and not to bother Carol, and remind Caitlyn to change Susie every once in a while, and tell Bobby not to put crayons in his nose, like last time, then she'd dash out the door.

Usually about noon, Carol heard a whiny voice wake her from her stupor, crying about being hungry. She'd heave herself to her feet with a groan, and stumble towards the kitchen, stepping on various toys that had somehow made it out into the hallway, on her way there. She'd fumble about, grabbing stuff from the cupboards and refrigerator. Bread, bologna, mustard, ketchup, mayonnaise, and whatever else was in her reach or seemed reasonable at the time. Then she'd grab a plate, dirty or clean, it didn't really matter, and slap it down on the table, her masterpiece smack dab in the middle. She'd grab a cup from the cabinet, and some juice or milk from the fridge, and pour it into the cup, usually spilling some on the floor or counter while she was at it. Slamming the cup on the table, another mess to clean up as the liquid sloshes over the sides, she receives her thanks, accepting it with a slurred mumble of acknowledgment, and shuffles back to the couch, leaving a horrendous mess behind. She'll clean it up later. Pouring herself several more glasses of wine, she settles back down into her routine. She sleeps the day through, letting the effects of the

alcohol carry her off to a constant state of dreamy drug-induced happiness and delusions of grandeur. Depending on the amount of wine she's had, Carol might be semi-coherent by the time her eldest arrives home, doubtful, or just in time for dinner to be served. But was always awake by the time her husband was home, cups of coffee poured into her system in the hopes that she will be coherent enough to avoid another battle.

The daughter got home at three thirty, giving her two and a half hours before her father's timely arrival to their dwelling. She'd walk in the house, usually a disaster, to find her mother sleeping off her wine induced stupor on the couch. The TV was on. It was always on. She'd start a fresh pot of coffee. Carol needed to be awake by the time Dad got home. She'd check on her siblings, normally intact with only a few minor injuries here and there. Usually they were cranky, hungry and tired from neglect. She'd check Susie to see if she needed a change, clean them up once more, and take them to the kitchen for a quick snack. It would hold them 'til dinner. Then she'd start dinner, sometimes a casserole she just needed to stick in the oven for an hour or so, other times something she had to make from scratch, soup, sandwiches, whatever there was time for. Then she'd pick up the house. Cleaning up spills, wiping down counters, running the vacuum. Everyone helped to pick up the toys. Monday was laundry day, so she did that too, and made any beds that were neglected in the morning. Five thirty five. Homework would have to wait until after dinner. It was time to get Mom up, if she already wasn't. Coffee in the system, along with a quick cold shower and a fresh change of clothes. Table set. Dad walks in. Dinner eaten. Time for bed. Get little ones into bed. Do homework. Sleep.

That's usually when it happened. Late at night. She's supposed to be sleeping, but usually isn't 'cause there's homework to be done. It's a little thing, she's never really sure. In the end it really doesn't matter, 'cause it happens all the same. There's screaming and yelling and crying and then, some more yelling. Things get broken, a lamp, a vase, a picture frame. She can never block it out. She gave up trying.

Sometimes the little ones would stay in their room, the door shut, but cracked partially 'cause Bobby was afraid of the dark. They'd huddle close together, scared, but trying not to show it. They hear yelling and screaming and tell each other and themselves

not to be afraid, their whimpers of fear muffled by the covers they have pulled over their crouching forms.

This is their world. Our eternal darkness. My hell.

Most of the time though, they come to my room, seeking comfort from the storm. Quietly they creep towards my door, which I crack partway open when the fighting begins so they have a haven to come to, without alerting the parents. They try never to attract attention, lest the rage be turned on them, so silently they creep into my room. I'm almost always awake, doing homework or reading a book or maybe listening to some music. I see three little faces appear at my doorway and I put all else aside, holding out my arms wide, knowing it's going to be a long night.

I gather them in my arms, desperately wishing I could protect them from the hell that is their life. We all lay on my bed, listening to my father's rampage outside my room. I croon comforting words to them, fervently wishing we were someplace else. They begin to relax, my words slowly calming their overwhelmed minds and overtired bodies. I look up at the ceiling, and I begin singing softly, a familiar song from my youth, a song Mom once sang before everything went so wrong.

* Beautiful dreamer, wake unto me,
Starlight and dewdrops are waiting for thee;
Sounds of the cruel world heard in the day,
Lull'd by the moonlight have all pass'd away!

Beautiful dreamer, queen of my song,
List while I woo thee with soft melody;
Gone are the cares of life's busy throng.
Beautiful dreamer, wake unto me!
Beautiful dreamer, wake unto me!

That's how it is in my house, my shelter from the storm, my haven in the night. There are screams, my mother's, or rather, the woman I once called that name. Something is thrown against the wall. There are yells, Robert's, the man I once lovingly called Father. A chair falls backwards and hits the floor. I look out the window, out into the night. It's raining tonight, there is a hurricane in full force, but there is not a cloud in the sky.

It's during these times, when the weather is so terrible, that I think of the past, the days when we were happy, when the weather was nice and the sun always shining. Those were the days when we went to the park. Back then; it was just the four of us, me, Mom, Dad, and Caitlyn. Every Sunday after church, we'd go down to the park for a little fun. We'd bring a picnic basket with tons of goodies and have lunch there and do all sorts of great things. They were good times. We'd spread out our blanket under the shade and unpack all the food Mom had made just for Sunday lunch, and we'd feast on all the food, laughing and playing all the while. Back then, Mom would have a glass of wine with her lunch, sipping it slowly, smiling and laughing with us the whole time we were there, just enjoying herself. And then we'd play for an hour or so more until it was time to go. We were all sad to leave, but we always knew that next Sunday we'd be back again to do it all over.

I always loved those afternoons at the park, but best of all, I like the swings. I remember that I would be on the swings, Dad behind me, pushing me higher and higher, 'til I felt like I was flying. It was great, back then, when Dad wasn't always so angry. I always felt so free, like I could do anything in the world; that nothing was out of my reach. Caitlyn was four years younger and too small, so Mom would sit on a blanket with her and they would both clap and cheer as I went higher and higher.

That was a long time ago, before everything changed. Tonight they're fighting; the happy image of old, nothing more than a distant memory, a long since shattered dream. My father's yelling at my mother. They're in another battle. It's raining terribly hard, though there's not a cloud in the sky. I hear someone get slapped, a crack like a pistol shot as flesh meets flesh. She'll have a black eye tomorrow. Robert is angry. He yells at Carol.

"You can't do anything right, you stupid bitch!"

I hum quietly, my siblings are asleep at last, blissfully unaware of the storm that brews outside my bedroom door. I am not so lucky.

Robert came home early today, and dinner was not on the table. I had a lot of homework to finish, so I just made everyone soup and sandwiches so I could get right on it. Robert came home, and there was nothing on the table for him, so he had to make his own dinner. He wasn't happy. Carol was in the bedroom, sleeping off the rest of her red wine. The fight started after she woke up.

She was hungry too, and there was nothing for her to eat. He yells and screams, calling her horrible names and throwing her around.

He had a meeting today. He was supposed to come home late. He wasn't going to be eating with us. That's what he said. But the meeting got cancelled. He came home early, and there was no dinner for him. He was mad. I guess he forgot what he said, 'cause Carol's lying on the kitchen floor crying, sobbing, pleading with him, begging for forgiveness. She's sorry. He's furious.

I look outside my window, up at the moon. It's crescent shaped tonight, like a big grin up in the sky, smiling at some cosmic joke I have yet to get. I don't see what is so funny, but I grin back anyway. There are thousands of stars pinpointed across the heavens, like sparkling little diamonds across the galaxy, surrounding the moon in its full grin state. It's so beautiful. It's getting late. I have homework still, and wonder if I'll get it done. The weather is terrible, rain pouring from the heavens while lightening lights the sky it splits in two with a jagged white line. The thunder rolls, the booming crack heard for miles around. It is a terrible night. The weather is dreadful, though there is not a cloud in the sky. In the distance I can hear a woman scream. I can hear a man yell. Something gets broken; there is a mess to clean. The weather is frightful, though there is not a cloud in the sky.

My brother and sisters sleep on, unaware of the dangers of this night. Susie sucks her thumb, Bobby his first two fingers, while Caitlyn just holds me tight. I sing a song from a time long ago, melody from my youth, and remember those days, those times at the park.

* Beautiful dreamer, out on the sea
Mermaids are chanting the wild lorelei;
Over the streamlets vapors are borne,
Waiting to fade at the bright coming morn.

Beautiful dreamer, beam on my heart,
E'en as the morn on the streamlet and sea;
Then will all clouds of sorrow depart,
Beautiful dreamer, awake unto me!
Beautiful dreamer, awake unto me!

I remember those swings, and flying so high. I wonder if I'll ever be free again, as free as I was in those swings at the park.

•*Beautiful Dreamer Serenade*; Stephen C. Foster (1826-1864)



The Stone God.

by Savya Lee

Standing before the head of the stone god
Looking into eyes that cannot see
Touching a face that cannot feel,
My hands are stopped—caught
In valleys of chin,
Furrows between eyes.
My wordless lips, pressing
Against lips of stone,
Breathe life into the cold deity.
My formless prayers reach deep
Into those furrows, those valleys
Warming stone into illusion.
What is there to say
When the god, evoked by desire,
Lives? How shall
Salvation be spoken
Before the moment passes?
Here, before the stone head
Eyes searching eyes
Wordless lips whispering
Formless prayers
And the stone god was stone.
Over stone, faltering hands
Wept.



Fourteen Ways of Looking at Coyotes

by Lois Valero

I
grey wolfskin
stretched over a
frail skeleton,
the coyote chases
a desert mouse

II
bared teeth and
darting eyes,
a tough survivalist
mythologized across
cultures and generations

III
making a home of
a burrow or even
conduit pipe,
the prairie wolf
mates for life

IV
hunted, maligned,
but always victorious,
the coyote survives
human inventions
of extermination

V
versatile opportunist
shy, playful, brazen,
a garbage gatherer
or marauder of sheep
day or night

VI

domesticated by Native Americans,
following settlers moving West-
eating lizards, skunk, deer,
harness buckles, shoe leather-
determined to survive

VII

clever coyote
tricking his prey,
feigning disinterest
or playing dead,
survival tactics
evolving with the years

VIII

catch the coyote
in your trap—
he'll teach his clan
to circumvent,
even release the mechanism
on another day

IX

bounties, poisons, traps
meant to eliminate
the "brush wolf"
only served to create
the super coyote-
birthing larger litters,
smarter, larger, faster

X

the mottled coyote
prances lightly
over the snow,
trailing the elk
who stirs the mouse

XI

midnight hymns
raucously melodious,
fill the air with
youngling's yipping
excitedly teaming
adventure's hunt from
mom and dad

XII

a solitary traveler
prances down the road,
wary, aware,
checking for trash
or handouts
or cats.

XIII

alone, he hunts,
his voracious appetite
driving him to wander,
hated or feared,
persistent still

XIV

symbol of the Old West,
wide open spaces,
success in the face
of human persecution—
the coyote,
a tough little survivalist



RECONNECTION

by Nell Sehestedt

In each corner of the sitting room stood a dusty plant. Beyond, several prescription bottles were lined up on the kitchen table. A cobweb hung from the doorway between the two rooms, and undisturbed for months, tiny spiders had built fuzzy nests at the corners of the windows. An elderly woman sat looking at a portrait before her.

Josephine Holmes was now over 75 years old. She had been a gregarious, active individual all her life; she belonged to several social clubs and always participated in community events and charity drives. Her husband, Thomas, and she were a congenial, loving couple for 47 years, and although they both wanted children, they had none. Gradually the family members on both sides died, and the old man and his wife drew closer together.

During the four years of Thomas's final illness, Josephine took complete care of him at home. Day and night she attended to his needs; in time she lost touch with friends and club acquaintances. Upon his recent death, her routine changed only slightly. On Sundays she attended church services although she no longer knew anyone there. After church she had lunch at a nearby diner. She always requested a container to take home what she didn't eat.

The widow continued gazing at her husband's photograph in its plain wooden frame. Every day she would speak softly to the image, apprising him of her feelings and activities, limited as they were. "Thomas," she would say, "I talked to Mrs. Warner, our neighbor across the street, when we both went to the mailbox. We chatted a little about her garden, but her phone rang and she had to run inside. Oh, and I saw Mrs. Ebell, the lady I met at the bus stop. They're the only people I know in the neighborhood."

At other times she would reminisce about happier times. "Remember when we would go window-shopping on Maine Street, and we'd stop for an ice cream sundae before coming home?" She would sigh. "Thomas, I'll never forget when we would walk down to the creek to see the water lilies in bloom. So lovely."

One day Josephine told Thomas that she had heard a strange noise during the night "I was scared, Tom. Oh, how I wished you were here."

The old woman felt terribly lonely, forsaken at times. She wandered around her small rooms, with very little energy and no incentive to do more than what was absolutely necessary. Actually she was in fair health, but was depressed and had no idea what to do to improve her state of mind.

One day during Josephine's talk to her late husband's picture, she said, "The house two doors down from us was vacant for months, and it was sold to a family with two or three children. They just moved in. I haven't met them yet. I hope they're nice people."

On cool evenings, she would sit out on the porch on an old rocker swing, as had been the couple's custom. With the photo beside her, she'd watch the moon rise over the treetops until she was sleepy. In the early evening on one such occasion the old lady said to the photo, "Today I played some of the old records we collected. I love those old songs, but they make me sad. They bring back so many memories." She sniffed and wiped her eyes. "I am so alone, Thomas. I feel like I'm just marking time, waiting to die." This thought frightened her; she covered her face with her hands and began to whimper, while tears ran down her cheeks.

"Why are you crying, lady?" A child's voice near to her ear startled Josephine. She opened her eyes and saw a little girl gazing steadfastly at her. "I had a cut on my finger, and I didn't cry." Unnoticed, the child had climbed the stairs to the porch and was standing next to Josephine's chair. "Whose picture is this?"

At last the old lady regained her voice. "It's my husband. What's your name, dear? Where do you live?"

"I'm Megan. I live over there," the girl said, flinging her arm in the direction of a nearby house.

"Ah, you must be my new neighbor," Josephine surmised. "Would you like to sit here? How old are you?"

"I'm seven." Megan sat beside the old lady, and began to rock back and forth in an attempt to swing. Josephine helped in the effort, then asked, "Would you like a cup of hot chocolate, dear?"

"Yes, ma'am!" The youngster grinned and continued to swing slowly.

Josephine entered the house and set about preparing two cups of hot cocoa. While she heated the milk, she placed paper doilies on a tray, and brought down two sturdy mugs for the beverage.

After adding the powdered mix, she filled the cups and brought the tray out to the porch.

“Careful, Megan,” she cautioned the child. “It may be hot.”

Megan said, “Thank you, ma’am. Ooh, it’s good.”

Josephine smiled and felt contented.

Dusk fell as the two sipped their chocolate. A woman down the street called, “Megan, where are you? Come home now.”

Megan put down her empty cup and rose. “That’s my Mom. I have to go. Thank you.”

“Megan, ask your mother if you may come again some evening. I enjoy your company, dear.”

“Yes. I will. Goodbye.”

The old lady watched the child run home and thought, “What a sweet, well-mannered little girl. I hope I can see her again.”

A few days went by without a visit from Megan. Then one day the doorbell rang. Josephine peeked through the window and saw a woman in a starched housedress. Upon opening the door she was greeted with, “Why. For heavens’ sakes! Aren’t you Josephine Holmes? Don’t you remember me from the Garden Club?”

Josephine was delighted. “Of course I remember you—Cecelia, Cecelia James! How wonderful to see you. Please come in.”

Cecelia entered and sat as requested. “Josephine I’m Megan’s mother. She tells me you were so kind to her, I wanted to meet you and thank you. But isn’t this the greatest surprise! I haven’t seen you in years and now we moved almost next door to you!”

“I’m so glad to see you again. You knew why I dropped out of the club—?”

Cecelia rose and hugged Josephine. “Yes, we were so sorry about your husband’s illness, and your loss.”

“Thank you, my dear.” Josephine eyes watered, and to forestall tears, she said brightly, “Why don’t we have a cup of tea while we catch up on club news?”

“That would be nice, Josephine. Wait till I tell the rest of the girls that you and I are neighbors! You must come to the next meeting.”

The two women chatted animatedly for a half-hour until Cecelia said, “I must be going before the kids get home from school.” They exchanged phone numbers and promised to stay in touch. “Megan said she would drop by to see you, Josephine. She said she felt like a grown-up with you.”

“How sweet. And I hope you too will come again. It’s wonderful that you are now close by.” Josephine was grinning with joy.

The two women embraced, then Cecelia left. Immediately Josephine sat down before her husband’s portrait. With stars shining in her eyes, she said, “Thomas, I am so happy. One of my old friends, Cecelia James, came by today and we had a good visit. Cecelia and her husband bought the house near here, and she is Megan’s mother, the little girl I mentioned recently. Isn’t that a marvelous coincidence? I’ve found two friends and they want to see me again. I can’t wait to go to the Garden Club with Cecelia. I’ll tell you all about it, Thomas dear.”

For the rest of the day, Josephine walked about in a warm glow. She looked about the room, grabbed a dust rag and began to wipe vigorously. She was humming all the while, and the smile on her face made her beautiful.



WHEN AUNT ROSSA CAME TO LIVE WITH US

by Gloria White

On a late spring afternoon, Aunt Rossa made a surprise first visit to our second story back flat on Fullerton Avenue. Junior and I were home alone and mother was not yet home from work.

“What a dump!” she said after entering the kitchen door. Junior and I laughed.

Our house probably did look like a dump to our sophisticated aunt who wore elegant clothing, fancy high heel shoes, rouge,

lipstick, red nail polish, jewelry and had her red hair rolled into a fashionable chignon at the nape of her neck.

As Aunt Rossa walked through the flat she made all kinds of funny comments about the objects in our house, causing Junior and me to laugh our heads off.

“What’s this?” she said pointing to the toaster.

It was one of those old fashioned toasters that was flat on the bottom with holes that allowed flames from the kitchen stove burners to come through and toast four pieces of bread that were placed on wires leaning toward the flames.

“That’s the toaster,” I replied.

“Oh,” she said, “I thought it was a pipe vent cover.”

None of the appliances or furniture in our house was modern. A pot-bellied coal burning stove that stood half way into the kitchen about five feet from an outer wall heated the flat. In the middle of the room there was an old wooden table with thick round legs and four matching chairs. It was covered with oilcloth. Food was kept cold in the bottom section of an oak icebox. In the upper section, the iceman supplied blocks of ice when the ice sign was put in the window indicating what size block of ice we needed. The cooking stove was built on four metal legs with an oven on the left and four gas burners on the right. Mother’s 1920 foot-treadle Singer sewing machine stood in front of a window. There were no kitchen cabinets. Food and dishes were stored in a long walk-in pantry. Along an inner wall, a wide porcelain kitchen sink with an attached drain had its faucets coming out from the wall. Aunt Rossa turned the hot water faucet on and held her hand under it a while.

“Don’t you have hot water?”

“Yeah we do, but you gotta heat the water tank first.” Junior pointed to the water tank that was next to the bathroom.

The bathroom was a large room with a commode, a small pedestal sink and, on a platform next to the window, a porcelain tub with claw feet, which we used for washing clothes with a scrub board as well as bathing.

Looking at the toilet she said, “How do you flush this thing?”

The water tank was on the wall above it. “You gotta pull the chain down,” I said as I pulled the chain to show her.

Aunt Rossa shook her head from side to side. Junior and I looked at each other and giggled. Facing a room to the right of the

kitchen, with a full bed on the left side and a twin on the other, separated by a chest of drawers under a window, I said, “This is where we sleep.” And pointing to an opening beyond the kitchen, “Ma’s room is back there.”

Mother’s bedroom in the original design of the place was really suppose to be a dining room and beyond that, separated by a wide drape, were two more rooms, a living room and another bedroom, both empty, where we kids and our friends would sometimes play. Aunt Rossa walked through the empty rooms and checked the door, which we never used, that led downstairs to the gangway between our building and the next. Sharing the same stairway was another smaller flat that went to the front of the building.

Just then mother returned from work. She was surprised to see Aunt Rossa in our house. “You’re staying for dinner,” she said in Italian.

Though Aunt Rossa spoke perfect English with a slight accent when she spoke to Junior and me, all of her conversations with mother were in Italian.

“No, no! I must get back to Cicero before dark.”

“Well at least have a cup of coffee.”

While Ma was preparing the coffee, Aunt Rossa talked. “Now that both of my daughters are married I decided to sell the business.”

The business was a candy store in Cicero, Illinois, with an apartment in back where she lived.

“I didn’t expect to sell it so soon, and now I need to get someplace to stay as soon as possible.”

Mother put cups and saucers on the table and a few cookies on a dish.

Aunt Rossa walked to the table, lifted a corner of the oilcloth and said, “Is this the same old table your father used when he came from Italy.”

“Yes, it’s the same one, and it’s good enough for us.”

Aunt Rossa continued her conversation, “Would it be possible if I moved in for a short time with my furniture until I can find a place of my own. I can pay you rent.”

“Of course you can, but I won’t accept your money.”

And so it was that three days later Aunt Rossa came to live with us for a few weeks.

After settling into her rooms, Aunt Rossa took it on herself to civilize Junior and me on table manners. “Use a fork to eat your mashed potatoes! Keep your feet on the floor at the table! Don’t drink with your mouth full!”

We respected her so we followed her instructions. However we felt mashed potatoes (we called them smashed potatoes) were tastier when eaten with fingers, putting our feet up on the chair when we ate felt more comfortable and swallowing food was easier with a gulp of milk or water.

I always thought Aunt Rossa was an attractive, youthful looking woman with classical features, including a Roman nose, high cheekbones, a dimpled chin and a slim body. She was gregarious, energetic and witty – a true people person. It was when I was given the unpleasant chore of holding a heating lamp over her nude back to relieve her chronic backaches that I realized she was much older than she appeared. Without makeup her face was very pale and freckled. Without clothing her body was bony. She looked her age, which I think at that time was in her sixties.

About a week after moving in with us, Aunt Rossa got a waitress job at a coffee shop. We never dared enter her rooms without permission while she was home, but now that she was working, the temptation was too much and before long we were looking through her rooms and then started checking what she had in her chest of drawers. Her things were very organized and tidy. She had jewelry in boxes in the top drawers. I carefully took a few out to try on and just as carefully returned them to their proper place.

Junior said, “Gee, she must be rich.”

“I don’t think it’s real jewelry,” I replied.

The middle drawers were full of neatly ironed and folded clothes that smelled like perfume. We sat on the floor to open the left bottom drawer. It contained sweaters, scarves and heavier clothing items. Then we pulled out the right bottom drawer and there among more clothing was a closed box. We carefully opened the lid and inside we found a gun. Junior and I looked at each other shocked and speechless. It was the first real gun we ever saw. Junior was about to take it from the box. “Don’t touch it!” I said, “We don’t want to get our fingerprints on it.”

What kind of secret life did our modern Aunt Rossa lead? The only thing we knew about people who had guns was from the movies – crooks, cops, gangsters, G-men, soldiers and murderers.

“Do you think Aunt Rossa killed someone?”

“I don’t know. I hope not.”

In those days Cicero, Illinois, where Aunt Rossa had her candy store, was noted for its Italian gangsters, particularly Al Capone.

“Maybe she had to protect herself from those Cicero gangsters.”

“Yeah maybe.”

We closed the box and the drawer, and decided we would never tell anyone about the gun.

About a month later, Aunt Rossa found a small apartment and got a job in a factory near her new place.

We rarely saw her after that. I remember our visiting her a few times in her new apartment. In 1941 she and her son-in-law Nick came to our house for my confirmation. They drove me to St. Bonaventure for the service while Ma stayed home to cook dinner. Junior stayed home too. By that time many of our old fashioned appliances were gone. The pot-bellied coal-burning stove was replaced by an efficient oil stove and the icebox by a new refrigerator. Our kitchen set was a modern porcelain metal table and chairs with tubular steel legs. And we had an electric pop-up toaster.

The last time we saw Aunt Rossa was at my cousin Emily’s wedding in 1946. A short time later she became ill and died. Junior and I did not attend her funeral. Through all those years, we never again talked about Aunt Rossa’s gun. But I often wondered why she had it, if she ever used it and, if so, for what reason. Aunt Rossa’s gun remained one of the unsolved mysteries of my childhood.



Hobie, 333 Stunt

by Ellen Monroe

McCray Lane was bad luck. Roberta can say that now. “Hobie, McCray Lane was bad luck.” She tells me this every time we make the hike back up the canyon, passing McCray Lane with its shell-shocked chimneys and its dull white foundations branched with dark cracks exposing earth that allows the mustard to grow up. The un-lucky. Can I say that? The bedrock – that’s what everyone always throws around, as if they know. But they don’t know because they still try to hold out on the crag of that sea cliff. Reinforcing thin air with more concrete. We did it too, but now we know that land is doomed to crumble, and everything on it. Leave it to the birds, I think. The birds and the coyotes, they know how to maneuver.

Even when McCray Lane was our lane, I watched those coyotes circling, laying paths and slicing past those things material and fortified with false permanence. They knew. But back then, Roberta didn’t speak of bad luck, or any luck for that matter. She and Phillip fought, or they got along, not much difference between the two really, that I could see. When he left it was a good thing. A good thing for Roberta and me for sure. And for Phillip? Who knows? She hadn’t seen him, and I hadn’t heard anything more about him since the night she was looking for the bottle. “Where’s the bottle?” she had asked over and over to herself that last night, and she searched and searched in the street for the trace of it. I think she wanted a piece of it to hold in her hand to prove it was over with them. The bottle, broken and thrown out of the car at high speed around the corner, she could hold and point to and prove with should he ever try to pretend everything would be okay with them. Well it wasn’t okay, and he’s gone, and I’m glad, and I guess we can both just sit back and point down at McCray Lane and say, “McCray Lane was bad luck”.

The story is that she and Phillip were out driving at night, had intentions of going in to town for a date, and instead, started fighting in the car. Roberta man, she sure chose the best way to make a man feel trapped. Her advice won’t go far with me; she knows how to lose them. When she told me about the fight and what she said and all, I actually felt bad for Phillip. I mean, he’s just a man really. But it’s still good that he’s gone, don’t get me wrong,

I’m glad he flipped out and threw the bottle out the window. Put an end to it, you know what I mean?

So anyway, this fight is going on in the car, and I’m up at the house on McCray Lane, just watching the stars go by and the crickets playing hopscotch matey-matey in the grass, when I heard Phillip’s car pull up. Actually, I didn’t hear it pull up. I heard it pull out. It screeched and tore a hole in the road trying to get away and the sound of it all put the stars and the crickets out at once. There’s not a lot of sound up there on McCray Lane, and so you can hear a lot. I didn’t know it then, and was kind of glad to learn from listening to the car, because then I knew not to go around in the manzanita singing too loud, or to get into it with Roberta. She loves to fight, and does it a lot less often now that Phillip’s gone. I reckon that’s why it’s good that he’s gone. But it wouldn’t matter much longer, the noise that is, because we left McCray Lane soon after that night Roberta came running down the side path. She mastered it pretty well it seemed, even in the dark, even screaming mad with what were soon to be furious sobs. “Hobie! Hobie! Come on now!” What with the car having torn off, and Roberta running and crying, I knew they had another one of their fabulous fights, and so I made myself ready to listen to what turned out to be the story of the last fight the two would ever have.

Walking down the road, heading off to the side when a car’s headlights would scan around a corner and up the side of the hill, Roberta told me how she had called Phillip a coward, and how he just lost it. I guess that’s all it takes to push a man over the edge. I’ll have to remember that if I ever need to get rid of one. “I told him he wasn’t willing to admit to anything, to own anything.” We tumbled down the canyon road and every once in a while a rustling in the monster bougainvillea smothered along the shoulder revealed an animal that had been crouching down trying to sleep perhaps between the passing of cars. Just about the time my legs tired of continually walking at an incline, Roberta began with, “Where’s that bottle?” The bottle was the one that Phillip had thrown out the window when Roberta had finally gotten to the point in her dictate where she called him a coward.

The open space in the window was definitely large enough for a bottle to fit through, and I suppose had Phillip really been trying to throw the thing, like with the intention of hitting something, or with some objective in mind like getting the bottle out of the car,

he could have cleared the doorjamb. But I guess when you're controlling a car around curves, the muscles of your legs pushing the accelerator to respond, and you've got someone like Roberta screaming at you, "You're a coward!" it might be hard to throw a full bottle out a car window.

He didn't have much luck with it either. I can only imagine in that instant all he wanted to do was get it out. When someone pushes you like that, you could growl like a lion just to show them. And I know how that is. Anything to prove that you are not what ever it is they're saying you are. But growling like a lion is only going to get you laughed at if you're fighting with someone who doesn't fight fair, someone like Roberta, so I suppose the next best thing to do is to throw a bottle out of a window. Only, poor Phillip can't get the bottle to clear the window, and so the stuff goes spraying all over the inside of the car, and man, wouldn't that make you mad enough to roar.

She was looking around on the ground, actually feeling with her hands for the glass bits, I could hear her hands turning pebbles over against the asphalt, she's still talking about old Phillip and what he never did for her and I begin to think about who it is that has to come and clean these streets. There's so many of them, and so much stuff gets thrown out on them. I started to notice all the old papers mixed in with the rocks and sticks that collect against the sides where the white rails are so that you won't drive off the cliff and end up in someone's backyard.

Roberta kept saying again and again, "Where's that bottle?" and I noticed something down by this grate that's built right into the road. At first I thought it was an old shirt or something, and I went close to see because it had this weird shape, like all balled up. The closer I got to it, the harder it was to see and it was taking on all of these different shapes when the light would settle on it in different ways as I moved closer to it, and then you know how it is when you're so close to something and you can't even tell what it is and then wham! It hits you. I was staring right inside the head of some poor dead bird that had lost the other half of its head somewhere on this road. Other than that it looked okay. And it wasn't so bad looking either. It wasn't crawling with ants or anything, that always makes you feel bad, and the rest of its body looked just like a normal bird, I mean a live bird, and I never really got to see a bird so close up on account of them always flying and

all. It was kind of nice to see, really. "Hey Roberta, come see this dead bird here."

"Hobie. What are you doing? Aren't you helping me look for that bottle?"

"No."

"Oh brother. Well I can't find that bottle anyway. Let's go."

"Maybe somebody already came by and cleaned the street."

"Hobie, nobody came and cleaned the street in the last half an hour. And besides, it's nighttime."

I guess that's all she had to say because she didn't say much else the whole time we walked back up the hill. She was kind of out of breath though. I think she was mad that she couldn't find that bottle and plus she can't walk up the hill as well as I can.

That night was the first time she got the idea for us to leave McCray Lane, which was a good thing especially if now all she can say is that it was bad luck all along. Only now we have a lot further of a walk. Our new address is 333 Stunt Road. It's not a real address, but that's what I write on my letters. Hobie, 333 Stunt. I mean McCray Lane wasn't a real address either if you think about it. The house had crumbled down five years earlier and all but the least of us hung on and lived in what buildings were left. We were okay. Though and that's what's so great about it. Nobody else could imagine it, and so after a while I gave up trying to explain it to them. "You just can't imagine it." I'd say.

Here's how it was: The roof intact all four walls, a wild yellow rose bush climbing the side grate, our own bedrooms all of us, a kitchen fire in what used to be the living room, cans of emergency food that someone had the sense to put away long ago when people did stuff like that. Up there we had a water tower. Phillip called it a cistern. So as long as we were quiet and didn't start any fires, we could stay up there as long as we wanted.

I didn't mind staying there one bit. I'd way rather sit up there sunning with the lizards and hoping to see a deer family than have to fish pennies out of a stupid fountain on Main Street any day. Phillip and Roberta liked to go down the hill a lot back then. Sometimes they'd stay all day, but Phillip was afraid to leave me there at night alone. I wouldn't have minded. Except sometimes other people tried to come there too. A lot of people come through on motorcycles on that road. You can always hear them coming from way off. Even if you didn't hear them, you'd see the birds

rush up out of the scrub, and you knew. There weren't a lot of noises that could do that. It was pretty clear we had the place set up first though, so I don't know how they thought they could stay. Besides, there were plenty of other places there, even on McCray Lane there were more. I don't know. I might've let them stay if it was up to me. They could go find their own, Phillip would say, "Go find your own." Once he said it to this guy who rolled in and landed at the carport thinking he'd found something special. The guy left just like that.

Our place was special though. In the spring, small mountain lupine cropped up blue and purple around the edge of the pavement that faded off and became dirt. You could walk the whole floor and never worry about falling through. Only the deck had holes. And the stairs were disconnected from the porch. But once you had it down you were fine. Raccoons lived upstairs, so we didn't go up there much. Not that I minded but Roberta said they sometimes bite you. They never bit me. Phillip taught us to put all our food away tight in these bins so the raccoons wouldn't come down and think they could get food there. "Let them get their own food," he would say. Oh, poor old lonely Phillip, I wonder if he misses it up here. Maybe I should write him a letter and tell him he could move back into McCray Lane if he wanted to now that we moved to 333 Stunt.

Roberta doesn't like me writing letters. She's afraid somebody's going to find us out. I doubt it. Only that one time did someone come looking for us. And that was only because I gave him a letter and wrote my address on it. I didn't want him to come there; I just wanted him to write me. You can't imagine how boring it gets up there with just Roberta to talk to. So anyway I wrote this one letter to this one guy who happened to come looking for me. I guess it was a good letter. It had my name and address on it. That's all. Hobie, 333 Stunt.



The Last

by Cyndera Quackenbush

"You're walking down this pathway at a profoundly crucial moment!"

Past the flowers
Past the parked cars
and forgotten movie stars

Past the memory that you have or haven't come so far
Past the people and the places they're going

She stands at the door
invokes Circe's sorcery
Cleopatra's calamity
Joan of Arc's justice
and the motion of Marilyn Monroe

Pass the stairs
on tiptoe
if you dare

come towards this door
if you dare

Fear is just a backstab of your past
the rest pushes you towards a secret proceeding

this is a desirous meeting
of tumultuous
fatefully lipped
needing

"I love you" says the street.
"I love you" says the concrete
"I love you" says the last woman you will ever meet.



on art

by elise sky

word play is an Art.
Art is Everything re-named, re-arranged, played, pushed, cooked,
cut, sucked in, and
gutted.
Everything is not only what
can be divided into sections or boxes or titles of this and that,
good and bad, woman and man.
Everything is not only what you want
or think it should be
it may not even be what you think you see.
Everything is everything, honey.
and you can be hurt or think it's a waste to talk of hate when love
is better, bigger, boom
but the first step in relieving reality
is to accept with rationality;
that acceptance leads to healing.
the acceptance of pain
and suffering
and acknowledging everyone is different
on their own trip
is the fix
for the frustration
of the Everything
that is Honest
Art.



The Maharaja of Monotonous Mayhem and Minuscule Mountains

by: Ryan Rainstar

The maharaja of monotonous mayhem and minuscule
mountains steals a child a night.
At one in the morn he is smashed and ready to fight.
He's a jazzy cat, sometimes fainting at the sound of a cello.

He's too hip for this world and dwells in isolation
Resulting every night in furious self-analyzation.
Yet, he never befriended a kind-hearted fellow.

Oh, what a glorious life to live in cultured segregation
In which the minuscule mountains play their legislation
In a funky haze of red and yellow.

He, the maharaja wears his golden, sand-treading shoes
As he sits in solitaire playing the blues.
A good tune, a marvelous tune, the ultimate in mellow.

Upon waking, he drinks another beer for a meal.
For upon no essence does he bend nor does he kneel.
How like an old drunkard, his drinking songs he does bellow.



religion reinvented

by elise sky

like the paper cup
sipped by lips after lips
leaks

like the prophet's pocket
picked
for a bigger place
on the porch of grace

old divinity
folded over and over
tends to crease



The Sound Of Drums

by Paulina Raeschelle Woods

The sound of drums beats in our ears and carries news afar
A village is being attacked and a marriage is taking place
A chief has died and his wife now mourns and everyone mourns
with her
A hunting party goes to the forest to get food for the tribe
Mothers sit around the fire cooking for the family

Then one day when the men are hunting, a large canoe can be seen
on the water
It is filled with men who are very strange to our eyes
They talk of peace and trading, how we can all benefit from the
union
We take them in on trust, give them food, water, and a place to
sleep

Whips and clubs, chains and drugs, taken away from home
We walk all night until our feet grow weary without any rest
In the morning our village will awake and notice that we are stolen
away
They will run out to the ocean and see the ships, and beat upon the
drums

Inside the ships dark and gloomy we pray unto the Lord
It seems as if He has turned His back and left us all alone
Out of the hold only once a week chained together without a
thought
Old bread and stale water is what we must live upon
Not many people make it to where we are going
Some jump and others just lie down and die

Upon reaching another land filled with these strange people we are
sold: sold off like precious stones
Babies are snatched from screaming mothers' arms and husbands
are separated from their wives
Sun or heat, rain or cold, we are treated no better than wild animals
Jump the broom and now we're wed, mass burials for our dead
We sneak around just to worship our God

Then brave people, from where the North Star points, start a train
of deliverance
A song is sung to tell the night when the train shall leave this place
Our very own Moses comes out of the wilderness to lead our train
to the Promised Land
We jump aboard and it starts up and not one of us is lost but some
want to turn back
Moses just pulls out her gun and says go on or die and so we all
make it on a wing and a prayer

Then comes a cry from far and wide about a war that could set us
free

Picking our weapons up and going out to fight, our men are true
warriors again

No one can stop us; no one will dare because we are a strong
people with God on our side

Freed by Abe and ready to go, the sound of the drums reach our
ears once more

Freedom is near and so we must leave and go, go away to a place
where we can be human once more

Follow the star and it will lead home, a home to call our own

A King arises among our people to help us become equal and
strong

We march and march, we sing and sing and get spit upon

Dogs are set upon us and strong water burns our legs

But never will we give up till we walk hand in hand with people

A gun goes off and out King falls, once again we hear the drums
We will never forget what our King has done to bring people
together as one

As all people turn towards their home mourning a great man's
passing

And from far away we see a bright light and lift our voices to joy,
joy because we know that his dream shall come true

We go to college and get jobs trying to make our way through life
But still on nights we look away, away to a land from long ago
A land that is rich in soil . . . and free of animosity
Someday we know that we will be free to live in peace with all
people

Then and only then will we sing a song that no one else can,
a song that says

Free at last, free at last, we as a people are free at last



A MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

by Savya Lee

I would like to boil it down to theory and pattern, to a specific formula. Like, last night for dinner I had: da de da da da. I took this vitamin, listened to that music, walked into the sunset or the dawn, smelled a triggering odor like roses or jasmine, watched the moon or the dark of the moon, sat under a blue light, made love, did some Yoga postures, read a certain spiritual book, meditated, chanted the names of God, danced. But none of this happened on that particular night.

What happened was, my husband needed a shirt. "Will you come with me to Sears?" he asked.

"Okay," I said, "I can look around."

At Sears, we separated. He went to the men's department and I went to the women's. This was a very small Sears. Racks of clothing left an aisle barely wide enough to pass through. Luckily, the store was not crowded.

As I moved between two rows of clothing, something happened. It was like the children in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, walking through their closet into the land of Narnia.

There was an imperceptible change in the air. A slowing down of motion, of breathing. I was aware of this without knowing I was aware — such a strange sensation. At the same time my skin began to vibrate. It felt like electrical pulses moving up and down my arms.

For a moment my eyes closed. When I opened them, everything had changed. I saw things as from a great distance, as if they were some sort of illusion.

The floor seemed unreal, as if it were made of air or dreams. As if, if I stepped too hard my feet would disappear beneath it.

The beginning of my passage through the clothes to the end — the coming out on the other side into the larger area of store — was like falling into another dimension. I stepped delicately, like a sleepwalker, my eyes wide open. My sight was clear yet detached. Waves of sensation surrounded me like bubbles, crept along my skin. I reached another rack of clothing, and still in my trance, sorted through some dresses, my fingers barely touching the fabric, not even recognizing it as fabric.

It was in this state that Richard found me. He knew immediately that I was not the self who had come with him that evening to buy a shirt. He took my arm and guided me to the car. Neither of us spoke.

When I was safely inside, I relaxed into the seat, still fragile, still remote. And had an insight. More than an insight, it was a revelation that flashed across my consciousness. A pure knowing, without doubt, that I was part of something larger than this body, even this planet.

I knew with absolute certainty, that taking care of the body was a farce, senseless. I knew I need never wash my face again, never comb my hair. I need never wash dishes nor clean house. It was all an absurd game.

Laughter bubbled up inside me, stretching, stretching — reaching upward, stopping just below the surface. I felt as if I could explode with laughter, just blow up into millions of bits and pieces of laughing bubbles, each one a separate, floating miracle of knowing, finally vanishing without a trace.

As I began to come down, I thought of the people in a spiritual group I had once belonged to and how they would burst into spontaneous laughter. And how I thought they were faking it to please the master or to impress each other. Now I understood — I knew.

By the time we arrived home it was over. Much to Richard's relief because I immediately began to wash the supper dishes that had been left.



Doodling

by Richard Lee

The ink is a crawl of black
on the white of the page. It
becomes a line of what I am
trying to say. The period
marks the end. The comma
says hello. Clauses touch.
Colons join. The poem floats
above, continues to go long
after the line has stopped
with no place to go. I don't
know what to say; I don't know
what I feel. It is Friday.
The sun is bright. The end
of a week. Here all life is
dancing at the end of my stick,
And I am too slow to know.



JUMPROPE

by Sharon Terleski

In the scarlet, rust and golden-covered boughs of the woods behind their house, the autumnal chill snapped at their ruddy cheeks. Two elfin-faced sisters, carefully bundled in matching jackets against the biting gusts, purposefully strode through leafy blankets up the hill. The imposing bow of the ship-like Pirates' Rock loomed ahead, grey and mysterious, through the towering white spires of birch, the site of childhood games and countless fantasies.

The Ice Age traveler had been lodged in the side of the hill creating a rocky stage, level with the terrain on one side. The front side presented a sheer drop of ten or more feet, an instinctive challenge to every youngster hell-bent on disproving gravity.

The day before, Pirates' Rock had played host to a dozen or so children, its leaden-hued granite festooned with brilliantly colored castoff jackets, as their gleeful play warmed the neighborhood bunch past the garments' usefulness. No one was sure who thought up the game. Leaves were gathered and dumped at the base of the cliff face creating a musty mattress several feet deep. The rustle of dried leaves hastily scooped up by the armfuls filled the woods with a symphony of swishing. A veteran of past games suddenly called out, "Com'on! That's enough! Get back here, you guys!"

That clarion signal brought in all the players, arms still laden with Mother Nature's discarded provender. The last of the leafy loads dropped and fluffed into place at the foot of Pirates' Rock, the leader issued the annual challenge, "Walk the plank or run back home! If you don't jump, you can't play with us, 'cause you're a crybaby!"

"I'll go!" one brave volunteer shouted. He performed a courage-building warm-up, instinctive to males yet arcane to females.

"Walk the plank! Walk the plank!" the others chanted.

"Shut up; I'm going!" he hollered back. His sudden leap off the edge caught everyone by surprise, the chant catching in their throats. His triumphant touchdown was greeted by appreciative roars of approval. "Ok, who's next?" he archly challenged.

"Me!" somebody answered. "I'm next!" The first plank-walker considerably re-fluffed the leafy mattress before stepping to the side.

"Walk the plank! Walk the plank!" The chanting resumed.

"Ok, I'm going! No, wait! I'm not ready, wait!" the second player wailed.

"Walk the plank!" the chanting continued.

"Ohhhh; are you gonna go or are you a crybaby?" the leader growled.

"Com'on, it's easy!" the first jumper assured.

"Ok." The second player announced, breathing heavily. And again, "Ok. Ok," and then really did jump, landing with an eruptive whoosh that sent up leaves in a geyser-like rainbow. "There. I did it," he reassured himself.

This latest feat already a thing of the past, the leader bugled again, "Com'on! Who's next? Are you playing with us or are you a crybaby?"

The two dainty sisters had watched these Olympian antics with great interest and curiosity. The older even dutifully gathered her share of leaves, sweeping them into place with the aid of several branches.

"Can anybody play?" she asked in what she thought was a loud voice. She was greeted with stony silence. "Hey!" she bellowed. Several heads appeared over the top of Pirates' Rock. They stared. They looked at each other then back at her. "Can anybody play?" she asked again.

"You're a *girl*, yanno," one of them lamely contributed.

"I know that, Stupid. I *said*, 'Can *anybody* play!'" she gamely returned.

The leader seemed impressed with this exchange. "Yeah!" he answered her. "No, leave her alone; I said she could," he added to his doubtful crew. "Let her try it."

The younger sister could not be persuaded to leave her sister's side, though her elder sibling explained that soon she would be right back at the bottom of the great boulder. Taking her sister by the hand, she climbed up the hill on the right side of Pirates' Rock. She tried once again to persuade her little sister to wait for her at the top of the granite Goliath. The apple-cheeked tot again refused. At the cliff's edge, the elder sister explained that she would be

jumping in the leaves below and that this time the youngster would have to stay put. Finally, the little girl gave in.

"I'll watch her," the leader chivalrously offered, trying to take the child's hand.

The younger sister violently shook his hand off hers, glaring at him from under her jacket's royal blue hood.

"Don't follow me, Carol!" the big sister warned.

"Walk th--! Whoa!" the stunned boys muttered, as the plucky girl took off without fanfare. Landing in the sheltering nest, she rolled out quickly, leaves sticking to her sweater, corduroy slacks, socks and hair. Laughter bubbled out of her until her head lolled back and her eyes teared.

"Yeah, that's great. Now get out of the way!" the leader had commanded. She obligingly patted the leaves back into shape without comment and trotted back up the well-worn path to the top of the hill. The game had continued long into the afternoon, until the first of the dinner whistles had sounded.

Today Pirates' Rock was uncluttered by children, its rocky face agelessly gaunt in its solitude.

"Where'th alla ulla kidth?" the junior sister asked.

"Nobody's here 'cept us, Carol," the older one responded. Together they unwound a colorfully braided jumprope with pink plastic handles. "You go first," she suggested to her little sister.

The top of Pirates' Rock was larger than their cemented patio at the back of their house; Carol could easily skip rope in a circle without fear of falling off the steep edge of the front face. She handed the jumprope to her sister when she grew tired.

"Hee-yuh, Thehwee," she offered.

The two played, alternating turns, chanting singsong jumprope rhymes, completely absorbed in their own pastime. The little girls' singing drowned out the sound of approaching footsteps, whisking briskly through the crisp autumn jetsam.

Two teenaged toughs, one carrying a metal pole recently harvested from a neighborhood tool shed, stepped onto the granite surface of Pirates' Rock, grabbing the jumprope out of Carol's hands as they passed her. The older sister pulled her younger sibling behind her.

"Who are you?" the taller boy asked smoothly. "This is our rock, you know."

"It is not!" the protective older sister shot back, "and give her back her jumprope!"

The second boy answered by wordlessly lowering the pointed end of the pole in her direction. The first merely chuckled.

"Oh, this is your rock?" he chided.

"No, Stupid; this is Pirates' Rock. It's everybody's rock." She bypassed the sullen pole-wielder and reached out for the jumprope.

"It's mine, now," the taller boy teased. The other one angrily swung the pole over the girl's head, bringing it down between his friend and her, narrowly missing her hand. She jerked her hand back, trying to keep an eye on both boys at once. The older boy was grinning ear to ear while he tied the jumprope into a loop resembling a noose. "You sure you want it back?" he asked slyly. Throwing the loose end over a nearby branch, leaving the loop dangling, he motioned to the wary older sister. "Com'ere. You have to come get it if you want it."

Taking a half-second to compose a decision, the older sister spun on her heel, grabbed her little sister's wrist firmly and stomped off Pirates' Rock through the brittle fall carpet. Heading into the thickest part of the woods, she led her sister on a twisting route through the lower bushes, finally pausing beneath one. Pushing the low-hanging branches aside, she shoved her fear-muted sibling inside its sheltering hut-like cranny, diving in after her. Undoing their jackets, blindingly blue and dangerously conspicuous, she hid them under their crouching bodies, suddenly grateful for brown knit sweaters. The teens raced past the sequestering bush, the ground thundering beneath their tiny hands and legs as the girls watched the boys' blue-jeaned legs disappear.

The older one strained to hear any sound of the boys for several minutes, hearing instead only the last songs of birds not yet flown south. She ventured out, peering between the trunks of weathered white birch. Feeling the ground with her hands, no thundering footsteps jarred her palms. The rustle of leaves was only the swishing fall music of the wind.

She pulled her sister out from under the bush, leading her by the hand through evergreen blueberry bushes and stark white birch trunks with peeling bark skins. "Too big for their britches, I guess," her father had answered when she'd asked why birches peeled their bark. At the edge of the woods, she shoved her sister behind one

of those birches and searched across the wide expanse of grassy field for any sign of the boys.

All clear, she decided, then out loud to her sister, “*Run!*”

They raced across the savannah-like field, around the two-storied red brick row house, past the tall grey picketed laundry-line yard, around the last corner and two doors down, threw open the front door and burst into their own hallway as though the Hounds of Hell were on their heels.

“Welcome home,” their father said mildly, bemused by their explosive entrance.

“Daddy, duh bad boyth chathed uth and Thehwee gave dem *my* jumpwope!” Carol responded.

Utterly done in by this betrayal, the older sister trudged up the stairs with her mouth still agape, unjustly confined to quarters yet comforted by the thought: solitude has no sisters.



A Reflection

by Fabianna Borghese

Going up Yucca Mesa Road to my house, I would pass by a mailbox with the name B. Gray written on it. The very first time I saw it the name Bob Gray immediately came to mind. No matter that there are a million other names, both male and female, that begin with the letter ‘B’. I thought that it could be none other than Bob. I became very excited and my brain started working a mile a minute. Bob Gray! Bob Gray in Yucca Valley?

How lucky I am, why we are practically neighbors. Wouldn’t it be nice to have visits and talk about the good old days over a cup of tea? We could become such good friends. I got really excited over the thought of it. How neat it would be to hear those stories first hand. Bob Gray was quite a storyteller. He could tell me what it was to fly B-25s and what the guys who flew with him were really like.

I started recalling the events of Bob Gray’s illustrious career in the US Army Air Force. How he left his ranch and his horse in Texas to join the Army as a pilot. How he made the smoothest take-offs and landings of his class. How he volunteered to make one of the most dangerous missions of the war. How he was one of the first pilots of the war to actually see Japan. Then one particular event hit me. The crash over India during a bombing raid that took his life.

I had forgotten about that. Bob Gray had been dead for sixty years. The happy picture of visiting a white haired old man in a little house full of mementos from many years gone by vanished from my thoughts like a snuffed candle. Instead the picture that was left was an old photo of a 25 year-old man with a brave look of determination in his eye. Bob Gray who never lived past 25. Then the greatest tragedy of the war hit me hard. There had been many men like Gray and many even younger who had never lived to grow old. They never saw their hair turn gray or watched the wrinkles start to form on their faces. The great tragedy of the war was that today a huge chunk of 80 year-old American men are missing.

Bob Gray didn’t live long enough to retire to his little house in the desert on Yucca Mesa road. He will forever be a young man. His old age was sacrificed and he is immortally youthful. Everyday

that I pass by that mailbox, the one in front of the little house nestled between some tall trees with the name B. Gray, I remember Bob Gray and all the men like him and what they gave to me living sixty years after their death.



BIOLOGICAL ANOMALY

by Sean Blau

The sad man sits in his chair and cries
As smells and colors leak out his eyes.
His acid tears eat away the ground
Along with the children next floor down.



A MAN WITH REFERENCES

by Evelyn Haggard

“I Ramanapa. I do massage. You like me do you?”

The small man, dressed in a white cotton shirt and long cotton pants tied at the waist, approached the railing bordering the hotel breezeway. Deeply furled wrinkles accentuated his smile as he offered his hand to my husband.

Jerry resisted. “I don’t think so, I’m relaxing. Thanks anyway.”

“I have references.” He presented the remains of an old journal, greasy and stained from perspiration and age, bent to conform to the shape of the pocket where it was stored. “Read,” he said.

“That’s nice,” my husband responded, ignoring the book. “Not interested. Maybe another time.”

“Here ma’am, you like. I have friends, American, English, Dutch. They like massage. You like, too?”

I took the book, carefully turning the crumbling pages, some unreadable, smeared and aged, comments from people all over the world, praising him generously. “This is very nice. But maybe tomorrow. We’re tired.”

“Here I show you, free feet rub. You like.” He began removing Jerry’s sandals. With a shrug my husband relented and the man began to work; first the ankles, then the heels and finally the toes. “Wow, you should try this,” Jerry groaned. “Can’t believe how good it feels. What’s the charge for a complete massage?”

“Three dollar. You like?”

Within a short time the gifted healer was working diligently in our room. Jerry was snoring loudly. “He very relaxed. He sleeping. I do you?”

“Oh, no.” No way was he going to “do me”, not a perfect stranger.

“I do your feet? No charge.”

“Well, alright, but on the breezeway. Not in my room. Okay?”

“Sure ma’am. I do good. You like.”

He did good all right. As his strong hands moved over my ankles and feet, I found myself “oohing” and “ahhing” while several friends on their way to the lobby stopped to watch. Since this was not the AAA hotel promised by our tour guide, my friends

were surprised to see me enjoying the luxury of a foot rub. Varanasse, India was the second stop for our U. S. tour group.

“Would you like Ramanapa to do you too?” I asked, grinning. Only three dollars.”

“For a foot massage?”

“Oh, no, the whole thing.”

“Great, how about tomorrow after our morning tour?”

“What do you think, Ramanapa? You might have more business tomorrow. “We’re leaving for Calcutta in the late afternoon, so be here early.”

The man’s eyes lit up. “I be here. I do good.”

“Where did you learn massage?” I asked after the others left.

“My father,” he answered matter-of-factly. Then after a pause, “My grandfather and his father too. All know massage. Many years we work.”

“And your children?”

He paused. “One son. He auto mechanic. I proud.”

The caste system in India has changed, allowing opportunities for choices of occupation. Ramanapa wasn’t eager for his son to follow in his profession. He proudly talked about his 17 year-old son, his wife and his own desires to fulfill the needs of his family. There was a kind of urgency in his manner. I wondered if he or his family had eaten today since it was getting close to lunchtime.

“Let’s invite Ramanapa for lunch.” I whispered to Jerry after he awakened. “I don’t suppose he’s eaten.”

“He won’t like what we have, but I’ll ask.” Jerry and I had packed protein bars and envelopes of nutri-meal to be mixed with bottled water for our lunches. All our other meals would be provided by the hotel.

“We’d like to share our lunch.” Jerry offered.

Ramanapa, embarrassed, lowered his gaze to the floor. “You good to me,” he commented. Cautiously, he tasted the drink. “Good.” His eyes brightened and he took another sip, slowly, savoring the taste.

“Aren’t you going to try the protein bar?” I asked. “It’s very good.”

“I know. For my son.” He grinned as he patted his shirt pocket where the bar was protruding.

“You eat it,” I urged, “and take two more, one for your son and one for your wife.”

His eyes watered. “For me?” he asked. Carefully he placed a bar in his other pocket and unwrapped one for himself. Then, chewing each bite thoroughly, he sat quietly, as if in meditation. When he finished, he thanked us, promising to come at noon the next day. Then he bowed, climbed over the railing, and disappeared beyond the walled courtyard.

The next day after returning from a tour to the crematoriums situated on the banks of the Ganges River, everyone was lined up, eager for a massage. True to his word Ramanapa was right on time. I consented to a full massage since my legs hurt, my feet ached and my back was in knots. But first we shared our lunch.

This time the quiet man was excited to eat with us. We felt energized and uplifted by his contagious waves of joy and gratitude as he ate the protein bar. “My son like,” he smiled. “I like, too.”

After lunch he began massage on me. Strong and gentle hands smoothed out the knots in my body. They felt warm, almost hot, as he manipulated my back and arms. His powerful fingers sensed each sore spot, and before long I was sleeping.

He left for other parts of the hotel, eventually giving massages to every member of our tour. Several hours later he came to say good-bye, his pockets bulging with money.

“You’re a rich man, Ramanapa,” Jerry teased. “If we could ship you to the States you’d become even richer.”

The man smiled, pleased to be appreciated. “I give to my wife and son.” He patted his shirt pocket where dollar bills were poking out. “You come back, I do you free,” he offered. “America nice, but I love India.”

He made well over a hundred dollars that day. Everyone paid him more than his asking price, but how can a monetary value be placed on such a service? We all sensed that we had experienced something unique and special, a once in a lifetime encounter.

I wrote an entry for his book, thanking him for his unique ability. He tucked it away with all the other comments. Then, after hugs and bows, a lump of emotion rose in my throat as we watched him climb nimbly over the railing for the last time. We would never see him again, but I’ll be remembered whenever he offers his skills to another weary tourist. “Read,” he’ll say. “I have references.”



Good Old Dad

by Jennifer M. Hill

There we were. Mom, Michael, and I, sitting at the dinner table and waiting on good old Dad. Mom had had the food ready since seven, the time that Dad was supposed to arrive home. I had done my part, and well too. Mom gave me her standard praise stating, "The table is set beautifully." Mom was already on her second time around asking me how school was that day when Mike started crying and asked permission to go to bed. Permission was instantly denied, as he had not eaten dinner. Dinner could not be eaten until all of the family was together; that was unheard of at my house. Finally, we heard the sound of Dad's 1974 Chevrolet Caprice roll up into the driveway. Going by my Dad's track record, this was an early night as the clock only read five minutes before ten o'clock. Mike and I were hungry and tired.

Dad walked in the front door mumbling his predictable excuses about traffic being horrendous and work being exhausting and as he sat down at the table in his usual "I am here now. What are you all waiting for?" demeanor. He actually had the audacity to ask Michael why he had been crying. To this day, I do not know what came over me, and there was no doubt in my mind as to what was appropriate and what my place as a child was. Nevertheless, I finally snapped, and with all of my built up frustration and resentment inside, I yelled, "He's crying because you take two and a half, sometimes even three hours to make a fifteen minute drive home and you always say the same old lies. Everyone knows where you were. Who do you think you are fooling? Normal children have eaten dinner and are asleep by this time, and you ask why he's crying. Don't pretend that you care. You know that we wait on you to eat; Michael is so hungry that his stomach hurts, and he's too tired to eat."

There was a look of astonishment on my father's face. As fear consumed my entire body, I held my breath, and waited for a response. My father had never hit me before, but I just knew that this was going to be the first time. I was wrong. He did not hit me. Instead, he looked at me and said, "Where exactly do you believe that I have been?" I did not know what to do or say at that moment. Did he actually expect a response or was he asking a rhetorical question? Was this my "get out of jail free" card? I did

not know whether I should intentionally give the wrong answer so I would be in less trouble, or maybe I should just throw it out there and let him try the truth for a change. I wished he had just hit me, as that would have been so much easier. I finally decided that silence was golden and stood there seemingly speechless.

Just as I felt the glare of my father depleting me, the air began to thicken and the room started to close in on me. All of a sudden my brother busted out with, "You eat at your girlfriend's house every night before you come home, while we are stuck here and Mom makes us wait and wait for you. Then, when you finally get here, half of the time you don't even bother to eat again with us. Instead you just plop down in your easy chair and watch television until three o'clock in the morning." No sooner did the last syllable roll off of Mike's tongue, then he dashed off down the hall and into his bedroom for the night. I guess he was the smarter sibling. I wished that I had thought to run away after my commentary, after all, as the old cliché goes, "out of sight, out of mind!" My mother finally broke the uncomfortable silence by saying, "Make a plate and take it into your room. I'll wake you up in the morning." To this day, I am thankful to her for saving me. Little did I know that the events that had taken place that evening would change the relationship between my dad and me forever.

Dad was rarely ever seen without a cigarette burning in his hand; in the event that you witnessed him without one, you would not have to wait long before he reached for one and lit up. I really felt sorry for my father as he unnecessarily stressed all of the time. Dad was a Quality Assurance Supervisor for a big electronic engineering company that made the electronic parts for airplanes and large jets. I know that he was important and that all of his friends, colleagues and business associates thought that Dad was the greatest. They frequented the house; we always had some uppity person over on Saturday nights that we had to impress.

Personally, I think that Dad would have been all right if he was not such a big control freak and if he would have taken the time to prioritize his life. It is my belief that he only attempted to control others, as he knew that he did not have any control over his own life. I felt sorry for my father. He had multiple extramarital affairs, and still, he was unhappy and seemed lonely all of the time. He made others unhappy and in his half-hearted attempts to be a father, he pushed Michael and me further away.

Our relationship never was the same, and it is a good thing. We learned to respect one another and realized that just as we ourselves were not perfect, it was unfair for us to expect each other to be. Although what I had said was appalling and offensive, I am so glad that I said it, as I learned to communicate openly with my father.

I suppose that it is true when people say that there is the light at the end of the tunnel and I believe that it is vital to include the happy ending of this story. Dad has drastically improved, as if he has become an entirely different person. After twenty-some-odd years of marriage with my mother, he remarried and has been successfully so for over twelve years. He has become a wonderful father and for about the past eight years, has been a far better grandfather to my children than he was a father to his own. Who would have ever thought that this miraculous transformation could have taken place? We can never go back, and that is a good thing. I would never want to; we have a wonderful future to look forward to. Life is just beginning and I can honestly say that I do not believe that there has been a closer father and daughter throughout history than we have become over the years.



The Twisted Face

by Sandra Griesmeyer

Evening came quietly out here. Jenny enjoyed these last moments of Sam's day. What an imagination! Sam sat with the collection of her long lean dolls with broad shoulders and tiny waists, around her. How could a four year old remember which voice belonged to which doll's personality? Each doll was purchased when they called to Sam from the shelf in the Thrift Store. She recognized them and called them by name from the first moment.

"Jeffrey, why can't you help me clean the house?" said the Kathy doll to the Jeffrey doll.

"Cleaning house is woman's work! Men work in the yard." The Jeffrey doll waddled off to the throw rug under the table.

Where did she get these ideas? No man influenced Sam's life that way, her father had walked out when she was two. Sam never spoke of him, but Jenny missed him terribly. Missing him made her ache from loneliness, which made her angry for trusting so much in one person, which made her angrier for believing his lies and promises.

"Anybody home?"

"Uncle Tim!" was Sam's immediate response. Abandoning the dolls where they fell, the child ran to be swooped up in the arms of her father's brother. Holding her tightly, he swung her around, her feet nearly touching the chandelier.

"Hi, Kiddo! Hi, Jen. Thought I'd stop by on my way home. How was your day?"

"Sam, Uncle Tim can hear your prayers and tuck you in. That's a treat isn't it? Pick up the dolls and put them in their house, please."

"Yes, Mommy. But if Jeffrey doesn't behave, I will have to twist his face off."

"What?" the two adults answer together.

"Well, he'd better!"

Watching her stalk off towards her room, Jenny's eyes met her brother-in-law's. "I don't know where that came from. The last several days, she has been talking about twisting someone's face off. We've talked about mean language, but she says this is different."

"Tim, I am so tired." Tears filled Jenny's eyes as she fell back into her chair.

"It's the accident. Give it some time. You only got out of the hospital two days ago? That's why I stopped in. Why don't I sit here, after I tuck Sam in, and you can get some rest. Just go to bed, and I'll keep watch over both of you. Will you let me do that?"

"I don't know. Whenever I shut my eyes I see that car coming at me. What if I'd been killed? What if Sam hadn't been thrown clear? Oh, I'm so scared for her."

"I know. Let me put her down. I'll be back."

Jenny met Tim at the top of the stairs. "Your being here has been the end of me. I am exhausted. Will you stay until I am asleep?"

"I'll be on the back porch." He kissed her forehead and headed down stairs.

Nights with Steven had been so peaceful. They would tuck their baby into bed and rock on the back porch swing. The last two years had been so scary without him; she didn't know how she'd survived. Then one week ago today, right after she'd picked Samantha up at preschool, a car had come flying through the intersection. When she closed her eyes she could still see it even after five days in the hospital with a severe concussion. Her legs were burned because the cars had burst into flames before the fireman had gotten her free of the smashed vehicle. Sam had been thrown clear. The child locks had not worked. The door popped open and she was thrown out. Sammy looked so little with the great big cast on her arm and the ringlets gone at the left side other face. Jen's first night in the hospital, Sammy had been there as well. Then Sammy had stayed with Tim and Christine waiting for Mommy to come home. Finally they were home again together. They were home. They were safe. Tim was downstairs keeping watch.

Slowly Jenny felt her exhausted body begin to let go. Perhaps sleep would come tonight. Quietly her tears soaked the pillow, as the first of only two sleeping tablets the doctor had given her began to take hold. She counted the muscles as they relaxed.

Dawn was bright and clear. Jen's head was cloudy and dull. The water from the shower cleansed and rinsed, slowly she changed the temperature to freezing and wake-up. The cooling effect chased the steam from the bathroom mirror and from her

mind. Just what she needed, another day with Sammy. It would be a good day because her daughter saw only good in people. Today was a field trip for Sammy's class; they were going to see how bread was made.

"Mommy! My bike is gone. I even put it away and today it is gone"

"When did you put it away? You can't even steer with your arm in a cast."

"Last night. Before we had supper Jeffrey had to go back to work. I put him in the basket and pulled the bike. Now it's gone."

"We can call the police when we come home. Right now we have to go. You're going to the bakery today. Hurry."

"Probably Jeffrey got it out after I went to bed and he didn't put it away." Sammy said, crawling into the car "He never puts anything away. He needs to get his face twisted off. He really does."

Tightening Sammy's seatbelt. Jenny was concerned with this new phrase of her daughter's. "Sammy, please don't use mean language. People do not twist other people's faces off."

"Well, they should. Some people need it."

"Are we going to drive by Miss Thomas's house? She says she likes it when we come by and wave at her."

The wonders of a four year old. One minute she wants to twist someone's face off and the next she wants to go out of their way to wave to a lonely neighbor. "Sure, Honey, we will."

"Kim, I'm going to stop by my house at lunch. I might be a little late getting back. Sammy's bike was missing this morning. I need to cruise the neighborhood looking for it. Can I get you anything while I'm out?"

"Yes, one of those wonderful sandwiches from Henderson's Deli. I'll get you some money," her manager replied. "You know, you could deliver the paperwork for the Anderson project. The architect is just beyond your house, that would make it a business errand and you would be on the clock." She suggested.

"Thank you. I'll be back as quickly as possible. I just want to give the place a look-see. Sammy has had a rough few days and she drives that bike a hundred miles a day, when her arm isn't in a cast. I need to see if I can find it."

Leaving the office. Jenny headed east through the little suburban community she and Steven had chosen to make their

home and rear their children. Streets were quiet and trees grew from one side to the other forming a protective canopy in the middle. It was autumn. She and Steven loved walking through the leaves. Steven was perfectly happy to crunch through them until they were mulch. They had laughed and rolled in the leaves of the big oak in the backyard. That was why they'd chosen that house. Steven had it all laid out in his mind; the swing set here, the playhouse there. Now she was finding it hard to crunch through the leaves with Sammy, determined not to let her memories steal her daughter's childhood.

The house sat back from the street, and the yard was filled with leaves needing to be crunched. When they'd learned Samantha was coming, Steven had pulled out the old fence and replaced it with a wooden one. He'd demonstrated how easy it was for a child to climb the chain links by going up and over himself, landing on his head for his trouble. He still had the scar on the palm of his hand where he'd grabbed the top at the last minute to keep from doing just what he'd done anyway.

Jenny reached for the latch and let herself into her backyard. The tricycle was not there. Jenny knew Jeffrey hadn't taken it, but someone had. She checked the rest of the yard and up and down the alley. Nothing. She circled the block. Still nothing. It was rusty and needed paint, but Sammy loved it. They would check the thrift shops on Saturday. Sammy would be heart-broken. Maybe they would find one before her cast was removed.

That evening, Jen and Sammy drove to Christine and Tim's. Tim and the boys took Sammy to the ice cream store and Jen shared girl talk. She looked forward to these evenings. Christine was a teacher, and welcomed a chance to talk with someone over eight. Tonight they checked out a movie the kids wanted to see.

When Tim returned with the children, he put the ice cream in the freezer and spied the popcorn bowl on the table, said, "Ooooo, not a good sign. You ate in here? Do we need to worry about the movie?"

"No, once word gets out, they won't want to see it. The acting is terrible, the special effects are worse than Peter's Thanksgiving play."

With Tim and the children back, Jen scooped up Sam and headed home. With Samantha snug in her bed, Jen went to sit on the back porch. She knew at once she wasn't alone. Quietly she left

the porch and stepped into the yard. In the dim glow of the street lamp, she saw someone heading for the back gate. His walk made her heart ache. "Stephen?" She called, afraid to believe. He froze, not turning around. "Stephen, it is you."

He turned, his heart wanting to see her face, his mind afraid she would see his. "Jennifer," he said, in a whisper she could barely hear. She walked to him. When she was just a step away, he moved to meet her, coming into the light from the window. She closed the distance between them, taking his face in her hands. "I have missed you so."

"Jen, look at me. I couldn't come home looking like this." Her hands felt the roughness of his face. It was covered with scars, but his eyes were those of the man she loved.

Before she could reply, they heard Sam. "You came back! You came back!" Samantha called through the porch window. Before he could move she ran from the house and slammed herself against his leg in a giant hug. "You came back. See, Mommy, he's the man with the twisted face. He took me out of the car and didn't hurt my arm like the men with the bed did. He didn't hurt me in the fire."

For the first time, the pieces were in order. Samantha's seatbelt had not failed. The safety locks had held. Sam had been rescued by the man with the twisted face. He bent to pick her up and surround her with his own hug.



A New Perspective

by Jillian Burkett

Teachers are like mothers in disguise. I didn't realize that until I read a book by Philip Ruth. Every once in a great while, you experience a teacher and their knowledge, but most of the time, this is not the case. Teachers have a tendency to do the bare minimum, at least that is the impression I have received from high school educators. I realized this after teaching my very own summer school class.

I arrived at the high school on the first day of summer school feeling anxious yet tired because my sleep was interrupted by the alarm clock going off at the crack of dawn. I had forgotten how awful it was to wake up early for school purposes. But I was there and since I was only eighteen at the time, I blended in perfectly. A yard duty official even scolded me to get to class. I of course set him straight with a little sass of my own. Walking into the classroom was surreal. My assistant was already there, she was an elderly lady who liked to wear hats, but that really has nothing to do with this particular incident. She asked me in a very snippy tone if I could "please sit down and read the syllabus" to myself. This was very frustrating to me because my assistant didn't even realize that I was not a student. I wanted so badly to be recognized as an adult with authority. I even wore my most professional looking outfit, but I guess I had adolescent teenager written all over me. I explained to her who I was and she apologized, but it made me a little disappointed that this lady was ready and willing to be rude to a student before class had even begun.

Class started at 7:15 AM and I called roll. The class was large. It was actually two freshmen English classes combined. I was amazed that this many students had failed the most basic English class offered by the high school. I found out from my assistant that the day had already been planned. I learned that to be on top of things, you must be at least two days ahead of the students. I thought it sounded like good advice. My assistant was an experienced educator and knew the ins and outs of every possible situation that could occur in the classroom. We later ended up handing out a bunch of boring packets and going over the syllabus. The classroom I was assigned to was bare and uninteresting. We were using the French classroom over the summer, so to safeguard

it from any pesky freshmen thieves; the teacher had stripped the walls of any photos, flags or posters. I knew that it was not a positive learning environment. The room was very quiet as the kids worked on page after page of a gigantic grammar packet. My job was to walk around and observe. I learned from my observations that most of the kids must have had a learning deficit disorder because they were doing anything, but working on their packets. I saw kids just staring into the corner of the room, and some of them were doodling on their desks. I tried to keep them focused, but most of them just attempted to pry all of the answers out of me. They could tell I was new. They could sense it. I didn't want to be the typical substitute that gets taken advantage of and loses complete control over the class. Nope, I needed to be firm and so I was.

I figured out that I could use my age to my advantage. I don't intend to sound self-involved, but I could see the girls in the class sizing me up like I was one of their own and many of them struck up conversations with me about where I got my purse or what my car looked like. Many of them wanted to know all about my love life as well. I tried to ignore these questions, but one student in particular put me in a tough situation. He was only fifteen, but he looked like a grown man. He had a problem keeping his rowdy attitude at bay and he couldn't help but make sexual comments toward me each time I helped him with a grammar question. After the third time, I told him that I'd either send him to the principal's office for sexual harassment or call my boyfriend and notify him of the situation.

Looking back on this, I can totally see my immaturity coming out, but at least he left me alone. The 5-7 minute break finally came and I was relieved. I wanted to talk to my assistant in the privacy of the empty classroom and discuss with her my concerns and questions. This was a job, but also a learning experience for me. She answered my questions, but not so thoroughly and then began to throw out general bits of advice. She told me about how awful it is to come to school with a hangover, so the best thing to do is to show a movie. She said that this was a well-known trick around the campus. All that I can say is that it was too much information. I wasn't ready to hear about the secret lives of my picture perfect educators. She was old, but she still had a little pizzazz left in her because she started gossiping about her and her younger marine

boyfriend. Once again, too much information. I certainly didn't want to know if she was up the night before eating chilidogs and drinking beer with a bunch of guys at the marine base. I suppose she wanted to impress me. I personally thought that it sounded like a bit of a mid-life crisis.

Class resumed and so did the mundane packets. We moved on to vocabulary, but there was still no true interaction between the class and I. I wanted to address the class and explain some of the directions and maybe even go over some lessons on the board, but my assistant said that summer school was not made for that type of thing. I think she is wrong, but I obeyed her instruction. Her motto was to do the least amount of prep work as possible for the classroom. I couldn't believe that this is the advice she was choosing to share with me. I didn't want to learn how to cut comers and how to be lazy. The day ended around 12:50. I was so happy the day was over. I enjoyed the kids. They seemed kind of sweet, including the boys. I was more relieved to get away from my assistant. She was driving me crazy with her negativity and incessant laziness. I went home and called my mom. It was kind of disappointing to know that I'd have to go and do the same thing the very next day and for the rest of the summer.

Being a teacher is a true achievement, but bum out is inevitable. I think sometimes teachers regard students as pests rather than human beings. I can identify this behavior because I am still a student and I could relate to those kids in that class. Of course they're going to fail if doing "busy work" is the solution to passing. They're human and they need to interact with one another. After the summer school session was over, only 10% of the students passed. I know it wasn't my fault, but I felt guilty. My assistant didn't express any of these same feelings. I guess she was used to it. I guess this is education in America.



Dharma Day

by Richard Westman

despite all the i am
that i am
that i possess
an illusion am i yet.

i am an aethyr image
alight upon . . . the surface
of the mirror's motion . . .

so long as
i am, as i am . . .
unconscious . . . i display the meaning
i am hiding in every false pretense . . .
awake . . . i am the ageless eternity
and i know this myself to be.



Something Alive In This Deadness

by Cheryl Colson

I feel there is something alive in this deadness.
It calls me in to the deepness of the mountains, over the sand and stone.

All of a sudden my footsteps are all I can hear.
After a while they are also mute.

When I am alone, my spirit loses itself in the wind.
I am swept across the earth and carried away from the security of my being.

The intensity of the sun singes my eyes and I am blinded by the radiance of the desert.
An observant coyote cocks back his head and lends me a howling cry.

The brush and the boulders are pulling at my soul as I am pulling at theirs.
An exchange of energies with this fierce power and I am humbled.

I inhale a breath of hot air and it clears my mind and softens my grief.
I am freed by the virtue and kindness of the living world.

An eternal essence blankets me and I am serene.
I slowly drift to the ground and am greeted by my footsteps.

A white lizard stirs under a weed, and his modest eyes meet with my own.
We stare at each other for a while, our gaze unwavering.

And then I walk on.
There is something alive in this deadness.



We are Savages

by Caroline Badel

Amongst the silence of unspeakable thoughts
Everlasting darkness awaits
Give them freedom, death is better than this . . .
Their insignificance exist only for We . . .

Bodies imprisoned
Laid side by side, pieces go here and there
Savages, Savages, come all to see
That cruelty among the ugly feed upon these bodies.

Dithering souls incarcerated by their monster
They loaf to that melancholy fate
Why does the burden become ignored to society
It is the dominance of greed!

They endure the death of fathers and mothers
And the death of their children
Where do they go?
To plates of the We that feeds them

We do not care for suffering of the Animals
They are mere Fowls and Cattle!
For Animals don't have rights!
Because the Savages, have the rights of Animals . . .



The Anticipated Cure

by Roderick Hurtt

Phase I

The scars have been made wounds
Cutting my self-esteem vessels internally,
Will I ever be healed
From these seemingly perpetual consequences of life?

Allowing my immune system to be infected with this
Contagious disease,
Will death bring my relief from this overwhelming
Pain I feel?

But yet I refuse to hate them who hate me
That use scornful words towards me,
Will I find Life
With a greater gleam?

Though I wrap the wounds and scars with gauze
The infectious air-borne disease of words will never
Allow them to heal.

Phase II

Constantly I am being sliced left and right
From disbelief people use against me,
They doubt my capability, sovereignty, and the supernatural
Spirit leading me

My blood drips with the cuts of others,
That have insisted on cutting my flesh

Tearing the muscles and cartilage,
And more so my spiritual bones

The superficial appearance makes it obvious to behold;
The scabs that accumulate the puss,
And the exhumation of bones from my flesh,
Of a person's ominous words

This takes me from home to the "Hospital of Regret for Living"

Conspicuously as it is, people don't accept
The disease that they have wrought into being

Phase III

The antibodies of my impudent blood
Are in their last phase of combat

With no family or friends around me,
At least that's how it seems,
I prepare to give up,
Inhale my last breath and restrain from taking that
Last significant step of acquiescence
Down the cold floor of seduction,

But just before I do, with this last unction
Of having just a mustard seed of faith
I take up my syringe of faith,
The everlasting cure of all diseases,
And inject into me the words
That I utterly project from the 23rd Psalm,

Feeling the weakness lift out of my bones,
Feeling the strength being replenished again unto me,
Feeling the commencement of a brighter day coming,

Like precipitating waters journeying
Back to the clouds where they began,
Only to reoccur again, I rise,

I walked back down the hall to embark
On my quest once again,
With the word of God
In my hand.



The Commute

by Angela Callister

Garage doors grind open
The desert colored car comes alive,
With gentle prompting it exits suburbia
Las Colinas - Westward Ho - Adams - Fred Waring - Washington.

Right, right, right - left, right, right -
Military trucks parked beside the road
Young men in camouflage
How many more will old men send to war?

Highway 110 West
Someone's expensive red toy
Crushed by a dark, brutal SUV
La Quinta - Palm Desert - Indian Wells - Cathedral City.

Into the Valley of the Wind Machines
An intruder in an alien land
Life out of sync
Right again, curving upward.

Highway 62, Twenty-nine Palms Highway
Horse power on command
Human ears pop
Morongo Valley, Yucca Valley.

Dark brown mountains brood
There is a god
"Choosing not to choose is a choice."
"Bang! God spoke and it happened."

A Pepsi truck lumbers up the mountain
Bringing relief to the Morongo Basin.
Miniature Yucca Valley snowplows
Push the detritus of the floods of '03.

Swarthy, brown man, with coffee,
Crosses from no where to no where

"Cactus. Dig your own."
"Little sins grow up fast."

An orange Laidlaw
Parked in the sand
Waiting
For human cargo.

Towheaded boy, with no cheeks of tan,
Shuffles the dust but carries a heavy load.
If attacked, no where to go
No safe haven for the endangered.

Atticus Finch, where are you?
Little Joshua Tree
Left, left
An educational oasis in the desert.



AND WITH A FISH FOR MY TEACHER, FEAR NO MORE

by Scott E. McKone

I awake to a strange new world. Obscured only by the clear water that is my home, I see rays of light, distorted as it shines through limbs of objects that tower above my pool. I am small now, but as my journey begins, I will grow strong and learn much, traveling to the destination where so many others have gone before me.

Even though in fear, I do find footing in these strange surroundings, and while slow at first, I am thrown into the river of life that leads to a great basin. But I know I must survive there, if I am to make my journey back here only a few seasons from now.

So with faith and instinct, I find the road is not so difficult an obstacle to overcome, and I continue.

Faster now, as my temporary home is dumped into the river that grows swifter. I am pushed closer to that place I must go.

Oh the joy, as I move towards the basin, and with it now in sight, I in a great leap of faith, clear a barrier of sand in its foolish attempt to separate me from the second leg of my destiny.

And then, I land, and with my first breath, I choke. I taste it. This basin is salty. It fouls my breath, and burns my eye and irritates the wing on my back that guides me.

It's funny how they call this great ocean a sea, as this sea is where I will clearly see the ways of creatures that dwell upon the dry lands that surround me. The same creatures that walk on two legs, the ones who hunt me and call me The King. The ones who divided me so five thousand could be fed. The ones who say I have a brain no larger than a pea, and yet, they use the oil in mine to fuel their own, and use the meat of my flesh to nourish their own.

Over the centuries, it's been imperative that I survive, for without me, neither would they. So I do live. I learn to breathe again in the murky depths of this place, where I become tolerant of the salt that fouls my breath, and burns my eye, and irritates my fin.

And like a clock that keeps track of time, in the seasons of these waters, they wind from warm to cool and cool to warm. And as my fathers before me who have made this journey, I learn while becoming stronger and larger, gathering strength for greater challenges that lay ahead. I am preparing myself for the next leap in

life, where if others of my kind are to survive, I must return back to that great river that delivered me to the place I'm at now.

So when that time is upon me, when it is time to return, I gather my strength. My body tightens and my soul unites. I feel strong as I tear through currents that push against me. Furiously, I fight with hooked jaw while coming closer to the sand barrier that only a few seasons earlier I crossed over. In sight now, I wait until the right moment, when the greatest wave threatens to crush me, and send me to my death. I heave headlong against it, and as I glide through it, with the wave crashing behind me, I feel its salty cool spray, naked on my back. I see the clear daylight standing before me. I hear a splash, and find myself back into the great river, where I rest along its shallow banks.

I take in the solitude and the rays of warm light from above. Yes, I rest. I gather my thoughts. I think of what I have learned in the journey I've left behind. Those lessons that will guide me on this final chapter.

And then the day comes, when I catch the smell - the familiar smell of the waters of my birthplace, and sense the time has come to begin once again, towards that place where this wretched journey began.

So now, with brothers and sisters alongside, I struggle back into the current, and one by one, watch as some disappear beneath the waves, only to be washed away, while others, find their way back to the streams where their journeys began.

Closer now, I grow more excited as the taste in my mouth grows stronger from the taste of the waters at the place of my birth. And then I see it - my beginning, my stream, flowing gently around the boulder that I remember. I approach the rock with trepidation, knowing the end is near. But I do not look back as I swim around it. I'm nearly home now. I suck in the clear water, flushing my gills of the salty brine that remains from my last home. I spread my fins and am washed clean. I feel pure while swimming to the spot where eggs in the pebbles gently lay, waiting for me to release in a milky white cloud, that which completes the process for my kind to continue to flourish.

And then, the realization comes. My life cycle is complete. Bruised and battered, I flounder near the shore. But now, lying on my side, I see clearer now. With the salt of life, no longer blinding me, I see for the last time, that first ray of light that I saw not so

long ago on the day of my birth, shining brightly through the branches of the towering trees. I know now that I made it. And then, before I lay still, I remember, if only for an instant, I was but only a fish in this great sea of life. But, I was The King, the King Salmon of my ocean.



Swami

by Sharon Terleski

With each “woosh-woosh,” the agitator soothes;
Though churning water, lulls my troubled mind
And by its liquid turmoil my brow smoothes



SHADOWS ON THE WALL

by Sean Blau

Edward Stevens received the call at 2:48 A.M.

“Hello?” he said, thinking for the hundredth time of disconnecting the phone line before sleeping.

“Edward?” a familiar voice said.

“Yeah. Who is this? It’s almost three in the morning . . .”

“Edward! It’s me, John!”

Edward suddenly realized the caller’s identity. It was Dr. John Shields, one of Edward’s best friends during college until their paths had separated. Post-college, Shields had immediately gotten a job at the GeneTech research center, a multibillion-dollar corporation dedicated to genetic engineering for consumer products, while Edward went on to a teaching position in a California junior college.

Before they became distant, Shields had expressed feelings of intense boredom to Edward. Shields felt his individuality in the company was nonexistent. He was simply another employee of hundreds. He was a number. He seemed to envy Edward to a certain degree. Edward liked his job, while Shields felt miserable despite the better pay.

Two weeks ago, GeneTech had called Edward. Dr. Shields had disappeared. Edward hadn’t heard from him for months so he had nothing to tell them.

“What happened to you?” Edward asked. “GeneTech called two weeks ago wondering why you weren’t showing up for work.”

“None of that matters now, Edward,” John said. “Meet me at the coffeehouse two blocks away from your house.”

“Now?”

“It’s important!”

“I’m teaching a class tomorrow morning.”

“Please, Edward! I can’t discuss this over the phone. I’ll be waiting.”

“John?”

But Shields had hung up.

Edward got out of bed and started getting dressed. He had been hoping to reunite with Shields at some point but this wasn’t what he’d had in mind. He’d give him three hours, all Edward could afford before his eight o’clock class.

When Edward entered the coffeehouse, he didn't see Shields at first. Only a family at a table near the entrance and a dirty, bearded man sitting in a corner booth, glaring into his espresso.

"Over here, old friend," said the man in the corner. It was John.

Edward walked over and sat down across from him. Shields looked awful. Eyes that looked bloodshot, a twitch in both his hands, and filthy clothes gave the doctor the appearance of a homeless drug addict.

"John, what's going on?" Edward asked. "What did you need to talk to me about at three in the morning that was too important to discuss over the phone?"

"What do you know about Plato, Edward?" Shields asked.

"What about him?"

Shields looked up from his espresso to Edward. His eyes weren't bloodshot at all. They were bleeding.

"Oh my God," Edward said. "What have you done to yourself?"

"Don't worry about my eyes," Shields said. "It happened before. Just a result of the process."

"Are you sick?"

"No. It's just a side effect. Don't worry." He paused. "Do you remember Platonic Forms, Edward?"

Edward knew of Plato's Forms. Plato believed the world was divided into two separate worlds: our material world, where nothing was perfect, and the world of Forms, where everything was perfect and unchangeable. Forms were like the master mold, the perfect version, of everything in our world. Plato made his famous allegory of the cave to explain his theory. In it, several men are placed in a cave, tied up in a way so they can only see a certain wall. Behind the men is a great fire that produces distinct shadows of themselves and objects. The men think the shadows are reality. In Plato's metaphor, the objects themselves are Forms.

"Yes, I know of Plato's Forms," Edward said, "but . . ."

"I've seen them," Shields said.

"What? How?"

"TransX. A neural scrambler. But I don't want to bore you with technical jargon. I know biochemistry and cell biology aren't familiar subject matter to you."

If Shields was on any hallucinogens, he could have seen all sorts of things. But Edward didn't know any drugs that made eyes bleed.

"Who gave it to you?" Edward asked.

"I made it," Shields said. "At the lab. It was easier than I thought. But you'll see for yourself, I hope. You can't imagine what I've seen, Edward. What I've felt."

"Have you seen a doctor about your eyes?"

"Are you forgetting I am a doctor?" Shields said, smiling. "I want you to come to my house. I want to show you something."

TransX were pill capsules. Through the capsules, Edward could see a white liquid inside with tiny black bodies permeating the fluid.

"What exactly are inside these?" Edward asked.

"A genetically altered virus. Typically influenza, the common flu, but now something with a different purpose."

Shields walked over to his desk. His house was a mess. His kitchen stank of rotten food and his bedroom was a clutter of papers and books. His desk was the only thing lacking clutter. It was almost clear except for some architectural drawing tools and a pad of paper covered in geometric drawings.

"Come over here, Edward," Shields said. "It should be working in a moment."

Edward walked over as Shields turned the beginning pages on the pad to a clear page. He looked at his watch.

"Just a few more seconds . . .," he said.

Edward waited.

"OK. Now I want you to draw a triangle. Use the rulers."

Edward shook his head but did as John asked. He drew a right triangle.

"Now," Shields continued, "measure the degrees of all 3 angles with the protractor."

Edward measured the right angle first. It came out to 114°. Edward smiled and handed back the protractor.

"Very funny," Edward said. "Give me a real protractor."

"That is a real protractor," Shields said, smiling. "Right now, angles have been altered, so to speak."

"That's impossible."

"I know. But look carefully. Measure anything. It's all mixed up now. It's all different."

Edward went back to his drawing. He then looked slightly away. Out of the corner of his eye, the triangle looked like a circle. When he looked back at it directly it became a right triangle again. He took back the protractor and examined it. From all appearances it looked like a normal protractor. But when he looked away, it changed. The protractor seemed to stretch and diminish in his hand.

“Don’t worry,” Shields said. “It will stop in another few seconds.” He looked at his watch. “Now. Measure it again.”

“This is a trick,” Edward said.

“You’ve been in contact with the protractor the entire time. How could I have done anything you have not seen?”

Edward measured the right angle again. 89° . Almost perfect. Clearly not 114° .

“How have you done this?” Edward asked.

“We live in a cave,” Shields said, “but all we see are the shadows on the wall. Our world is nothing but projections of the world of Forms. The first time I used TransX, I found myself there. I was inside it, swimming in it, a sea of perfections more beautiful than I could ever fully comprehend. I could move with my mind. I could simply be somewhere, anywhere. As I marveled at all the incredible complexity, all the different things I couldn’t even see entirely, I realized something else was with me. Something alive.”

“Forms are like information. Data. No Form is alive the way we think of it. Not entirely. Forms are more like the most perfect blueprints you can imagine. But this thing was alive. It was nearest in description to a box, though far too vast and complicated to be any box here. It reached out to me and we exchanged knowledge. Its identification was 3 and it was a laborer for this place.”

“There have been others like me, Edward. Others that have seen what I have seen. That have felt what I have felt. Older than our time, 3 has communicated with different human beings throughout our brief period on Earth. I am the first to fully transfer over to the world of Forms.”

“From 3 I learned of the others of its kind: 2s and 1s, the soldiers and the philosopher kings. The world of Forms was their lab. It was their experiment: our universe. They made us in the hopes we would evolve to the point where we would answer a question they have been trying to answer since before time. But

after awhile they gave up on us. They don’t think it’s going to happen now. They moved on to other experiments to answer their questions. They left 3 to look over things on the miniscule probability we do get there. Our creators abandoned us a long time ago.”

John’s description of the alien social structure was exactly like Plato’s ideal society. Plato believed that, since democracy always fails, Philosopher Kings should run a society. Under rulers of intelligence and education, soldiers would protect the society. Below that, the laborers would do the work the society needed done. 1s, 2s, and 3s.

“John,” Edward said, “isn’t this place without time? Without location? Some of what you said is self contradicting.”

“I know it’s hard to understand,” Shields said, “but it does all make sense. At some level, they based our world on theirs, Edward. Like I would make a mass of bacterial culture, of inferior but similar organisms, they have made our universe.”

“After communicating so much to me, 3 finally showed me around. You see, Edward, 3 is bored. It is sick and tired of doing the dirty work, just like me and, with 3’s help, I can change Forms! *I can change the world!*”

Everything Edward had read about Plato’s philosophy stated that Forms were unchanging.

“Forms don’t change, John,” Edward said.

And then he realized they did change because they just had a few minutes ago, hadn’t they? The Form for a right triangle no longer 90° . . . No, that was impossible. Edward didn’t believe it. Something had changed, but not Forms.

“Edward!” Shields yelled. “Think! If Forms were created, they can obviously be changed and destroyed.”

Edward didn’t say anything. John was beginning to act psychotic. He had a mind-altering virus. Could Edward have it too? At the coffeehouse, if John had spread the contagion to Edward, then that would explain why he was experiencing hallucinations.

“And now,” John said, “we’re going to show everyone how ridiculous this world is. Come with me, Edward. Join us as we show everyone what an illusion this world really is.”

Edward was beginning to feel dizzy. Things were getting out of control. He shouldn't have gone to the coffeehouse. Too late now. He needed to get help.

"John," he said, "I really think . . ."

"You can follow me," Shields said, "or you can stay behind and watch the show. It's up to you."

Shields went to the bottle of TransX and took out several pills.

"Wait!" Edward exclaimed.

John swallowed them all. He gave a final grin, then closed his eyes and collapsed.

"John!" Edward yelled.

He bent down and shook him. "John!"

There was no response. He turned around to go to the phone in John's living room but the door was gone. He saw it from the corner of his eye. He slowly turned to where it should be but the door moved with his sight.

Someone suddenly started screaming. Somewhere, something exploded and a car alarm went off. A multitude of colors began flashing through the window. He walked to it and looked outside.

Edward couldn't believe what he was seeing. Everything was changing. People were running and screaming. Geography was remodeling itself. People were dying.

He looked away, breaking into a cold sweat, his expression one of horror. The things he had seen replayed in his mind, over and over, a parade of chaos and mounting disorder. The world Edward knew was coming to an end (No, it's just a dream. None of it is real, right?) he was powerless to stop it (it is real, you know it's real and... No. He wasn't powerless.

Edward turned to the TransX bottle by Shield's hand. He could do something, couldn't he?

It was now or never.

Edward took a pill and swallowed it.

It was closest in human description to a nightmare blueprint. A mass of lines that were really solid edges and light and color that was indescribable. Something touched his mind. It was a direction, guiding him. It was not John, not anything remotely human that Edward could understand. And then he was in the white room.

"Edward," John said. "Happy to have you join us."

It was Dr. Shields. A perfect Dr. Shields. Next to him was a box. No, not quite a box. There were too many edges.

"I don't like him," the box said.

"Now 3, this is my friend Edward," John said to the box.

"He's not like us," 3 said. "He wants to stop us. He thinks we are wrong."

"Where are we?" Edward asked. "Is this still the world of Forms?"

"It's so you have a sense of place," John said. He turned back to 3. "Does he really?"

"He will," 3 said.

"I guess we'll have to leave him here then," Shields said.

"Wait," Edward said. "Leave me?"

"What about the trace alarms?" John asked. "Were you able to halt them?"

"98%," 3 said. "It should work."

"Excellent." He turned back to Edward. "Sorry you can't join us, old friend, but I guess I misjudged you. Goodbye."

Before Edward could say any more. Dr. John Shields and 3 were gone. Edward was alone.

In the background an alarm began to ring.

Two children playing in an unfinished addition to their house disappeared in the corner of two walls. A teacher of geometry suddenly couldn't get the proper answers while measuring a circle, and shortly went into a screaming hysteria in front of his class. Buildings collapsed. A hole opened in the middle of a small town and began licking houses down its throat. A woman gave birth to a school of fish that could breath outside water. Clouds became rainbows and the sun began dividing into numerous different glowing spheres.

Then, as the chaos was gaining momentum, the changing stopped as abruptly as it had started. The trace alarms had been triggered. 2, a soldier, had returned, immediately erasing the information known as Dr. John Shields. 3 was altered to function without repeating its destructive behavior. 3 reversed the changes its previous form had helped make to the universe.

The information known as Edward Stevens was returned to its previous state with slight alterations.

Edward awoke with blood in his eyes. He lay in a street he didn't know. He blinked and felt his stomach churning and headache of a hangover. He vomited. Then he got up and looked around. He recalled having a dream with his imaginary friend and

some sort of world chaos. Dreams were so funny. Nothing was abnormal.

He began walking home. He'd obviously been drinking again. Yearning for years past when he explored the undisciplined life with only himself and his . . .

Embarrassing. That's what John was. A figment of his imagination based on anti-social behavior and lack of a personal life. But he had no need for John anymore. He had overcome those days in college. That life was gone.

But then Edward wondered if imaginary friends could ever really die.



Prelude To Autumn

by Travis Puglisi

Widow at night
Casting no shadow
While she sups on warm broth

Her home weepy gray
A wispy shroud housing the ghost remains
Of passed dinner guests

Yarns spanning a dreary empire of insects
Ruled by a lonely empress
The black crones fingers and toes
Arch to points of arsenic knitting

Born a widow with eyes
Dense as diamond and
Dark as deaths first shovel of dirt
She balances a bloody hourglass upon her breast



The State Of State Art In America

by Tom Loret

A day without irony is like a day never lived. It's what I said to Jim when he mentioned that peculiar sense of discomfort he got when he discovered a highly commercialized glassmaker with his own exhibit under the same roof of the same gallery in which Jim will be showing his sculpture. I had just returned from a stay in San Diego and that same genius, that same master of glass had his own multitiered exhibition of flamboyant exuberance on the ground floor of the San Diego Museum of Cultural History. The man's show wasn't more than thirty feet from the gift shop entrance. I had to walk past it to get up stairs to where the region's native and pre-Columbian displays stood, which is why I paid five bucks.

On the way out of the museum two guards, college kids, walked towards me and asked what I thought of So and So's exhibit. I forget his name. He's got wild hair, a patch over one eye that he lost to exploded glass, and he cultivates the attitude of a wound-up Salvador Dali grabbing market share in a harem of fashion hogs. He's the ubiquitous wonder in the field.

"Quite the industry," I said. "He's got factories all over the world pumping that crap out. I just find it odd to see it here. That's not what I paid to see, some one-eyed clown's circus act in glass." They both took a deep breath in, eyes widened into surprise, and then chuckles of gratitude and relief. And then again, this time in Seattle, in the very gallery as Jim's exhibit. Like a disease, like smog.

An hour away from me is Palm Springs, one of the wealthiest enclaves in the world. Their galleries are completely blank of everything but decor. All so harmless, so abundant, so pretty, and so ready for sale and immediate delivery. I met an artist, one of those unique seers of our times who did just that. A gallery step van arrived every month at his suburban home, backed up to his garage studio, loaded the art, and handed him a check. Three-bedroom home, kids in college, bills, alimony, what's a man to do, he said. It's all so reasonable, so necessary. Art by the truckload selling for thousands, like watermelons off the back of a sweltering flatbed. Esthetics thus established, values determined, and the course of lives, culture, and civilization lived.

This is my milieu, the climate in which I breathe as an artist and man. I need to write about it because it's time to cry out in terms that might be useful to any dear reader who wonders what it is like on such boundaries, at such crossroads where fates are forged.

I intended this to be an essay of some sort, but don't know what sort. I also thought of making a letter out of it, a letter to the author Bohumil Hrabal whose book, *Total Fears*, I recently read. He writes letters to his young American muse, Dubenka, who teaches Slavic languages at a university in America. He describes how totalitarianism leveled his once spring-like society into the drab ghost of obedience it had become. It was a tale of anguish, a description of slow, suffocating death not by tanks but by language and its symbols.

Its tool was the monotony of Social realism, the overriding aesthetic for political and economic aims. The crudity of its propaganda drove it home all the better: pictures of tanks, portraits of Lenin, made-up stories of happy factory and collective farm life, and all the symbols of unity, loyalty, obedience. Against this, Hrabal exuded praise and excitement over Andy Warhol, not only held by many as the greatest of all American twentieth century artists, but as a child of his Czech Republic. Warhol's parents were born there. Warhol was like a savior to Hrabal, personally as well as nationally, lauded him even as a redeemer of the Slavic people. Warhol's brilliance, his freedom, his star in the world of pictures and symbols absolutely enthralled poor old sad used-up Hrabal.

And then, all at once, everything I ever thought about American art and my own struggles made sense. Warhol simply did what was in his thick apparatchik nature to do, gave America its Social Realism. Look how trapped, determined, and insidious it all is! It begs a deeper question. If Hrabal sees Warhol's Pop as freedom, then what is the real nature of freedom, where does it come from, and how do we get it? At least in me it does because I've always thought of Warhol as the foulest enemy collaborator of our times, the rat that brought the plague. The plague of tyranny that shrank the creative imagination down to products on a store shelf, that hypnotized with beauty portraits of vacuous icons, and that reinforced it all with news frames exhibited with the authoritative pomp of Mona Lisas, all en mass for the masses.

To me, it's always been an insane horror. His fifteen minutes of fame continues to be the standard of meaning in the cultural mind of America. On the surface it's all so pleasant, even funny, and so ridiculous that it can't hurt to hear it again and again everyday of our lives to exclusion of all else. But it's not that simple. Excluded is the search for eternity, simply a fraud. Gone too is the quest for self, ludicrous and irrelevant. Unique is obsolete. Reality, genuine, authentic are now brands in the effluence of things. Glossy proliferation, bulk art, anything and everything to keep the mind spinning off topic, off itself. It's not a tyranny of suppression, but of surfeit, blind to consequence, made deaf by the decibels of progress.

Hrabal touched on it, unwittingly, when he described a night on his first book tour in America. It happened in a hotel room, in Washington D.C., late at night, all alone, except for the whirl of the building's air conditioner. It kept him awake all night in a terrifying insomnia. He couldn't imagine how in the midst of all that comfort there wasn't any quiet in which to think or apprehend his dreams. He said it was infinitely worse than knowing the room is bugged as it was in his dictatorial homeland. There, he boasted, a man can choose to not talk, but to be excluded from one's dreams was utterly excruciating. He drank, as I recall, himself to sleep.

I see newsreels of uprooted and deported populations, all gray, grainy, torn and misused. And I hear the slogans of commercial products ringing in my ear. *No money down. Come on in and buy today!* And how casual we are, how willing to depopulate our own minds — the efficiency.



A Day Too Soon

By Sandra Griesmeyer

Monday: Nothing really happened today. It was just another day. Mr. Sanderson was out of the office most of the day, and I did get a lot of the little jobs completed. My filing is finally caught up. A young woman came in to see him, but he was out and even then he rarely takes walk-ins. She seemed nice enough but she is very alone, like me. I guess she is worse off than me because she is married and her husband just seems to come and go and they don't spend much time together. They don't have any children. Her parents live in Cleveland, Ohio and she can't talk to them very often. They don't email, but there really isn't much for her to tell them. She works at Piggly Wiggly and doesn't have many friends there. She waited for Mr. Sanderson over an hour, but he never came back to the office, in fact, he called to cancel an appointment because he couldn't make it back in time.

Tuesday: The whole morning was devoted to making people unhappy. Mr. Sanderson got called to Judge Brown's office because of evidence illegally collected and I had to cancel all of his afternoon appointments. One of girls in the secretarial pool had a birthday today.

Wednesday: The police picked up one of the juveniles on Mr. Sanderson's case list and I spent the day keeping him company while Mr. Sanderson arranged bail and talked to his case worker.

Thursday: Carol Dalton announced she is getting married. I knew she'd been dating someone pretty seriously. I hope she is very happy.

Friday: End of the week. No court. Mr. Sanderson went to the seminar this morning.

Saturday: Finally cleaned out the closets today. I gave the stuff I can no longer fit into to the lady downstairs. She lost the 20 pounds I gained and doesn't want to buy any clothes until she loses some more weigh.

Sunday: Church and the kitchen was a mess again. No one ever seems to have time to clean it. I bought some sleeping pills today because I don't do enough during the day to be tired enough at night to sleep. Maybe I'll feel better when I can get better rested.

Monday: I got a jury notice today. I got a flat tire on the way to work and the guy at the garage didn't have time to fix it. I hope I don't get another one before I get the tire back.

Tuesday: The juvenile from the other day came in to see Mr. Sanderson. He ran away from the foster home. I had to call the police and keep him there until they came. He talked to me all day. I didn't get any work done. I'll have to catch up on all of it tomorrow.

Wednesday: The young woman from last week came back. She wanted to know if one of the partners would see her. One of them asked her to wait, but he got called away.

Thursday: Mr. Sanderson came back from the seminar and asked me to read up on some of the topics discussed. Mostly family law.

Friday: Finished the booklets for the training Mr. Sanderson will give based on the seminar.

Saturday: It rained today.

Sunday: I tried to take all the sleeping pills tonight. I couldn't take that many pills before my gag reflex reacted. I just threw them up.

Monday: Secretary's Day. Mr. Sanderson sent me flowers and he and his wife gave me a certificate for two for a day at the Palisades Resort with free use of all their facilities ending with dinner at their restaurant. The secretarial pool took me to lunch I got my tire back. He didn't charge me because he said I'd been very kind to wait.

Tuesday: The woman came back again today. Her husband quit his job and they are moving across state. He says he spends too much time away. She wanted to thank me for making her feel welcome while she waited in the office and for the little conversations we've had. I don't even remember what I said. I am glad it helped.

Wednesday: The juvenile from the other day came in to see Mr. Sanderson. He thanked me for listening to him while we were waiting the other day. He said usually grown-ups only talk they never listen. Mr. Sanderson is sending me to a seminar for Legal

Aides on Family Law. He says I will need to know more of how the law works because he is expanding the practice and I will be asked to have a better idea of what is happening here, to better coordinate the clients.

Thursday: I threw away the pills.



Tears of Loneliness

by Jennifer Bradshaw

Drowning in the sorrow of lost dreams
I am a puddle
Disturbed by the smallest breeze
And made by the tears of loneliness
“Please do not go” I cry to every passing wind
They do not know they keep me alive
Meddling in my past hopes and fears
I draw the storm close
Hoping to join thunder on its endless journey
But reaching for my unknown fate
I fear I will become a star whose light fades
With every wish from a young heart.



CMC Foundation—Building the Future **NOW**

Copper Mountain College Foundation is the fundraising arm of the college. Under its former name, Friends of Copper Mountain College, it raised more than \$2 million in 20 years to help build the college and enhance its programs. The name change was in recognition of its heightened responsibilities in support of recently accredited Copper Mountain College.

The Foundation is now engaged in raising \$1.4 million—the local share of a \$14 million state-approved project that will bring a 36,000 square foot Multi-Use Sports Center and many playing fields and courts to the campus by 2006.

Visit the Foundation at: <http://www.thecmcf.org>

Alumni Association

The CMC Foundation oversees the college’s Alumni Association, composed of graduates, former and current students, faculty, and friends. Alumni donations and membership dues are used to fund student scholarships and other campus programs and activities. The Association’s major fundraising event is its annual Art Auction, held in the early spring at the Helen Gray Center in Joshua Tree.

Membership dues are \$25 per year, payable to the Copper Mountain College Foundation with the memo: *Alumni Association*. Dues and other donations are charitable gifts for income tax purposes.



HOWL 2005 Submission Form

Contributor _____

Address _____

Phone (_____) _____ E-Mail _____

HOWL: a literary magazine of Copper Mountain College, is accepting poetry, short stories, essays, scholarly papers, and reviews for its 2005 edition. The deadline for accepting submissions is the second Friday in February.

Guidelines: All submissions must be typed, double-spaced on 8 ½ by 11-inch paper. Poetry must be single-spaced. In addition to printed copies, all entries must be submitted on a 3.5-inch diskette. Labels must include the title, author, and program in which the work is saved. Contributors will be contacted in April 2005 if their work is selected for publication. Work will only be returned if accompanied by SASE.

Editorial Policy: Because HOWL is a product of Copper Mountain College and intended to represent the campus and community, and due to space limitations, publication of all submissions cannot be guaranteed. The staff reserves the right to edit all pieces.

Address: CMC's mailing address is: PO Box 1398, Joshua Tree, CA 92252, Attention: Professor Greg Gilbert. Entries may also be left in Professor Gilbert's mailbox at the Office of Instruction.

Agreement: I, the undersigned, confirm that my submission is my exclusive property. I grant permission to the staff of HOWL to publish my work without giving up copyright benefits. I also understand that publication, including editing, of my submission will be at the discretion of the editorial staff.

Contributor's Signature _____ Date _____