

*sine cera*

a DiverseCity Writing Series anthology

A City  
Devoid of Sharp  
Edges

Volume 9

April 2011

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## Introduction

### Everyone Can Write!

In August of 2000, the SLCC Community Writing Center began working with writers from local organizations in two-month writing workshops. Each workshop culminated in a publication and a public reading. At first, this DiverseCity Writing Series worked one-on-one with a variety of organizations: Justice, Economic Independence and Dignity for Women; the Road Home shelter; Liberty Senior Center; and Cancer Wellness House.

In the summer of 2003, the DiverseCity Writing Series expanded to offer multiple, on-going writing groups. Volunteers were trained in collaborative writing strategies and became mentors for a variety of open-interest and specialized writing groups.

In the fall of 2003, the pieces written in these groups were assembled to create *sine cera: People Are Strange*, the first DiverseCity Writing Series anthology. The anthology celebrated the work of participants, who were then invited to present their writing at a public reading.

Over the past several years, the DiverseCity Writing Series has grown to include fourteen groups, with an average of 200 community members participating; however, the mission remains the same: *The DiverseCity Writing Series bridges the Salt Lake community's diverse social, economic and educational backgrounds through writing, collaboration and dialogue.*

The SLCC Community Writing Center would like to thank the mentors and participants who have made this program an ongoing success.

# DiverseCity Writing Series Groups

Avenues Courtyard Group

The Center for Women and Children Group

Columbus Library Group

The Community Writing Center Group

The Environmental Writing Group

Gay Writes Group

The Homeless Youth Resource Center Group

The King's English Group

The Literacy Action Center Groups

Men's Detox Group

Palinca

Silver Pen Seniors Group

The St. Mark's Tower Group

The Veterans' Affairs Group

We look forward to the future growth of the DiverseCity Writing Series, particularly with the Center for Hope and YWCA groups and development of the DiverseCity Writing Series, and are happy to present our fourteenth publication:

*sine cera:*

*A City Devoid of Sharp Edges*



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*sine cera*

A City Devoid  
of  
Sharp Edges

Volume 9

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# Preface

*The DiverseCity Writing Series bridges the Salt Lake community's diverse social, economic and educational backgrounds through writing, collaboration and dialogue.*

—DiverseCity Writing Series Mission Statement

We live in a world that encourages a remote existence. Maslow's hierarchy of need—food, shelter, safety—forces us out of our homes to forge means of satisfying the most basic of human desires. Each day when the necessities of work and requirements for sustenance compel us to leave our homes we find ways to distance ourselves from the constant threats to our senses of safety. iPods, phones, books and body positioning are used to avoid any eye contact or dialogue that would put us in contact with a stranger.

Twice a month the writers of the DiverseCity Writing Series break through the barriers that distance us as they share words that have only been heard in the privacy of their own minds. Over the last twelve months I have watched the writers of the DiverseCity Writing Series stretch the boundaries of their understanding and come into caring contact with those they would otherwise overlook or segregate.

This caring contact roots the foundations of the DiverseCity Writing Series in empathetic human interaction. The thoughtful consideration of others ideas, experiences and feelings has led to an overreaching sense of hope and vitality across the various writing groups. The stories, memoirs, poems, and essays told in this publication fearlessly give attention to things in life most of us spend time avoiding—death, grief, violence, crisis of faith, sexuality—while simultaneously celebrate birth, triumph, laughter, and love.

The courage and intimacy present in the sine cera are a result of the unique space of respect and reciprocity carved out when a wide-range of voices both listen and speak. These relationships of respect and reciprocity make for a publication rich with a nuanced interpretation of the world, in which people challenge how they relate to issues of race, class, gender, sexuality and other markers of difference.

Through reading their words we are given the opportunity to remove our own sharp edges, to push past our own sensation of discomfort, stop waiting for the other shoe to drop and connect in a meaningful way with our and other humanness.





# A City Devoid of Sharp Edges

by Peggy Kadir

In the morning haze,  
Softened by the early light,  
The city is painted in pale pastels,  
A Monet in blues and pinks.  
Some will speak of “pollution,”  
Others of “the lake effect.”  
I just enjoy the sight of the city  
Devoid of sharp edges.

# Tailwaggers

by Jackie Skinner

Max the stray dog was an expert reader. He had graduated puppyhood with Clifford the Big Red Dog and cried through adolescence with Old Yeller and Shiloh. He decided in adulthood that he did not much care for Cujo, not out of any kind of moral code, but because the dog was unhygienic, what with spending all his time hovering in the dirt around a broken-down car. Perhaps because of his homelessness, Max couldn't respect a dog that so blatantly eschewed cleanliness. The other strays accused Max of spending too much time cleaning himself and not enough time chasing animals and rolling in the mud. On one occasion, they insinuated he was more like a cat than a dog. Upon hearing this, rage overwhelmed him. He erupted in fury, ears flattened against his head, lips raised in a snarl, danger radiating from him in waves. He readied his charge, and noticed an errant fleck of dust on his paw. He lay down and began to lick.

\*\*\*

Max didn't like to brag unless he was in public, but he was proud of how fast he could wag his tail. He entered a competition to display his ability. The competition took place in an alleyway behind the local bakery; the scenery featured crates, boxes, and a rather filthy dumpster. Winning was simple: whoever could wag his or her tail the fastest and for the longest duration would win a delectable bag of day-old treats liberated from the bakery. Shep the Border Collie officiated. He gave a single bark, and the race was off. Max paced himself early on by thinking of chicken biscuits. As he settled into a comfortable rhythm, he glanced at some of his competition. The overzealous Bulldog, perhaps unaware of the tail prerequisite for the competition, had wiggled himself into a corner and gotten lost in a bag of garbage. Pep, a yippie little Yorkie, easily kept pace with Max, his chopped tail a blur in the fading light. Seth the Spaniel barked menacingly at his opponents, trying to scare them away. And there was Mindy, a Chihuahua who entered the competition mostly to show off her pink coat. A fastidious yellow lab named Gus eyed Max with loathing as he matched Max's wagging speed. Max felt himself flagging, but rallied at the thought

of turkey jerky. He envisioned the succulent treat, could feel the texture of it caressing his taste buds. He almost stopped wagging his tail, but caught himself just in time. Meanwhile, Gus grew tired. He had a heavy tail that had already succeeded in knocking half of the contestants unconscious. Max thought this was cheating. As Gus drooled in copious amounts, he saw Max gloating at him and resumed wagging with ferocity. As Max tried to distract Gus, he noticed a human standing at the window watching the competition, but was too intent on his tail to take further note of her presence.

By this point, Mindy was bored and angry over a spot of mud on her coat, Seth had found a stick, and Pep had decided he would do better cheering the others on. He ran back and forth along the sidelines until Shep nipped him on the leg and put him in time-out.

Max noted two remaining contestants, and renewed strength poured through his body and into his tail. He was so excited, so proud, that he managed to turn himself in a circle. From this new angle he saw a gorgeous Samoyed named Penny. He was immediately drawn by her fur, the lustrous shine of her coat. And her eyes! Such soulful brown eyes. *Dog bed eyes*, Max thought, followed by *how I'd love to sniff her bottom when this is over*. He almost gave up then and there, just to let her win, but was too stubborn, too determined to prove his worth. Besides, Gus was still there, and Max couldn't let a Lab win. He waggled harder, spinning uncontrollably in circles, daydreams flashing through his doggy brain – picking the best pieces of trash out of the garbage for Penny, finding her the smelliest places to pee. So caught up in this fantasy, Max didn't realize that five minutes had passed and the competition had ended. Gus had passed out from exhaustion and was twitching in a corner. Penny had left, overwhelmed by the testosterone in the air. She didn't know that Max won because of her, was unaware that for a week afterwards he dragged his bag of peanut-butter treats for a mile on sore legs and buried them under her tree. Max had won them for her.

\*\*\*

Since that day, the weather had turned cold, but still Max thought of Penny. During times of weakness, Max would admit to himself that Penny had a tail comparable to his own – fluffy and strong and beautiful. And she could shake that tail as well as he could. When these thoughts became too overwhelming, Max would cover his eyes with his paws and whine himself to sleep, unaware that his dreams were of Penny, and that his breathing calmed into a

gentle, peaceful rhythm as he slept.

\*\*\*

On a Tuesday, Max awoke, fully alert. He stretched, his long gray body tensing and shaking, muscles rippling in the morning light. He sniffed the air once, twice, and a goofy grin rippled across his face. Treat Day! Treat Day always smelled different from the other days: the tang of liver in the air, the poop lining the parks producing an extra layer of olfactory delights, the sudden emergence of dogs usually relaxing in their backyards.

He trotted towards the familiar brick building, scents wafting in the air around him. He had always felt welcome here. The Biscuit Lady never judged who appeared on her doorstep, especially a gray dog without a permanent home. On this particular Treat Day, the Biscuit Lady had set out beef and peanut butter cookies, lamb and cheese sandwiches, and duck and potato biscuits in a cookie basket. Unable to contain his excitement, Max rolled himself in the dirt, not caring if he remained clean. He felt his tail sway to and fro, at first gently caressing the wind, then building into a crescendo that stirred the air around his head. He bowed to take a cookie, and saw a flash of white. Sensing competition, he growled, but upon raising his head saw Penny trotting away. He panicked and whined, bowing to appease her, but Penny merely looked over her shoulder and vanished into the maze of buildings.

Well he had really screwed the pooch this time. First Max trumped her tail-wagging and then he threatened her away from sumptuous snacks. What was he to do? How could he profess his puppy love for her when he kept growling at her? His tail did not wag, the mischievous smile slid from his face. Max sat on his haunches, defeated, rolling a lambwich around his mouth as he moped. He bent to extract another bone from the basket and saw a crate tucked behind the garbage cans next to the bakery. Something to explore! He approached cautiously, gently sniffing

***“During times of weakness, Max would admit to himself that Penny had a tail comparable to his own”***

the air. It certainly wasn't food. He leaned closer and realized it was a waterlogged book. The title was almost unreadable, and many of the words were almost completely erased, but Max eventually puzzled it out. Squinting, Max barely detected the archaic writing: "A Secret Recipe: How to Win a Lady's Heart." He sensed movement, and glanced to see the Biscuit Lady at her doorway. When she saw him looking she quickly withdrew, but Max swore he saw the etchings of a smile on her face. Returning his attention to the damaged book, Max gingerly sniffed the edges, but sensed nothing dangerous. He nosed the book open, lay down, and began to read.

\*\*\*

A Secret Recipe: How to Win a Lady's Heart

- warmth
- love
- yummys
- good grooming
- romping
- place out of the rain

\* Added Spices: 1) good bark, 2) healthy heart, 3) loyalty, 4) sexy tail

Max stared at the recipe long after the sun played jump-rope with the moon. The recipe was rather vague – how was he to know how many yummys it took to woo a lady's heart? Was a good bark throaty and loud or soft and menacing? Thoughts tumbled upon themselves. Max sat the entire night, frowning slightly as he spent hours debating the myriad combinations of ways to win Penny. As the sun's turn came about again, Max suddenly came upon it. He wagged his tail, which had cramped during the night, and sped off down the street to prepare.

The next day, Max returned to the bakery with a plan. He peed on the building, which was not part of the plan, but was satisfying nonetheless. He finished his business and strode to the back door, his face set with determination, his mind completely focused on the task at hand. He gave one curt bark and sat on his haunches to wait. After a few minutes he barked again. The Biscuit Lady came outside, stirring something with a whisk. "What?" she barked. Deliberately, Max made his way behind the trash can to the pile of crates, selected one, and gently dragged it down the alley and

out of sight. After a time, he returned and repeated this action until he had taken all the crates and all the piles of wood. Head cocked to one side, the Biscuit Lady watched until he gave her a debonair smile, peed on the trash can out of respect for the building, and disappeared before she could lovingly thwack him with her lamb-coated whisk.

\*\*\*

Max's invention could kindly be classified as a labor of love, partly because he had Penny in mind, and partly because he had to stop his work and clean his paws every ten minutes. After weeks of frustration and effort, Max was finally satisfied and ready to show Penny his creation. In between his building efforts, he had slowly worked his way into Penny's routine. He sat outside her favorite haunts, bringing various treats with him. One day it was a lamb bone, the next it was a dead mouse he let swing back and forth like a clock pendulum. Whether he was trying to flirt with her or hypnotize her remains a mystery.

No matter how often she ignored him, he always returned, and he always brought different presents. She often puzzled at the contradiction between the dirt-encrusted dead animals he brought her and his shiny coat. Penny had to admit – he intrigued her. *How does a mangy stray keep so clean?* she wondered. He's like a cat. Impression was everything. His fur was impeccably shiny and lustrous. She later learned that Max took care to walk over open manholes to puff up his tail before he visited her. Over time, Penny found herself softening her attitude towards him. As the seasons shifted again, Penny decided to make Max her mate. Max was so happy he wagged himself into a tree.

One day he escorted Penny down a secret path ensconced in the woods. He had her close her eyes halfway down the lane, and instructed her to follow the sound of his bark. As she trotted, she smelled fresh flowers, the scent of trees in the wind, and reveled in the way the sun gave the field its earthy smell.

When she opened her eyes, Penny gazed at a lopsided shack with nails sticking out at odd angles. Tree limbs were affixed to crates and wood planks at useless locations. A wood plank leaned inexplicably against the side of the shack, a single nail bored through the top centimeter of the plank and embedded to the wall of the shack. Over the crooked archway was a melted-looking sign that read "Mutt Hutt." Penny had to enter the structure from the left side of the door because the right side sloped too close to the

ground.

The inside was uglier than the outside. A bed lay on the far side, presumably stolen from a group of mice that decided to chew their way out from the inside. A bowl of brackish water lay next to a bowl of week-old food. On top was a little pile of peanut-butter treats. She stared for a second, and then the events of the last few weeks clicked into place. She turned to Max, who was grinning sheepishly, self-consciously pawing the ground. He was the one who had brought her treats during the week after the Tailwagging. And he had saved some just for her, to surprise her when she entered their new home. Penny felt a sudden rush of affection for Max and for their new home. Their tails wagged together in a blur of white and gray, and they romped around the shack, play-biting and otherwise flirting.

After a time, she stooped and crawled outside again, facing the shack once more to better examine her new pad. Max had found an eccentric Scottie to carve a wood panel that hung on the entrance to the Mutt Hut. It showed a well-kept dog sniffing the bottom of a beautiful female. Penny glanced sideways at Max, but remained silent. Max was so proud of himself; she didn't want to ruin his excitement. Feeling frisky once again, Penny turned and fixed Max with her most lascivious grin, then swayed into the Hutt. *Dog bed eyes!* Max thought, and shimmied his way inside.

# Jealous

by Randy Eggert

My dog is black.  
My dog likes snow.  
My dog is a black blur  
As he runs through snow.  
The snow is white.  
And cold.  
And deep.  
And inviting.  
My dog runs up slopes so steep he falls over backwards, spinning  
on his back legs,  
    rotating 'til he's forward and slides downhill, his face  
    burrowing in  
    up to his nostrils, coming out with a white beard, and a  
    grin.  
I am jealous  
Because I like snow, too.

# The Girl Who Spoke Cat

by Peggy Kadir

I had never known anyone who spoke Cat.  
No, I don't mean someone who spoke with cats.  
I mean someone who spoke Cat.  
Then I met Martha.

It was at a morning coffee klatch.  
Our hostess had prepared coffee and cakes.  
The noise decibels were rising.  
Her cat had passed the doorway several times.  
Finding us uninteresting, it had moved.

The last time it passed, Martha remarked,  
"I speak Cat." We made derisive sounds.  
"I'll show you," she said.

When the cat passed the doorway again,  
Martha made a soft, unusual sound.  
The cat stopped in mid-stride and stared at her.  
"What do you want her to do." Martha asked.  
"Tell her to come in," we replied.  
Martha made another soft, unusual noise.  
The cat entered the room and  
Looked at Martha quizzically.

"Now what do you want her to do?" Martha asked.  
"Tell her to go away," someone suggested.  
Martha made another soft sound.  
The cat's back arched. Its hair stood on end. With startled eyes, it  
bolted from the room.

"I also speak Horse," Martha announced.  
This time we believed her.

# Exerpt

by Kelly Verdejo

I could now escape from the house and play games outside with my older brothers, or so I thought. Little did I know, that my presence was not wanted. I was a girl, and girls are not allowed to be cowboys or Indians they said. This started my rivalry with them. They would always run away and try to hide when they saw me coming. I was persistent, I wanted to play and they weren't gonna stop me. I turned this into a game. They gave in a couple times, then one of them got a great idea how to convince me how not to want to hang out with them. They were on their way back from the creek catching frogs. Acting all friendly to me, like they wanted me to hang with them, I was instantly suspicious. They surrounded me, two of them grabbing one hand each, I couldn't get loose, the others grabbed the back of my shirt, and put a frog down it. I was screaming bloody murder as I felt that frog grabbing me with his little suction toes, turning to hysterics as they ran around me slapping me on the back! I just knew I'd have big ugly, brown warts, the size of potatoes all over my back. I finally got it out, half dead, kinda juicy, the frog dropped to the ground lifeless, I ran home crying, feeling outcasted and defeated. I simmered the remainder of the day thinking, "ITS ON NOW, YOU LITTLE BASTARDS!!" I would get my revenge, and it would be on the 2 youngest brothers who were 1 and 2 years younger than me. I could run faster and I was (for that year) stronger than they were.

# Mud Pies

by Dr. Joyce Murray

“Aunt Clarice, may Jack come out and play?”  
“Yes, he may. It would be nice if you two could stay clean” she encouraged.

Jack and I took off for Uncle Fred’s orchard, and found a large pear tree in the orchard. There was not fruit at this spring time of year, so we made a ‘house’ out of the various limbs. We had a bedroom (which we climbed into and laid down), a kitchen which we made fudge in (we had taken some from Aunt Clarice’s candy jar.

Then we decided we wanted pies, so we found a big puddle of water and began stirring our batter, which was dark brown dirt and water: “mud” for mud pies. In the process of making mud pies, Jack and I became “mud kids”. In our lovely pink and blues clothes we became chocolate babies! Great fun—until Aunt Clarice called us in the house and put the two of us in the bathtub. We are so young (4 years old) that boy/girl stuff was way, way off.

We splashed each other until Aunt Clarice came and washed us both, hair and all, and put out clothes in the washing machine. From then on, Aunt Clarice would say to bem “Joyce, dear, please don’t play mud pies with Jack”.  
Fat chance! I loved mud pies and I loved Jacked!

# Yesterday and Today

by Rudy Pedersen

When I was younger I went into my sister's room to ask her a question. I remember hearing a song on the radio, but I really paid no attention, or so I thought. I went outside to play football. While I was playing I could not get the song out of my mind. After the game I went back into my sister's room and I asked her, "What was the name of that song I heard, and who wrote it?" She told me it was the Beatles and the song was called "I Wanna Hold Your Hand." I wasn't much in to listening to the radio, but all of a sudden, I really wanted to hear more of that song. Even football was put on hold. I needed to hear that song. The more I listened to the radio and heard more Beatles songs, the more I felt enchanted by their music.

Every Saturday I earned money by mowing lawns. I was exhausted by the end of the day, but I had money. So with my money I happily ran to the record store and bought any Beatles music I could get my hands on. When I bought something I felt accomplished. The more Beatles records that came out, the more I wanted them! It went beyond wanting. I felt I actually needed them. I was in love.

The Beatles were coming on a show that I used to watch every Sunday. When I found out they were going to be on one of my favorite shows I was so excited. I talked about it for days. That was all I could talk about. It drove my family crazy.

I remember when the first Beatles movie was coming out. It was called "A Hard Day's Night." I was so eager to go see it. I wanted to be the first one to see it. I was anxious to tell all my friends about it.

I was determined to collect all of the Beatles albums. I bought all of them that I could get my hand on. If a new one came out, I would happily do any chores to make money so I could buy it as quickly as I could. I went from record shop to record shop to find out if there were any I didn't have.

As I got older, I drifted away from my music because there were other things that got in the way. School and working took most of my time. I was so exhausted by the time I got home; I would

strip off my clothes, fall into my soft bed and promptly fall into a deep sleep. I still collected all the new Beatles albums. As soon as they were out I raced to get them.

Then something horrible happened. The Beatles broke up. I was so shocked to hear about it. It made me very sad, because I had so much hope for them. I almost cried. I could not believe it. I was absolutely devastated. It astounded me. How could this happen?

I was in my last year of high school, when a good friend informed me that one of the Beatles was doing a concert in Salt Lake City. "George Harrison was coming to my hometown!!! I had to go see this concert! I spent many hours waiting in line to get a ticket. I waited and waited. I felt like I would never make it to the ticket booth. Then, I did! I got my ticket. The day finally came when I went to see my long awaited concert. I was thrilled. The concert blew me away. It was better than I ever imagined it could be. It actually gave me goose bumps.

I was working late one night and was already feeling tired and irritated when I heard some very disturbing news. Somebody had shot John Lennon in New York City! I was furious! I was angry! I was devastated and couldn't believe something like that could happen to somebody so many people loved! I went home and lay on my bed. I lay there for hours thinking about the Beatles, their music, their hardships, and how they had impacted my life. Many years have passed for me. The responsibilities of being a family man have cut my time short for "outside" things. I don't have money to spend on me any more. I spend it on my family and bills. I never forgot the Beatles though. They were a big part of me growing up! Paul McCartney came to S. L.C. recently and I was able to go to the concert, there was something inside of me that stirred. All those old feelings came back to me at the concert. All the emotions from my younger days; the happiness, the sadness, the excitement. I realized how thankful I was that I could come see this concert. Somehow this concert gave me some kind of closure. I still listen to my Beatles albums and on the radio. The Beatles have always been a big part of my life! I will never forget that.

***"I don't have money to spend on me any more"***

# The Music Box

by Joyce Luttrell

Music that comes from heaven,  
Like the sound of angels wings  
Soft and velvet tones  
Bring sweet and tender tinkling.

Watching with your mind, as  
gracefulness In motion,  
Becomes a ballet before your eyes  
With tender gentle emotion.

The music box may become  
A joy with an abundance of magic  
It could also very well be  
A remembrance of memories so tragic.

Music and melody like  
Wind Beneath My Wings,  
Or something bouncy like  
These Are The Simple Things.

Even if the music is bouncy  
Even if the music rocks,  
Everyone should in there midst  
At least one tiny Music Box.

# Son of Superman (S.O.S)

by Paige Kimball

We are ecstatic in that first photo together. Sharing the hospital phone, a long-distance call to my parents in Utah, chattering about the birth of our new baby boy. My cheeks are flushed; droplets of sweat speckle my forehead. My husband's blue-gray eyes sparkle with the exuberance of a first-time father. We are smiling, so wide it stretches our faces.

The baby's story is different, of course. Little Eli is stunned. His face is swollen, eyes blinking in the flood of fluorescent light, glazed over with antibiotic ointment. His skin is ruddy, wrinkled, like a red potato. But all of his vital parts are affixed and blood courses through his skinny limbs. He is secure in our arms.

What they tell me must be true, I think. *Raising a boy is hard work, but the joy will overshadow the fatigue, and your love will always be enough.* And I believe. I want to believe, need to believe. My husband is just starting his Emergency Medicine Residency, and I am this baby's everything.

I don't know the precise moment I stopped imagining I was enough for Eli. From the very start I never seemed to satisfy my boy, to soothe him adequately. *Was it the day the principal had to carry him up the elementary school steps and into third grade--the same day his Dad left for Iraq? Was it the year he quit piano and the neighborhood soccer team?* (The quittings coincided with the duct tape incident, the day a couple of bullies wrapped his ankles on the walk home from school. He didn't know I was watching from the car when he tripped.) *Was it the end of fifth grade, when Grandpa Jim died of a brain tumor, and Eli was institutionalized for depression?*

*Or was it during my own depression?* I don't remember. Perhaps it was a slow whittling away of hope over the years.

Finally, his sophomore year of high school I threw up my hands and turned him over to Dad—or Superman, whatever you want to call him.

The Super tried, too. Cut back his hours at the University Hospital, cut back his paycheck to help his eldest son with on-line schoolwork. He *would* fix him because he could fix anything, and

anyone. By this time, the Super had spent fifteen years putting people back together, sometimes cracking them open to relieve lethal pressure on vital organs, or to start a heart beating again. He always sewed them back up in the end. He'd dished out novels of advice to struggling nurses, splinted limbs in Haiti, taught lifesaving skills to midwives in third world countries, and was even Young Men's President in our Ward. Everyone came to the Super for help.

But this teenage boy was a different creature. He spoke his own language. Formed his own alliances. Was desperate for autonomy. In the words of his toddlerhood, "I do it all myself" boomeranged back to us with g-force. All he ever wanted was to be competent, and all he had to break through was his own insecurity. Big Brick Wall.

At age fifteen, it was apparent that our sweet baby boy had become a creature quite unfixable by either of us. And so we sent him into a wilderness program.

Wilderness Camp is an intervention. A ginormous "teenager time-out" in the vast chair of nature. And Eli really needed a time out. The decision was not easy for me, sending my oldest child away, but it was even harder for the Super. For the first time in his life, I think he realized he couldn't fix something—one very big something. His own son.

When the therapist asked the Super if he planned on holding Eli's hand through college, something finally just clicked. His efficient mind slowed down just long enough for the pieces of the puzzle to snap into place. The arguments over medication types and dosages, the psychiatrist visits, the continual disconnection--it was all bigger than him. And it wasn't going to stop just because he spent an occasional day skiing the slopes with Eli, or tutoring him through another geometry assignment.

We signed Eli up for Wilderness that very day. In my blog, "The Life and Adventures of Superman's Wife", I wrote about that dreadful ride to the wilderness of the San Rafael Swell:

**11/23/10**

What do you do when you can't live through another day with your defiant teenage son? What do you do when you see him choosing mistake after mistake, self-destructing one tiny piece at a time? Do you let him walk all over you like a sisal doormat? Let him bend and break the very rules that were set to keep him and his siblings safe, as they watch with wide eyes and even a secret

jealousy?

No. You send him into the wilderness in the middle of a roaring blizzard.

The Super and I, after years of being on different pages when it came to raising Grumps, years of discontent and floundering parenthood, have finally agreed to send our son to Wilderness Camp.

We drove two hours into the Southern Utah desert, being chased by the worst snow storm in Utah's history, with only the clothes on his back, and turned him over to a group of total strangers.

Those two hours were anything but fun. He went ape in the car. He punched-in the dash. "You're fucking throwing me away," he screamed. "You're ruining my life!" We'd heard the sentiment before, but this time he really meant it, and this time we may have believed him a little.

Then he tried to jump out of the car at freeway speed.

Now, it is night. The storm has raged by, leaving a thick blanket of snow over all that dared to stay put outside. It should be hitting the Swell about now. If I didn't already feel like a failure of a mother, now I'm worried Grumps will freeze to death. I'm having hallucinations of him secretly cranking up the space heater tonight, unbeknownst to his counselors, then asphyxiating, being found stone cold in the morning with his eyes open. Dead.



***"There are  
no space  
heaters in the  
wilderness"***

**11/24/11**

There are no space heaters in the wilderness.

**11/25/11**

Grumps first went into a deep depression one day in the fourth grade. It was the same day the Super deployed for the war in Iraq. We didn't know if the Super would be gone for several months or several years. Or if he would come back. Young Grumps dressed in fatigues and wore one of his dad's military caps. He made me sew army-green military stripes on the shoulders of his wool sweater.

Two days ago, when we dropped him off at wilderness camp,

they stripped him of his street clothes—the logo t-shirt, the skinny designer jeans—and dressed him in army green once more. Thick trousers, chunky wool sweater, heavy-duty hiking boots. The physical similarities were haunting, but especially the hollow look in his eyes, his hunched shoulders.

Grumps was a very vulnerable little boy once more.

Night after frigid night we worried about our son. There were more nights below freezing this past winter than ever. *Is he warm enough? Is he getting enough to eat? Is he learning anything in that blasted, freaking expensive, bordering-on-child-abuse-camp?*

Finally, several weeks into the program, we were able to visit him. Somewhere under layers of soot and dirt was our boy, and *he cried*. Cried like a child. He had been humbled, and his heart genuinely ached. I don't know if it ached with regret for his hurtful behaviors, or because he realized he loved us, or because he longed intensely for home, but his tears were like a baptism. They washed away my fears, and they gave me hope for healing. It was truly a miracle.

A counselor with dreadlock reached out to Eli in his emotional flood. She asked him to identify his feelings, to find a spark of hope inside. When he finally gathered himself, Eli made a new spark. With no more than some sticks and a stone and a wee speck of dirt, we pushed and pulled until we had created an ember together. We blew on the glowing thing until it became a flame. And as we warmed ourselves around the fire, we secretly hoped his heart was burning, too.

That night, other boys joined them at the fire, and the counselors, too. We talked about the things they had discovered in Eli's head—things to celebrate, things to ponder, things that needed fixing. We talked until the fire burned into ashes and the Milky Way rolled across the sky. Something about the wilderness softened all of their hearts that night, and we were glad because Eli's heart had been locked for so long.

We slept with him on the frozen ground, under a tarp strung between two junipers. We snuggled like sardines in our sleeping bags as a storm hurled in, safe from the fury. And though the frozen ground hurt my joints, and sleep was fleeting, and snow tumbled in through the cracks, Eli was happy, sandwiched between the two people who loved him most in the whole world.

It was a night I'll never forget, one I never want to forget. I

knew that like a crude gem stone, my son's rough edges were being scrubbed off. That he was merely a diamond in the rough. The scrubbing was painful, but if he could survive storms like the one raging outside, and the near constant ache of hunger and cold, he could survive other kinds of scrubbing, too. And one day he would see his a jewel when he looked in the mirror.

I see a jewel somewhere inside of Eli now. I see glimpses of it when he laughs, or when he helps his little sister learn a kick flip on her skateboard. I also know Eli isn't the only one who needs to change. I have much to learn as his parent; undeniably, so does the Super. I hope my son chooses to be a part of the Mormon Church, for it has brought me much joy and contentment. But I'm not holding my breath. And I will never fight with him about it again. Ever.

Hanging on the wall of the Wilderness office is a print called, *Even Superman Needs a Dad*. The image is of a young Dad, holding his sons hand, the skinny boy donning sandals and a blue cape with a big red iron-on "S." The dad's head is tipped toward the boy with a listening ear as they walk hand-in-hand down a tree-lined sidewalk.

It is a touching image. But I can offer some insight into the painting. First of all, my sister's first son and her ex-husband were the inspiration for the painting, and that father was not a perfect parent. Shortly after the image was captured he walked out on her to be with his lover, another man. The boy clung with all his might to his daddy's legs on the night he left, pleading, until he was finally shaken off. That boy is a struggling alcoholic today. And his younger brother is his inspiration, thanks to Wilderness Camp, the very cousin who inspired me to send Eli away.

And secondly, that cape is not perfect. My mother made it with leftover scraps from my prom dress. The dress was blue, but Superman's cape is red.

Parenting a son is not easy. The advice I was offered fifteen years ago, that *raising a boy is hard work*, has certainly played out in my life. Hopefully, with perseverance and the grace of God, the rest of the sentiment will come to pass in time. *Joy will overshadow the fatigue, and my love will be enough*. But in the mean time, don't offer us any help. Superman and I are stepping back, letting our boy earn his own cape.

# Expressions

by Cyndi Lloyd

## WANING GIBBOUS

I'm a junior in high school. In Salt Lake City, on a snowy February Saturday night, sharp pains stab the right side of my abdomen. I'm at Palladium, dancing with my friends beneath flashing lights. The deep bass of music thrums in my ears.

Earlier, I had drunk wine coolers that the Asian market sold to me without asking for ID. I have a good buzz going, but my abdominal pain intensifies. My friends lay me down. For a moment, I black out. My girlfriend calls an ambulance, and my parents meet us at St. Mark's hospital.

I lie about imbibing. I think the alcohol has something to do with the pain I'm in. Certainly, I couldn't let my dysfunctional Mormon parents find out about the liquor.

The doctor says I have appendicitis and need surgery. I only miss a few days of school. Two weeks later, I'm in pain and feel feverish. The doctor says I have an infection in the appendectomy incision site. He cuts open the wound. Yellow pus oozes onto my skin and runs down my hip. He squeezes the incision, and gobs of yellow matter clump forth. I gag from the foul odor. The doctor injects the antibiotic right into the wound with a large syringe. I howl!

"The life in us is like the water in the river."<sup>1</sup>

## LAST QUARTER

I had been a ballerina since I was five years old. For thirteen years, I worked my feet, getting them ready for pointework. Mom took me to a store where the experts fitted my feet in Capezio pointe shoes. I tried on the pale pink toe shoes with satin ribbons. Lambswool padded my toes. The flattened box at the front of the shoe enabled me to *elevé* onto the tips of my toes. I was a junior in high school when I began pointework. I pirouetted on toe across the parquet floor and executed *pad de bourrées* on pointe.

1 Thoreau, Henry David. "Walden."

After a few months of dancing in them, inevitably, I lost my right big toenail. A crust of yellow pus ringed my toe's cuticle. I had to keep my toe wrapped, and I couldn't have any water touch the exposed skin. Every time I changed the dressing, when the air hit my exposed flesh, pain emanated from my toe, throbbing. During ballet class, I reverted to wearing my old pink ballet slippers. I wrapped my pointe shoes in the tissue paper and put them into the shoebox. Months passed before I removed them from their box and slipped them on my feet. I danced in my toe shoes for another six months. Ballet ended once I graduated high school. I wound the pink satin ribbons around each slipper, wrapped them in the tissue, put them in the box, and stowed them under my bed.

“Look at the stars  
 Look how they shine for you  
 And everything you do  
 Yeah, they were all yellow”<sup>2</sup>

#### WANING CRESCENT

Tippy toes. Tip toe. Tip toe. Night after night (I'm 10, 11, and 12 years old)– as long as my parents are downstairs, I creep down the hallway of our Boise house. It's an art scaring someone. Tip toe. Tip toe. Silence is an absolute must. I know the creaky floorboards. I press myself along the wall. Tip toe. Tip toe. I drop to all fours just before the door and crawl into my younger brothers' room. Slowly. They talk and I crawl. They quiet. I stop. Patience. They talk and I crawl, until I'm between their beds. I lay on the floor. Listening. They talk. I wait. They talk. I listen. They talk. I leap from the floor and grab them. They scream! I laugh.

Thick clouds smudge the moon's light and tentacles drift.

#### NEW

The archaeological record reveals that *Australopithecus* had shorter toes than those of the great apes, but longer than the toes of *Homo*. The reason for this may be that natural selection favored stubby toes for running. The long-runner hypothesis postulates that the adaptation may have assisted our savannah-dwelling ancestors to chase prey. Longer toes require more exertion of muscles, causing more stress and damage, and require more exertion to maintain the body's stability. While running, between one-half and three-quarters of the body's weight is put upon the foot hitting the

2 Coldplay. *Yellow*.

ground. The toes do more work in running because they provide the momentum, pushing you.<sup>3</sup>

I'm 19-years-old and in the United States Navy at boot camp for two months. PT, physical training, which includes running, begins every morning at five o'clock. I start out running, feeling not good, but okay. I feel like I race against the huge rising sun. I push myself, trying to maintain a pace that gets me the time I need. Soon, my knees and ankles hurt. A side ache starts. I can't regulate my breathing even though I'm in Orlando. I push on. I fight against the negative voice in my mind: *I can't do this. It hurts too much! Maybe I shouldn't be here.* But, one day I tell myself: "This won't last forever." With that mantra, I run. I separate myself from the physical pain and psychological turmoil and complete every run within the required time. Not every one made it through boot camp. I did.

I'd rather use my stubby toes for walking, maintaining my balance, and bearing my body weight. Walking allows time for my eyes and brain to absorb the beauty around me, and I don't have to concentrate on getting the walk over with. For instance, there's a house in my neighborhood with a rock yard. Makes sense given the valley's midlatitude steppe and humid continental climate zones. We shouldn't be growing grass in such a dry place. The rock yard isn't straight-edged; instead, it contains curves created by the particular placement of various trees, barberry, rose, and sage bushes, and patches of flowers like wild daisies, yellow tickseed, and tall sunflowers.

***"Not every one made it through boot camp. I did."***

"He was quick and alert in the things of life,  
but only in the things, and not in the significances."<sup>4</sup>

WAXING CRESCENT

Yellow is my favorite color. Yellow is great for clearing the mind, making it

3 Keim, Brandon. "These Toes Were Made for Running."

4 London, Jack. "To Build a Fire."

active and alert. Wearing yellow clothing increases the ability to express yourself and increases written and verbal eloquence. Want to stimulate movement and your mental awareness? Carry yellow stones. Yellow enhances clarity for decision making, provides relief from nervousness, panic, and exhaustion, it enables a sharper memory, boosts concentration skills, and it protects from lethargy and depression during dull weather.<sup>5</sup>

The last yellow quaking aspen leaves shimmer in the sunlight and  
drift below.

Twelve-foot sunflowers bob their weighty yellow blooms in the  
mighty breeze;  
soon though, nature will lob their heads.

## FIRST QUARTER

At 16, I complain of feeling tired all the time. The doctor says I have the colloquial “kissing disease”—mono. Mononucleosis. Jaundiced eyes. Swollen lymph nodes in my neck. I feel weak. Dad fixes me breakfast, eggs and oatmeal, every morning before he goes to work. I sleep a lot, and life becomes a blur. I miss school for an entire month.

It’s a warm April, and Dad makes me sit out in the sun. My next door neighbor delivers my homework, but I can’t concentrate. I fall behind in school, which scares me because the semester’s almost over, and my grades have fallen. I don’t want to repeat my sophomore year. The doctor releases me back to school, but only for half days until I get my strength back. Daily, I quarrel with sleepiness to go to school and complete my homework. In the end, my grades aren’t the best, but I pass all my classes.

New tulips sprout in red, white, and yellow.

A yellow rosebud opens, blushing at the tips of her silky petals.

## WAXING GIBBOUS

“These are for you, Mom.” I extend my five-year-old hand clutching flowers. The morning light hasn’t reached our west-facing kitchen which remains muddled in shadows. Mom turns from the kitchen sink where she’s washing dishes and looks down at me.

It’s early summer. Wet soil and bark had permeated the air. My neighborhood’s flowerbeds beckoned me with bold smells and  
5 “Color Yellow.”

enticed me with deep, rich colors. I plucked yellow, red, orange, purple, and yellow blooms. I don't know their names—I only know they're called "flowers" and they're pretty. I held the fragrant bouquet gingerly in my palms trying not to crush their beauty. The petals and pollen stained my fingertips and made them sticky.

Mom takes my offering, but she doesn't smile with pleasure. Instead she demands, "Where did you get these?" I tell her about my escapade. She drops the posies on the counter. She says, "This is stealing. You can't just go into other people's yards and take their flowers. What's wrong with you!" She wipes her hands on a towel. "Pick those up. You're going to show me the houses you took these from, and you're going to apologize."

I scoop the wilting blooms into my hands. Mom hauls me down the sidewalk, to several houses. I don't dare look at all the pretty flowers we pass. She makes me go to the neighbors' doorsteps by myself. I'm scared and don't know what to expect. At each door that's answered, I hold out the now squashed blossoms and say, "I'm sorry for picking your flowers." The women at each house thank me for my apology and tell me not to do it again. I lower my head and turn away. I cry, not comprehending the error of my desire.

"All the time, everywhere, something or someone is dying to please."<sup>6</sup>

FULL

And the Earth's rust-colored shadow falls on the full moon.

My friends and I are at Club DV8, drinking and dancing. I didn't know this good-looking man, only his name. I notice him watching me. Now his body hardly moves to the music. He stares at me. The music breaks, the DJ announces some guy's birthday, and this man moves toward me. At first, I pretend not to know his name. I ask him, "Is it your birthday?"

"No, that's not me," he says.

A new song plays and I dance. He stands against the back wall. I catch his eyes following my body's movement in rhythm with the music. I approach him. "Do you take martial arts?"

"No," he replies. For some reason I don't quite believe him. His movements to the music are controlled, yet smooth and timed. His arms move in toward his body, bringing the palms of his hands together

6 Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire*.

We dance with each other, not physically, but in the same space. He lightly runs his hands along my slender arms. His unbuttoned shirt exposes his very curvy, muscular chest. I run my fingertips along his breastbone and over his pecks, savoring the softness of his tanned skin. He places his muscular hands upon my hips. I no longer hear the music. We press together like a flower in between the pages of a book. I feel heat pulsing through his veins. He moves his head towards mine and our foreheads naturally come together. Suddenly, his hands move from my hips up to cup my face. A sensation of numbness spreads over my head at his gentle touch. Our lips join. My mouth parts easily for our first kiss. Our tongues entwine, release, and dance some more in time with the music. Heat courses through my body at this passion I've never felt. We kiss and kiss. I want more. I want to explore his whole body and the depths of his mind. I don't know what song is playing. All I hear is a boom-boom, like fireworks exploding in the distance. His kiss is tantalizing and full of passion. Surges of energy I've never experienced rip through my body.

The rest of the world falls away from us. We're the only people there.

A long time ago, he gave *another girl* the moon once: at a square fountain, the water reflected the moon; he scooped his hands into the water and cupped the moon. Now, *this good-looking man* is my husband.

I am Cynthia, my feminine given name,  
epithet for Artemis, the Greek goddess of the moon  
who was born on Mount Cynthus.

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# The Girl Who Was Gone!

by Fantasia Ward

Once, there was a girl who was seven years old. We met in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and she became my best friend. We did everything together.

One day when I went to school she wasn't there. She had never missed a day of school. I went to her house to see why she wasn't there. I knocked on her door and her mom answered. I asked, "Is Hannah ok?" Her mom was crying. "What's wrong?" She told me that Hannah was sick. "Is she going to be alright?" She told me that Hannah has leukemia. Then I asked, "When did she get sick?"

She said, "She has been sick for awhile."

She tried to go to school for a few weeks. One day I got a phone call when I got home from school. It was her mom. She said, "Hannah is in the hospital. She has got worse."

I asked my mom to drive me to the hospital to see her. When I found Hannah, she looked so sad. I thought to myself, "I hope she is going to be alright." We waited for the doctor to come to her room.

Her doctor came in and told us, "She has gotten worse, and she needs some tests done." They took her to the testing room, while Hannah's mom and I waited for her to be done. They came back and told us, "She only has a year to live." They couldn't cure the cancer. They had tried everything they could.

As the days went by, I would go to her house after school everyday to see her. I would help her with anything that she needed, including eating, reading, and washing. I was there to do it all. A year passed, and I was expecting her to move on, but things were going well.

One night when I was sleeping over, I woke up in the middle of the night. I looked at Hannah, and her face was turning blue. She said, "I'm cold," so I went to wake up her mom to tell her that something was wrong with Hannah.

We all got into the car to take her to the hospital. We waited and waited forever to see what happened. They took her into surgery, and we waited some more. Then the doctor came out and

told us, “We are sorry but she didn’t make it, She lost too much blood.” I felt so sad that my best friend died! I didn’t even tell her that she was my best friend.

# Orphan Wars (excerpt)

by Jaron Frost

A warm breeze floated through the metropolitan streets of Vaskel. It carried the unusual scents of Remembrance Day: roasted cinnamon almonds, sausages seasoned with spice and onion, semi-sweet chocolate, popcorn bathed in butter and salt. It wove its way through streams of cars, taxi cabs lit with neon advertisements, double-deck buses, and electric trains, all bearing passengers heading to or from Central Plaza, where the day's festivities had just begun. Red banners flapped from streetlamps and balconies, beckoning all to the Remembrance Day Fair. Music echoed across the faces of skyscrapers, filling the city with a pulsing rhythm.

From far above, buried in the usual layer of smog, the Goddess' Bell Tower seemed to swing its great brass head. It had been tolling all morning, each clear ring representing a human soldier who had thus far given his life in the Demon War. The festival would continue as long as the bell rang, and this year's was planned to last for three days.

Many couldn't hear the bell over the live music, the mechanical whir of carnival rides, or the satisfying crunch of a fresh Remembrance Pretzel. But from the graveyard a few streets away from Central Plaza, Zidaiku heard the steady ring and, despite his best efforts, could not forget its meaning.

The headstone rose a foot from the uneven grass, names etched in black on white granite. He read them again, hoping he had made a mistake.

*Joss Paine - Sirea Paine*

*2560-2590*

*Beloved friends, taken too soon*

He had never allowed himself to hope that his parents were still alive. How could they be, when so many others had fallen? The names of the dead surrounded him, and the Goddess' Tower reminded him of countless others who never even returned home. The last name on this gravestone even matched his own.

But despite the evidence, he didn't want to believe what he

saw. He reminded himself that he had never known their first names. In a city of ten million, a simple last-name match couldn't prove a thing.

A scuff in the grass interrupted Zidaiku's thoughts. "There you are," said a familiar female voice. He turned and saw Angel stepping carefully through the graves toward him. Her platinum blonde hair and white tee shirt shined in the sunlight. Zidaiku took special notice of them because the way Angel styled herself was indicative of her stress levels. The tighter her hair, the more likely she was to lose her temper.

Today, her hair was down. Fine strands of it floated in the breeze. She touched Zidaiku's arm. "We've been looking all over for you."

"Sorry. I was just heading back." He walked past her, hoping she wouldn't notice the headstone. He knew it was stupid to even consider the possibility of Joss and Sirea being his parents, and he didn't want Angel making a big deal out of nothing.

But when he didn't hear her fall into step behind him, he knew it was too late.

"Zidaiku, are these your..." She knelt and brushed her fingers across the stone. "I thought you didn't know their names, or where they were buried."

He shrugged. "I still don't. These guys could be anybody."

"But look at the date of death," Angel said, her face lighting up. "Twenty-five ninety. That was fourteen years ago. You would have been three years old. And you said you can't remember anything about them, right? At that age, you would have—"

"I don't care, Angel," he interrupted. Her smile faded into a worried frown, but he ignored the resulting twinge of guilt. "Look, it doesn't matter who they were. Nothing can bring them back, and I've gotten along fine without them so far. Let's just go back to the Plaza, okay?"

As her cerulean eyes darted back and forth across his face, the concerned wrinkles between them slowly faded. She let out a long breath. "Okay. I'm sorry."

When they reached the iron gate at the edge of the field, Zidaiku looked back at the sea of names. Angel's words burned in his mind. Could they really be...? No. He shook the question away. Finding out would change nothing.

He only had one year left. After that, he would never have to look back to his past again.

# Memories in early life—5 to 8 years

by Dr. Joyce Murray

My Mom had bright blue eyes and red hair.  
Her love was roses and my Dad, Glen.  
I was sent away when she got sick  
I came back once and got to peek at her  
through the bedroom window. They thought  
I didn't know she died so they left me in the car  
alone while they discussed her death.  
When they took me home, my Dad said  
"your Mom has gone to heaven".  
I knew, so I knew I had to cry.  
I fixed my Mom's hair in her casket in  
our living room. I was very glad to be home  
from my Aunt Ruth's home.  
I had no understanding of illness or death.

# The Dread of Pipersmill Hollow (excerpt)

by Greg Near

Dr. Ignacious Q. Honeychurch was the most officious villager anyone in Pipersmill Hollow had been forced to endure in recent memory. But while his dialogue was tedious, his skills as a physician were unmatched.

“There is no putrescence that cannot be cured,” the doctor was fond of saying, “no ailment of the bowels that cannot be discerned, and no fever that cannot be cooled. I’ve yet to meet the boil I cannot prick.”

*Lord help me*, thought Mayor Whitby as he lay back on his heavy mattress with an enormous sigh, Dr. Honeychurch prattling on at the bedside, regaling the town elder with yet another story of his miraculous cures. *If I possessed the strength at this moment to throttle this young man and silence his incessant chatter, I’m afraid I would.*

That was what the mayor told a small group of village gentlemen who had gathered together a fortnight later at The Black Goat, Widow Olsson’s ale house. They had come together on a foggy evening to sample the victuals and resolve a number of small disputes over crops and property boundaries. In Pipersmill Hollow, more issues were settled over a mug of ale and a steaming plate of the widow’s fare than at any official town meeting.

“I’m loathe to admit my weakness, sirs, but the fact remains that if I had not been drained of all strength by the water in my lungs, I would have risen up out of that bed like the Mad Man of Blackwiche Isle, wrapped my fingers about the young doctor’s throat and silenced him straightaway.”

“Aye,” said the old mortician to his right, the always agreeable Matthew Peace, “I don’t mind saying, that’s one body I wouldn’t mind dressing.”

To which there was a grumbling of assent and a few low chuckles among all the men seated at the long table.

“Pardon my bluntness, but he’s just so damned arrogant,” said Simon MacNare, the local veterinarian, who had spent an afternoon earlier that same week with his earhorn up against the belly of Dr. Honeychurch’s cow, listening to her yet-to-be-born calf and

desperately trying to hear over the voice of the doctor. “He seemed physically incapable of stopping the air through his vocal cords, as he began telling me of the preferred treatments for calves twisted in the cow’s womb and of new procedures he had heard of in the city. Then, to my vexation, he told me yet again of his irresistible charms among the more wealthy young ladies of Boston, to which I wanted to respond, ‘Then why didn’t you marry one of them, settle in the city and spare us all the torture of your company!’”

The chuckling around the table increased.

“Here, here,” someone muttered.

MacNare lowered his voice to a whisper and glanced over his shoulder to make sure the Widow wasn’t within earshot. “Then, sirs, he went on about the prodigiousness of his physical attributes and how that together with the techniques of coupling he had learned from perusing Oriental texts on the subject, which he described in more detail than I care to repeat, he had never failed to carry his many paramours to the very heights of purely sensual pleasure.”

The Mayor gasped and felt the heat of embarrassment rise from his weighty jewels to the tops of his ears. Yet he leaned in to hear more, asking “Did he name the volumes?”

“He did, but their esoteric names are too much for my memory. He even went so far as to reveal that a particular method of entry from behind was verily assured to produce squeals of breathy delight from the fairer sex.”

The Mayor nearly fell forward into his dinnerplate, the mortician turned paler than usual, and the other members of the impromptu council wiped their brows, blew their noses and squirmed on their benches. The mortician rose and threw another log onto the fire, his hands rubbing together like two pieces of dry parchment.

“I tell you, gentlemen, I barely knew how to respond. So I didn’t, simply gathering up my tools and exiting as politely and quickly as possible having finished up my examination of his animal. But damned if the man isn’t a fine doctor in spite of his capacity for self-appreciation. Last summer he cured my little Joe of an infection to his leg that could have easily left him crippled for life. It was, dare I say it, practically miraculous. Now if the Reverend Pike ever heard me say such a thing he would give me a full lecture on the power of prayer, and how the night-long beseeches of my dear wife to Our Lord could not be discounted in

the cure. But I witnessed the dexterity of his administrations and the keen workings of the doctor's mind as he bent over my boy's troubled limb. If it had been old Doctor Washburne still serving our town, I fear little Joe would have gone under the saw. I hate to say it - for I feel as the rest of the company that he is like a buzzing bottlefly in our ears - but the man knows his business."

After a silent moment, John Kettlesworth took a long draught of his ale and with foam still on his lips said in his gravelly voice, "It's true. He took care of our housekeeper Addy, who had taken to her bed with a noxious fever, and had her back up on her feet within a couple of days. The few coins it cost me to have her healed up were more than worth the endless complaints I would have had to endure from Mrs. Kettlesworth about the inconvenience of a sickly maid."

"Aye, aye," they all mumbled in consent. The nearby fire cracked and hissed, its yellow light producing deep shadows in the room. It had grown late and the uneaten food on the board had long gone cold.

"Now if he could just cure that damnable Dread on my property," Kettlesworth added.

Some of them filled their pipes and proceeded to smoke in silence, each waiting for the other to take up the subject at hand. After a round of throat-clearing and finger-drumming on the wood, the mayor finally spoke.

"It's a dark matter, that. And not the first time it has disturbed the peace of this village. I remember sitting on my father's knee when I was a sprout of three or four, and having him warn me that if I didn't say my prayers before bed and always mind my mother, the Dread would surely drag me out from under my covers and into the cold frosty air. I don't think I slept a wink that night."

***"Now if he could just cure that damnable Dread on my property"***

It was then the heavy front door of the The Black Goat swung inward, and the gathering was joined by a smiling Dr. Honeychurch, who was wearing a brocade waistcoat of gold and vermillion under his black jacket.

"Evening, gentlemen," he greeted them. "Do you mind if I join you for a mug of the local?"

The mumblings of assent were subdued, and the mayor

managed to motion toward an empty space at the table where the doctor slid himself down like a dancer. A drawn out, almost uncomfortable silence followed, during which the only conversation was between the fire and the logs, a spitting, cracking dialogue that continued until after the widow in her lacy bonnet had sat a pint of ale down in front of him.

“Gentlemen,” Dr. Honeychurch said, “it seems that I have stumbled into the middle of a depressed meeting. Has there been a death in the village, Mr. Peace?”

The mortician looked around the table from face to face, then said, “Only the cattle on John Kettlesworth’s farm of late.”

Kettlesworth mopped his wet brow, as he sat closest to the hearth, and said, “Aye. I fear if I lose even one more the lady of the house and myself may have to pack up and relocate back to the city, as much as I hate the thought of that.”

“I hadn’t heard of this,” the doctor said. “Are there wolves in the surrounding hills?”

“Certainly,” Simon MacNare added, “but the wolves in these hills have never ventured down into our farms or village. Either they’re well enough fed on venison or something deters them from drawing any closer than the very edges of the woods.”

“Then what, pray tell, is the cause of this bovine decimation? And is it only your cattle, Kettlesworth?”

“So far it has only been mine. But that will surely change afore long at the rate they’re going, as mine will be gone by Christmas.” The large man hesitated to go on revealing the nature of their problem.

“Well?” the doctor prompted.

Kettlesworth then looked to the mayor for a sign of whether to continue or not.

Mayor Whitby let out a large sigh, leaned back into the shadows causing his chair to creak under his weight and wrapped his hands around his ample belly. All eyes turned to him.

“You may think us mad, doctor, or full of our New Englander superstitions, but the plague on our countryside is far worse than any pack of wolves. And far older. It has been here since before the first settlers. Probably since before the earliest indigenous natives tracked their kill through yonder woods.”

“Ahh,” the doctor expelled, puffing himself up a little and pulling back the lapels of his coat, as if to make sure no man at the table missed the fine needlework in the brocade fabric. “Now I

understand. I recently heard of a similar disease that was striking the livestock up in the Montpelier region.”

“Similar to the Dread?” MacNare asked.

“And not without a cure as well. It is merely a sulphite mixture that takes out the hidden disease where it lies in the ground, roundabout where the livestock were feeding.”

The mayor began to wave away this explanation of the doctor’s.

“Yes, you see, gentlement, there really is no putrescence that cannot be cured.” His smile had broadened and glowed in the firelight.

There were deep murmurs among the men, many of whom were shaking their heads or moving restlessly in their seats.

“Doctor,” the mayor said, using the same tone of voice he used with his wife or his young children, “you have failed to understand.”

“But--”

“No, we are not referring to a common disease, such as our inestimable Mr. MacNare might treat in a cow or a pig.” The veterinarian nodded his thanks to the mayor’s kind words.

“We refer instead to something called a Dread.”

The doctor’s smile had faded, and he shrugged as if to say, “And? So?”

“It is a malicious presence in the country. An enormous vapor or entity, if you will.

Untouchable and apparently unstoppable, that slumbers for years, and then once again awakens and begins to feed off of the lives and livelihood of Pipersmill Hollow. The community has always been able to wait it out, hoping for its hibernation to return, but this time is different. It is stronger, and more bold in its ravenous appetite. It only moved on to John Kettlesworth cattle after completely exterminating all of the animals on the Schooley farm - chickens, pigs and two horses. The Schooleys have since moved on further west. Throughout the history of our village, there has been evidence both seen and experienced, of animals - and in some more vile instances, young children - who disappear in a cloud of blood and flesh, or hide and feathers. Never to be seen again.”

For once, the doctor had no reply, his features having gone very serious and his eyes reflecting a distant light. He nodded for the mayor to go on.

“The Dread is sometimes heard, like a an enormous bale of hay being pushed through the undergrowth of the woods, or a ghastly rumbling that makes the very ground shudder. But more often than not it is felt: a nauseating chill that you can feel to your very bones, and that stays with you for days afterward. Many of us here have felt that, and the attendant inability to once again get any warmth back into our frames. It is an unnatural evil, but one that we have no weapons against. I fear it may be the undoing of us all, and that this fine village will be ultimately devoured.”

# Cold Embers Never Die

by A. Nikki Inkcraft

there's nothing, no nothing, this construct can't do  
if men were so pure they'd not fear it's coup  
a wonder of clockwork, invention and screws  
t'will function forever it never needs cues  
your hand it will hold long past when your dead  
forgotten & rotting in man's final bed  
fires are forged by it when its cold  
warmth for its master it does what it's told  
what of your heart the temple men tread  
& soil with soot unhallowed boots bled  
machines do not scar, disappoint or dispose  
nor claim bloody land from your heart for your foes  
science is pure, on science we stand  
it's god's science which created this land  
but humans are wrought with vile emotions  
scheming with shadows to fuel all their notions  
what choice do you have to live or to die  
to let men kill man or embrace this one lie  
so no emotion resounds in machines  
but man lost his smile when cunning was gleaned  
return then to them who cast your apart,  
who's actions belie if they e'er had a heart?

# My WWII Report

by Ray Wright

When I wrote my report on WWII, I did a lot of research. I used many books and the Internet for information. I also watched the military channel and the History channel.

I did my report on Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor is located on the Hawaiian Islands. The Japanese attacked our naval base there on December 7, 1941. There were many bombs dropped on the naval base when we were attacked. President Roosevelt declared this to be "A day that will live in infamy."

I had a lot of fun preparing this report. I used pictures and maps for it. I used overheads. I used some maps from that time period. They showed where our ships were at the time. When I finished, it was six pages long.

I really would like to go there one day and see the museum that has been built. There is a memorial on the U.S.S. Arizona that you walk across to see the remains of the ship.

I'm glad I did this report because the class and I learned so much from it. It was great fun to present my report.

# Storm Children

by David Goodale

Little Rock, Arkansas

August, 1944:

There was a roof for the train platform at the station in Little Rock, but that night it was of little use. A storm was setting in and by midnight wind blew rain right across the platform.

She was already tired from traveling. Lugging her bag, she made slow progress along the wet concrete, hunching into her coat as the rain pelted her. The train was indistinct in the rain but as she got closer it took on form and solidity. A porter jumped down.

“We been waitin’ on you. Here let me get that.”

She was glad to give him the bag. The wind blew her coat aside and he saw the curve of her belly. When they reached the railcar he left the bag on the platform and helped her up the stairs.

In the vestibule she paused and seeing a bench she sank down onto it. The porter brought up her bag.

“You might have a hard time findin’ a seat, ma’am ... the train’s pretty full. You know this is really a troop train. There’s only a few civilians on board. I’m gonna get one of the Sergeants, maybe they can help you.” He left.

The last few days had been hectic. Wartime transportation problems caused her to change her travel plans several times. At the last minute a scheduled train was cancelled and she rode to Little Rock from North Carolina with her friend Hazel in Hazel’s Studebaker. She knew that Hazel would have taken her all the way to her destination on the west coast, but Hazel had to get back to work the next day and couldn’t really afford to make such a trip.

She was lucky to get a ticket for this train. She suspected that the ticket agent had bent the rules for her, and probably also helped delay the train. She had to admit: late-stage pregnancy had its advantages.

In a bit she rose and opened the door to the passenger compartment. The car was full, all seats occupied by soldiers wearing rust-brown uniforms and garrison caps. She would have to try another car farther along in the train.

As she started up the aisle the train lurched into motion, making her grab for the overhead rail. Men began twisting around to look at her, more and more of them in a slow wave of turning heads that spread up through the car. Several men jumped up. The car rocked a little as the train rolled over a switch, and a soldier moved to her side to offer his arm to her.

Another soldier approached; he had a few extra lines on his face and some extra stripes on his uniform, as well as an air of authority. He gestured to a couple of soldiers who were sitting nearby and they rose, leaving a pair of adjoining seats empty.

"Come on honey, sit down," he said to her, "You can have both seats."

Gratefully she sat, working her way over to the window side. She thought of saying that she didn't need both seats and a soldier could sit next to her, but the chance to sprawl a little was just too tempting.

"I sent for a pillow," he said. "Do you want anything? There's coffee and I think we can get some milk."

"Is there any hot water?"

He murmured to one of the men in the small crowd behind him and the man left on the double.

"When is your baby due?" he asked.

"It should be in a couple of weeks."

"How far are you going?"

"Washington State - Seattle area."

He whistled. "That's quite a trip. You must be a tough little lady."

She smiled. "I hope I'm tough enough."

"Your water will be here soon. I'm Sergeant Simmons. Anything you want you just let me know. If I'm not nearby just tell one of the men and they'll find me. Will you promise me that?"

She nodded. He went on: "Now see if you can get some rest. You men, go on back to your seats. Give the lady some privacy!"

She dozed for a while, her head on a pillow next to the window. After a bit she woke. The storm was going strong and sheets of rain sluiced along the railcar. Lightning in the distance made writhing abstract patterns in the water that pulsed across the window.

She chatted with the soldiers in the seats across the aisle, learning that they were on their way to San Francisco, where they

would board a boat for the Philippine Islands.

The train had stretched out into a long fast run across flat terrain. The porter came by and told her that they were in Oklahoma.

As they moved through the storm lightning struck closer, close enough to be uncomfortable. She moved uneasily but kept watching, a little bit fascinated. When she was young she had enjoyed watching thunderstorms but right now the lightning, and the soldiers on the train, made her think about the war, something she usually avoided doing.

According to the news the war was going well, which was good because defeat was unthinkable. However the situation was still uncertain. There were secrets, too. Hidden things might turn out to have important effects on the war.

She happened to know about one such secret. She was probably the only person on the train who knew that the U.S. leaders were afraid that the Germans were building a completely new type of weapon, a bomb far more powerful than any that had existed before. It was called the atom bomb. She also knew that the U.S. had launched a huge effort to build its own version.

She knew these things because her husband, an engineer, was doing research connected with the bomb. He should not have told her about his work, but as happened in many cases, he had.

She remembered the conversation. A few weeks ago he came home from work and told her that he had to leave early the next morning for Hanford, in Washington State. Once he was in Hanford he would have to stay there. She would have to join him when she could. He wouldn't be able to return to North Carolina to help her sell the house and move their possessions.

"Why, Ed? Why can't you come back and help me?"

"I tried, Win. I talked to Ralph Hendon, and I talked to Turner ... Turner is head of the entire section. I practically begged him. He said no extra travel would be permitted. He said it was no good talking to Colonel Ambruster; the guy would just yell at me and threaten me with prison."

"But ... I need you. There'll be so much to do, and besides ... I'm so worried about ... you know ..."

"I know, I know." His tone was tortured. "You can't believe what it's like now at work. The military is all over everything.

Everyone is being watched. Once I'm done with this job I'll never deal with the government again, especially not the Armed Forces."

"But why? Why are they so crazy?"

"Okay Wini, I wasn't going to tell you, you know I'm not supposed to talk about this stuff, but I will. But you've got to keep it a complete secret, never tell anyone, not Hazel, not even your mother ... absolutely no one. All right?"

She agreed and he told her about the atom bomb and the project to build one.

"My god, Ed," she said when he finished. "It sounds crazy. It sounds like some of your science fiction. Is it for real?"

"I'm afraid so."

"It's horrible ... it's like a nightmare."

"Yeah it sure is. I've been hoping that we won't be able to build it, but it looks like we can. Just one of those damn things would flatten out Cleveland like it wasn't even there. And that's not the worst part. There would be radiation, lots of it ... it would kill thousands more people, maybe even more than would die in the explosion ...

"Wini, Turner told me that the top brass is afraid that the Germans are ahead of us on this thing. Maybe several months ahead. Can you imagine what could happen if they get it first? That's why everyone is so nuts. There just can't be any delays."

There was a long silence. Finally she took a deep breath. "I've got a lot to do."

"I've been thinking about that. Let's not put the home up for sale until after you've gone - I don't want you worrying about it. And we don't have to move everything. If stuff isn't essential we'll just leave it behind; we can get new stuff in Washington. I'll put in for reimbursement for expenses connected with the move and to heck with them if they don't like it.

"The main thing is to get you to Washington as soon as possible. The hospital in Hanford is supposed to be top-notch. Just get there, Win. Where we can take care of you."

***"It's horrible  
... it's like a  
nightmare."***

It was nice in the train. She felt safe surrounded by the

soldiers, swaying in their seats in the dim light of the railcar. She hoped that they wouldn't go into battle in the Philippines and that they would all make it home in one piece. She hoped the war would be over soon. She hoped the bomb would never be used.

She sighed. Life was so uncertain now. Along with everything else there was ... her baby.

She had already lost one child in a miscarriage that threatened her own life. She and the baby she now carried might both be dead in a few days. She felt like a soldier in the war.

The train sped westward. The lightning danced and played and even as it flashed in her face she fell asleep again, leaning on the pillow. By the time she woke the train had pulled away from the storm and the lightning was gone. Dawn brought clearing skies and sunlight.

Hanford, Washington  
August, 1946:

She took a last look around the apartment. It had served them well but it was time to move again. Her little family was on their way to New York.

Ed was outside now, stowing their luggage into their recent acquisition, a proud new Ford 6-cylinder Standard Sedan. They would drive through the northern states, pausing in Cleveland to visit relatives, though they didn't have much spare time. Ed had to report to work. He had carried through on his threat and quit the nuclear plant in Hanford for a job in Schenectady, one that involved minimal contact with the government.

He came in now, flushed and cheerful, carrying their young son. The boy was wide-eyed at the excitement of the move.

"That's all, Ed. There's just the food bag and the overnight bag."

"What about the paper?" he said, glancing toward the kitchen table. The newspaper headline read: "HIROSHIMA: ONE YEAR LATER." There was a picture of a mushroom cloud.

"Leave it," she said.

As they went out to the car she remembered the train trip she had taken to Washington. Things were a lot better now.

The war was over, for one thing. And though it was disastrous for many countries, it had been good for America. The Great Depression was just a memory as the economy, boosted by wartime spending, roared into peacetime growth. There was

energy and optimism everywhere.

Also, she and her son were alive. She was still thankful for that.

The one thing she regretted was that the atom bomb did get used. She didn't like being reminded of it.

She hated the bomb. The world with the bomb in it was a different place, harder, cruder, more unreal. Shadows were darker now and lights were harsher and politicians were more senseless. Officials had the power to annihilate with the push of a button.

As it turned out there had been no real need to build the bomb; the Germans never made much progress in their own efforts.

So the United States had exclusive control of its new super-weapon, at least for now. "I hope we don't regret it," she murmured, and put it out of her mind.

(This narrative is non-fiction and autobiographical)

# Precious Life

by Tali Morgan

Before him, I honestly believed there was no purpose to my Life.

I have been through so many trying events,

That have left me battling through endless pain and strife.

I have been used and abused, battered and torn.

Yet moments from Death,

God smiled at me, and miraculously my son was born.

# Little Girls

by Denise Bell

My little one is hiding but peeks around for me.  
Mischievous as usual, she lands upon my knee.  
She looks for hidden treasures in pockets and closed fists,  
And settles back to eat them, when she's sure there's none she's missed.

Her cherub cheeks so tempt me to give them each a pinch,  
I grab those chubby cheeks of hers and squeeze to half an inch.  
I can't resist just kissing that little puckered mouth,  
Then hug her fast before she has a chance to scamper out.  
So on my knees I drop to play the game that wins her heart.  
I chase her down and tickle her so she can play her part.  
She squirms away and starts to run but sees me sitting there,  
Then comes back uninhibited, her arms raised to the air.  
"Tickle me!" she taunts me and I pretend I'm bored.  
Then when she's nearly past me, I get her to the floor  
And tickle her and eat her neck until she pleads for air.  
She pouts her lips and puffs her chest as if she doesn't care,  
Then sneaks around behind me and tiptoes to my back  
And with those tiny fingers, she sees that I don't lack  
The happy feeling tickling can cause to such as I.  
What pleasure I can get from her, this joy I couldn't guy.  
And when my troubles seem to be the biggest in the world,  
I stop to think of happiness that's found in little girls.

# First Day at Clayton Middle School

by Joseph Gilmore

You get out of the car and walk into the school auditorium. The principal says that every 7<sup>th</sup> grader needs to have an 8<sup>th</sup> grader show you around. So an 8<sup>th</sup> grader shows you the library, the gym and all your classrooms. What's worse than this? Your mom already humiliated you in front of half the kids because you missed the bus. You hear the bell ring and hope your classes are better. Your teacher tells the class they're going to have more orientation tours—yeesh. Do they seriously have to do this *EVERY* year?

You fall asleep and later miss the bus again. Now what should you tell your parents this time? They'll be furious! You see a sign telling you about the after school program. So you go to the after school program, and they even offer you a snack! You stay after school until 4:30, but you leave in a good mood. They have soccer, snacks, homework help, art, music, and they give you a ride home! You run home so happy and tell your mom about your day.

She was right, as usual. This school is so fun. You want to go back tomorrow.

# Miss Paul Remembered

by Peggy Kadir

To a seven-year-old she appeared tall and gaunt as she stood in the front of her classroom. She dressed like my grandmother. It was the middle of the Depression and everyone dressed that way, but I was too young to know that. What I did know was that she stood very straight and was intimidating. As a teacher she expected respect and got it. Her classes were disciplined. They were also fun.

Once a year she walked her home-room class to her house to see the spring flowers in bloom. What an adventure! We walked many blocks and crossed several streets, which I found exciting. Then she spoke to us about the flowers as if we were adults, explaining the mysteries of the plants. So much of what she said I didn't understand, but her enthusiasm stirred in me the wonder of nature.

She didn't stop with the earth and the miracle of renewed life in her garden, however, she also took us to the stars. Although we were deep in the Depression she insisted that every student buy a book of the heavens. I can still remember walking tin to Kress's (a local five-and-dime store) and buying that thin dark blue book for ten cents. Then she explained how the planets revolved around the sun and how the groups of stars were called constellations.

Orion the might hunter was always my favorite, which the three stars in his belt and the bright star Sirius in the nose of his dog. Miss Paul made learning not only painless, but exhilarating.

Sometimes we disappointed her. One day she brought an orange to class. Explaining that the orange represented the earth, she pointed to the top of the orange and said, "If you lived here UP would be toward the floor." Then she pointed to the bottom of the orange and said, "If you lived here UP would be toward the window." "And if you lived here," she continued, "UP would be toward the door." "Now where is UP?" she asked in a commanding voice.

No one answered. Her face showed her chagrin, and she called upon the smartest student in class. He couldn't answer either. Saddened, Miss Paul said, "UP is always away from the earth." Then she said, "Remember, you have to think!"

Miss Paul was my teacher for a few months only. I moved to a new school district and never saw her again. During my many years of schooling I have had numerous teachers who were excellent. However, the one who most influenced my life was Miss Paul, because she not only taught me to think but she made me *want* to think.

Today the mental picture I have of Miss Paul is that which I formed as a seven-year-old, rather vague and fuzzy, like a faded tintype. But my heart picture of her is clear and shining. In this picture she glows with enthusiasm, surrounded by pulsating signs that say, "LEARNING IS FUN! LEARNING IS EXCITING! THINK!!!"

# Paul's Reading Adventures

by Paul L. Rosser

I was sick and tired of not reading the newspaper, *NASCAR* books, and menus for years. It made me mad to not read what I wanted to read most, the Bible. My friend, Karen, got me into reading. In 2004, I started reading, writing, and spelling at the Literacy Action Center. Years later, I started to do math, too.

In 2010, I did lots of reading to help me practice words. I read newspaper articles about West High School, University of Utah, and *NASCAR*. I read 132 books. Some were about airplanes; others were Clifford books. I even read an *Old Testament Story* book. I read one Clifford book to some kids. I used flashcards to help read the books. Now I can read these books over and over again.

I was interviewed by Cathy Free in July. Cathy Free works at *Deseret Morning News*. She wrote about me in an article in the newspaper. I am learning the words she wrote. By Christmas, I could read 40% of what she wrote. By the end of 2011, I want to read all of her article.

I read signs on field trips at the Arts Festival, Anne Frank Exhibit, Green Fair, and the Living Traditions Festival. I walked around to read signs like *Outback Pottery* and *Hardwood Pens*. I read the census form and filled it out.

I wrote stories. I read my story about an accident on State Street to people at the Arts Festival. I read another story at the Literacy Action Center Open House. I read two of my stories at the Writing Center.

I worked on reading bus maps so I could go to the Literacy Action Center's Recognition Dinner. That was the first time I tried to find the place myself. The dinner was fun, especially meeting people and talking about my reading.

I am a lot different now. I go to the library to get books to read at home. I ask my boss at work about the words I can't read. I ask my friend to help me read people's names on the sports page and the words on DVD's. Now I go to the store by myself to get milk, eggs, cheese, steak, hamburger, and bread. It makes me happy to do what I couldn't do before.

# Reading Is Pain

by Scott Aldrich

October 21<sup>st</sup> sent a shockwave of fear through me. It was the date I had feared since mid-August.

I joined the writing group at Literacy Action Center in August, one of the groups sponsored by the Community Writing Center. It sounded like something I would enjoy being involved in. I had never attempted any type of writing before, so I signed up. I hoped I would be able to construct a story that made sense.

I had written a short story about summertime activities in my yard and presented it to the group for feedback. At the end of the class I was informed that their stories would be read, out loud, in a public place, in front of a crowd (by the author of each particular story).

Not knowing that I was expected to read publicly and I had inadvertently volunteered myself, I felt a very strong sense of personal betrayal. I had just shot myself in the foot!

I agonized for several weeks knowing I would have to read my story on October 21<sup>st</sup>. Reading in front of a group always terrified me. I never liked the focus on myself. I was afraid I'd stutter or stammer while reading aloud in front of the class. I hated the laughs in school. I'm sure I'm not alone.

The writers in our group revised and edited their stories. We also practiced reading them at the Literacy Action Center. Oh, boy, we were supposed to be ready for the big day!

Well, I wasn't! I was scared sweatless!! The big day had come, and we all had our little gems polished.

The reading took place at the Community Writing Center right next to the Main Library in Salt Lake City. It was scheduled from 6:30 to 8:30 P.M. I had no idea how many people would be there, all I knew was I would be reading into a microphone. Oh, Lord!

On the ride to the Community Writing Center (which Deb so graciously provided), I tried to visualize myself reading to a crowd. Not a pretty picture!

When my wife, infant daughter, and I arrived, I somehow felt quite calm. My wife and our infant daughter were there to support me. We went inside and my palms instantly became clammy, my knees shaky, and my voice achey-breaky.

We were supposed to sign up for time slots but now it had changed to open mic. I listened to a few stories and saw my opening.

I had found the courage to stand up front and read. Slam! Door closed. Too late, too slow. Someone else beat me to the microphone. I waited for one or two more readers to finish and walked up front. Talk about high blood pressure (thank God for meds), mine was raging!

I started reading, becoming calmer, and more comfortable as I went ahead. All my preconceived ideas were wrong. No one laughed at me. My pants were dry. I still stood, speaking fairly clear.

It really wasn't so bad after all. I had psyched myself out for nothing. I was having fun reading my story, expressing myself in a way I had never done before. I finished reading and returned to my seat.

My wife said, "You did just fine."

I felt great relief from the pressure I'd put on myself. It was so unnecessary. I also felt a sense of pride for overcoming a fear I had carried since grade school.

It turned out to be extremely satisfying, an evening of fun and humor. All the stories were interesting and had their own unique flavor.

# Why I Write

by Meg Burke

The bird sits in the tree, awakened before dawn. Her branch sways. No use tucking her bill under her wing, she feels the dawn about to break, as a rumble up the tree though her tiny stick legs frozen in grip to the branch. She waits to sing, waits for the moment when something beyond herself ruffles her feathers in a shiver and rises up through her throat. Then when her beak opens, her eyes shut and song is born. When I catch the words it feels like a song. It feels like Grace.

Writing pulls me into grace, grace I want to drown in, I want to burn in.

Writing pushes me into grace, I want to explode from it. I want it to consume me from the inside out. I want every breath, every heartbeat to be about it. I want the grace.

I. Want. That. Grace.

The wind blows as if it has been reading this over my shoulder and is here to help. To carry away my invocations for a writing life. To carry them up to the heavens to the angels and saints.

Sink me into that grace. Lift me up to that grace. Wrap me in it douse me in it roll me in it toss me in it HURL me in it push me off the edge into it. Whatever it takes but it is what I want.

It. Is. All. I. Want.

If I didn't write my belly would swell. My back would ache, I wouldn't walk well. And at some critical mass-not according to any gestational calendar- I would double over with cramps and pain. I would push, because not to would mean the expansion of tears that would ultimately blow me apart from the inside out. Like a water balloon gone errant off the faucet I would gush. All unwritten ideas and poems and feelings and dreams and- all of it- would express in tears I could not cry fast enough- tears unshed and incubated until they grew too large to be kept.

These word babies are miracles, ugly miracles to be cleaned up, cared for, nurtured and presented, for their life will exist as telepathy to the reader in whom they impregnate and incubate more ideas more feelings. I write so as not to let those babies die,

not to still born, not to abort.

It. Is. Why. I. Am. Here.

A friend of mine told me he doesn't like to write. What do you mean you don't like to write? You must not be doing it right. What's the payoff, he asked. It makes me a better listener. Allows me to hear that Grace, more often, more easily. Like each word acts as a door stop- holding the gateway open to something more, something bigger, something better. If I don't write I feel that door begin to shut, begin to slip shut as the words gather dust, brittle, and decay- and if that door shuts-then I am joyless- lifeless. The words from ME, the "MY WORDS" hold open the door, it's my give, it's my call out into that More, that Better. What I GET BACK is the Grace. What I GET BACK are divine words, moments inspired, words that are not mine. They come back at me through that door and I love that.

That. Is. Why. I. Write.

# Stepping Over

by Katherine January

pulling the cabin  
door shut with  
one hand, my left,  
I step into space  
with my right  
foot off the high  
stone step

and in the air like  
that, one hand on  
the now locked  
knob, I can only  
follow my foot  
in one motion  
over the long  
black, tight-  
stretched,  
spring-  
basking  
snake

# Monster Story, Part 1

by Julie Liljenquist

I have an invisible monster. While he can't be seen, he can be heard and smelled. My invisible monster is half human and half monster. His name is Bob. He came from a monster adoption agency. He is five years old.

The monster adoption agency gave me a monster indicator so I can keep track of him. The indicator is a green box with purple, red, and yellow buttons. The purple button makes Bob appear for a half hour at a time. The red button is only used when Bob is asleep, so I can see his breath. The yellow button is like a car's "check engine" light. It tells me when the monster indicator is broken.

Bob is an unusual monster because he can make the bottom half of his body human, while the top half stays monster. He does this when he laughs or plays with children. He returns to being all invisible when he sees a stranger or dislikes my actions.

He is special as a monster and a human because he doesn't really speak human, although he can hear in human. He speaks monster. How does a monster speak at five years old? Monsters like to scare people, so he growls and says, "Boo."

He likes playing ball with humans but he makes himself invisible so all the children see is the ball moving around in a circle. They know when he's caught it because it stops bouncing. The children like to play hide and seek with Bob because they can't see him. He does not make himself visible until I push the monster indicator. I have to tell the children when it's time to go home so Bob can eat.

One day last week, Bob went to the playground to play with the children. He fell off the monkey bars, and the children fell on his monster arm. The arm has no bones, so it fell off. The children ran to our house and told me what happened. We all ran back to the playground, and I saw his monster arm laying on the ground. I took him to the hospital at the monster adoption agency.

Bob and all the other children ran around and played with the nurses while Bob was waiting for the doctor to sew his arm back on. They crawled around on their hands and knees, making the nurses fall all over the place. The nurses called me out

of his room. I, in turn, called all the mothers of the children. They came to the hospital and spanked their children. They, the children, could not play with Bob until his arm was completely healed. The moms did not know that Bob was a monster. They thought he was only human. They did not know that all the doctor had to do was sew Bob's arm back on his body.

One day I dropped the monster indicator in my soup. It did not work. I was wondering how I was going to make Bob visible. I asked him to help me, but I forgot he doesn't speak human. I took Bob and the monster indicator outside in the sun, hoping the indicator would dry out and work. Of course, I can't see Bob, so he took off without me and got pretty far before the indicator started working. When I got it working and pushed the purple button, I found out he was three blocks away, at the candy store. I had to jump in my car to get him. I said, "Stay out of the candy." He didn't obey me. He tried to defy me by making it difficult for me and making me chase him around. So I said, "Come on, Bob. We are going to leave the store." So I picked him up and started to tickle him. We had a good time on the way home. I made sure that never happened again.



*"The  
arm has no  
bones, so it  
fell off."*

# Marbles: A Chakra Series

by Ramona Maassen

## *Base Chakra*

He had nearly bankrupted his self getting his new marble. The guy that sold it to him promised him a good time and laughed a little. Jack couldn't wait to get home to plug in. He closed the sign on his shop 5 minutes early, even though he saw his best customer headed his way.

Hurriedly he pulled down the window roller as he slipped his closed sign in place. While he waited for Mr. Wainright to pass by, he examined his new acquisition. He had never used his base chakra before and his hands were trembling with excitement. It wasn't like he was hard up for a date or anything; but he was sick of all the complications relationships brought. Two weeks before he had his base chakra modified so that he could start slipping marbles.

Jack recalled the look on the face of the technician who performed that bit of surgery. The way the guy looked at him made him feel sleazy. Well, what the hell, everyone was doing it now. And from listening to the comments some of the guys at the bar made, he figured it couldn't hurt. There was a knock at his door, but he remained where he was. There was a slight rattle as Wainright tested the door handle and then steps moving away from the shop. Jack looked briefly around his shop and then after peeking through the shades at the door. Opened it and closed it behind him.

## *Solar Plexus Chakra*

It was in the spring, after her mother died that Mani's world simply fell apart. The tears that would not come at the viewing, at the funeral remained dammed in the throat, swallowed in her gut and buried in her darkest thoughts. Her children hovered over her, not knowing what to do or say and eventually they went away. They promised to visit, to call. She accepted this without feeling and so began the new part of her life.

Day after day, through the summer she went through the routines of her life. When her husband, Pura, came home, he found his supper set for one and she would be planted in front of the television, staring blankly at some vapid program. When he tried

talking to her, she would answer. When he changed the channels on the television, she continued to stare. Nothing meant any difference. Fall and winter passed. Frustrated and angry after trying everything to somehow engage her, he finally left.

In the spring when the yellow daffodils began blooming, Ana, Mani's youngest child came home. "Mother, this is not right, your mother would weep to see you so. Can you not see the yellow flowers you and your mother planted? We all cried to see grandmother leave, but you, your heart was pierced the deepest."

It may have been these words that reached her. It may have been the color yellow that Mani recalled was her mother's favorite. It matters not. She went to her box of marbles looking for one special one. When she found it Mani fingered the yellow marble of her mother's and later that night replaced her own with her mother's.

Mani cries that night and in the morning, goes out to greet the world.

### *Throat Chakra*

Karla enters her room at the Bridge suite, ignoring Jamie, her personal assistant and the clump of admirers lining up in hope of seeing her; walking straight pass everyone and slipping off her scarf from her neck. It falls in a spiral of color to the floor. She opens the doors to her bedroom and quickly shuts them behind her. Her posture sags against the closed double doors.

In the other room she can hear Jamie supervising the organizing of flowers in vases. God, did Karla hated the ever present smell of flowers her adoring fans smothered her with. Jamie is now answering correspondences on her voice mail and trying to get Karla to respond. "Karla, Karla I know you are tired dear but you can rest in just a little while; we need to talk about your bookings. Sudya would love it if you could just squeeze in a little performance, nothing big. Karla?"

Karla, lets the voices go into the background. She moves to her bed and throws herself across it. Didn't she want this? Didn't she plan and hope and make this her life? Her welling tears streamed and stained her shantung silk duvet. Finally when there are no more tears she rises from her bed and goes to her walk in closet. Pushing a button on a remote causes the racks to move. She stops at the teal colors and selects a gown made of spun silk. She heads to the bathroom. While she is running the water for her bath a man comes up from behind her. His reflection is just barely

visible on the neck of the faucet and she feels a scream building in her chest but it is too late. He pounces and grabs her using the pressure of his hand over her mouth and throat. Desperately she claws at him but his face is covered in a slick gray material. As he straddles her he expertly slips his fingers into her throat chakra, and then runs out of the room. Karla gags and croaks. Her voice a crackle and a whisper as she cries for help to no avail.

### *Third Eye Chakra*

James Carter ran like hell; staggering against strangers who pushed him away from them. His sides were burning and his lungs felt on fire. How had those bastards found him? He had kept a low profile. Giving up his expensive clothes and creits had been easy compared to living on the streets. There was no way he could make his contacts now. The Freaks would know. They might already know about the safe houses. All he could hope for was that the hastily scribbled notes left in the drop boxes were safe from the Freaks' grasp.

When the technology for the marbles became available, James was one of the first to choose the third eye chakra for his arsenal. As an undercover spy for the Feds, he saw it as a perfect hand up on the promotion he was waiting for. Now all he wanted to do was to dig it out of his forehead and smash it. But of course it wasn't that easy. As long as he had the marble, he had the Freaks' kingpin's knowledge of all the illegal set ups, books and the multiple murders the monster had committed. Knowledge that was going to get him killed if he didn't move faster.

He had been undercover as a Freak for six months. About a month after his surgery for his third eye he felt the kingpin's stare. And he knew that the kingpin knew that James was trouble for him.

***“Her voice a crackle and a whisper as she cries for help to no avail.”***

Ducking into an alley he closed his eyes to see better with his third eye chakra. There, about three blocks back were the bad guys. The grays were bad. They had no sense of morality. This gray was apparently working with the Freaks. The gray saw him with his third eye chakra. James got a lurching feeling in his stomach and launched himself out on the sidewalk.

He walked right into the gray. The gray was a tall, thin man with a turban covering his third eye. James could feel he was no match for the man. He felt his will drain away from him, the gray's projection of will causing James to fall to his knees. James concentrated on his inner light of indigo, hoping for a last minute reprieve against his certain death. Already he could feel the pain sinking into his brain and heart as the gray one forced his will on him.

Peace rolled over James.

After a time when he no longer felt any pain he opened his eyes.

Sorry to put you through so much, said the girl with the violet aura. She helped James up with the help of another man with a third eye chakra. If we had pulled you out any earlier we wouldn't have been able to get them all. Thanks to you we have enough to put these assholes where they won't be able to get out and we snagged the kingpin too.

# Broken Rules

by Rachel Frost

Octras licked his cracked lips as he studied the ground. The rocks around his feet slipped when he stood. He knew that his shell thief was somewhere in this pass, hiding among the jagged cliffs that jutted out along the face of the mountain. It was an ideal hideout, really. From the road, it was impossible to see any of the caves that existed among the broken cliffs. And the terrain was treacherous; no man was designed to climb the slope. Even as Octras drew breath, the rocks gave way, and he slid down a finger-length. The only way to find sure footing here was to test it.

He moved, little by little, until he found the footprints he was looking for. Tiny rocks had been pressed lightly into the moist ground where he now stood. They marked the thief's trail, which led straight up the mountainside. Octras gripped the wall of gravel and climbed. It was like crawling up several flights of broken stairs. Stones slid around him, but his calloused hands and careful balance kept him from falling.

As Octras reached a flat surface large enough to stand on, he knew he was just below the entrance. His muscles tensed and stretched as he hoisted himself over the ledge and onto the shelf—the thief's cave. It was much larger than he expected, filled with treasures from all over the region.

"I didn't think you would make it," the thief said, stepping from the shadows. His black hair hung like drapes from a loose ponytail. "You're clever to have followed me this far. Since you survived the climb, it means you're either a magician or a death seeker. I'm curious to know which it is I'll be killing."

The words were strong from someone so short. This thief was hardly more than a boy; even if he had some combat skill, he was no match for Octras.

"Now, none of that. I didn't even bring Tyn with me. I just need the shells you took from Dors, and I'll be on my way." Octras rose to his full height, weighing the boy's reaction. "But if you insist on fighting, I'm sure Varin here would love to play." He tapped the broadsword strapped to his belt.

Though he was certain the thief was scared, the boy puffed

with bravado. “I don’t know what you’re spouting, mercenary, but I’ll write it on your grave anyway, when I bury you.”

The thief lunged forward, a knife flashing as he struck. Octras dodged, and the thief pushed past him. Octras wheeled around and pushed on his opponent’s head—the boy stumbled toward the entrance. He turned and slashed several times, but his movements were wide; Octras barely had to sidestep his swings.

The thief’s attacks were all wrong. He had never been trained, and yet he swung with confidence. A blow finally landed, pushing Octras out toward the entrance. The blade hadn’t pierced his skin; it was a dull thud against his chainmail.

Octras drew his broadsword—and was taken off guard as the thief tackled him, sending them both over the ledge. Octras gripped the rock with his right hand as he went over. His side smashed into the cliff, and he dropped his sword. Below him, he could hear the thief tumbling down the slope. When the sound ended with a sudden thump, Octras brought himself around the shelf to the only flat area and let go. Turning toward the road, he slid after the thief down the mountainside.

At the bottom, the thief’s unconscious body lay in a sad pile of bruises and broken bones. The shells he had stolen were still tied to his waist. Octras removed them, and then checked for a pulse and shallow breath. Badly broken from his own foolish mistake—Octras knew that punishment well—and yet the boy was alive. Octras grabbed his damaged broadsword and sheathed it, another unseen struggle going on within his mind. He would have to go against the rules of service again.

The mercenary, arms shaking and fresh blood trailing across half his body, carried the boy on his shoulders.

# A Murder in the Switching Yard

by Robert Rischel

It was a warm summer's night—*'perfect for a walk'* I was thinking while putting the kickstand on my motorcycle down and hoping Susan would agree. After hearing me ride up she came to the window right away, but I could tell immediately that she wasn't in a trusting mood—and why not?

It was dark out and here was this guy who was a friend of an old boyfriend who broke her heart by not proposing after he graduated and landed an engineering job in Minnesota. I could tell she had reservations about taking a chance on love again because our conversations always started with Susan talking about how she thought Jim was going to do this or she hoped he was going to do that. He was the Sun she wanted to revolve around after he graduated and landed a good job.

“Oh I suppose,” she groaned hesitantly as a warm breeze was blowing against my cheek like a lover's breathe.

“I should walk over to Albertson's and get some groceries,” she rationalized her decision with—as my face brightened when I heard that.

“You can help me carry it back,” she cheerfully added and I was more than happy to comply.

But there was something about Susan—something she kept hidden. She wrapped herself in a distant aloofness that was easy to dismiss as adherence to the teaching of the Catholic Church ... about how a young woman should be reserve in her appearance and manner around a guy coming to seek her favor—but we all have secrets, some too painful to talk about.

I learned much later from her mother that it started when her cousin Lisa convinced her to going to a bar when she was under age and use a fake ID to get in. It went on from there in ways she never expected, with a nice looking Airmen from Ellsworth Air Force Base offering her a ride home and her accepting it.. But instead of taking her home, he took her out to Lake Sheridan and wouldn't take NO for an answer.

Sneaking into a bar with a fake ID made going to the police and reporting it, seem out of the question so Susan lived with the

violation in secret and never told anyone.

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On the other hand, Louis had had his ups-and-downs in life. He was a craftsman with a knack for building things—but not so good at managing his construction company and later a trucking company worth three-quarters of a million dollars. He blamed the downturn in his life on the women he loved.

After lavishing them with expensive vacations, nice cars and other gifts, his businesses seemed to flutter away, like their love for him and now poor Louis was left to drown his sorrows with liquor.

While the night was still perfect and the breeze still warm as a lover's breathe. The lonely sound of a locomotive off in the distance, baying its departure for a long journey into the night could be heard—and we were both looking for that special someone in its wake. But like water under a scorching sun, the lonely find companionship in the same fleeting ways, while liquor makes the loveless gullible—poor Louis—poor, poor Louis on his last night on the Earth.

*My head should be spinning by now but wasn't and all those regrets about lost loves and his lost fortune would be gone for awhile—when two snaky-eyed guys—one sitting immediately to his right and the other immediately to his left. With their hard beady eyes looking for opportunity, here was Louis on that warm summer's night.*

Now the Boot Hill Saloon had a reputation for being a rowdy bar, especially during the Sturgis Bike Rally—and newfound friends were easy to come by there if you had money for drinks.

With the two of them, one on each side of him now, Louis wondered aloud.

“Have we met before? Did you guys used to work for me?” he asked.

“Work for ya,” the one on the left chuckled, like the thought of manual labor was amusing to him—just as the backdoor of the Boot Hill swung open and a locomotive in the switching yard was blowing its horn not far away. The idea must have seemed like a good one, to the snaky-eyed one

*“the irony of them being in a saloon named after a famous cemetery seemed somewhat apt.”*

on the left. *THINGS ON THE TRACKS GET SCATTERED AND HARDER TO FIND*. While Louis, poor poor Louis was going to meet a train in ways he never figured he would.

“Nooo,” the man on the left did all the talking.

And Louis was starting to get an uneasy feeling—as looking back, the irony of them being in a saloon named after a famous cemetery seemed somewhat apt.

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Now Rapid City South Dakota, at the foot of the Black Hills, is divided by a high ridge called Skyline Drive. Up there they used to hang their criminals during the gold rush of the 1880's, at Hangman's Rock and it is said: That the ghosts of those hanged back then still move through the forest at night—along with the coyotes, cougars and rattlesnakes.

But it's also a place where lovebirds like to smooch above the lights of the city, shimmering down below. As the lonely wail way off in the distance from a passing freight train in the night, reminds those lovebirds of why they need each other.

I thought it would be a nice place to go when the breeze was warm as a lover's breathe. But Susan was hesitant for reasons I didn't understand then and the words from Billy Joel's '*Only the Good Die Young*' ...”you Catholic girls start much too late” seemed like why she might feel that way—as we continued to laugh and joke on our way to Albertson's for groceries, not far from her apartment.

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Louis poor Louis, were you laughing with them when one probably had his arm around your shoulder and was directing you toward the railroad tracks, where your body would be rip and torn to be scattered—and if your newfound friends from the Boot Hill were really lucky, the leftover pieces would scattered even further by scavengers with wings or four legs. Yes poor Louis, according to your newfound friends you couldn't go home with money in your pocket that night.

Later the autopsy photo showed you swollen and badly bruised—long after a shocked “HUH!” and “CALL THE POLICE” was excitedly cried.

I can only speculate about how it ended and Susan was traumatized again by another crime. Louis, to my knowledge the Rapid City Police never solved your murder—and when you and I talked, you were bleeding from the mouth and your face was

swollen and bruised.

Do you still remember that night Louis? That we had some time to talk while we were waiting for the Rapid City police to arrive and you told me a little about yourself. About your lost fortune and your lost loves? How you grieved for a daughter you hardly saw anymore and wished you could see more of.

Poor Louis, that switching yard behind the saloon was a lousy place to die on a night that the breeze was as warm as a lover's breathe.

Two days later KELO-land News reported your body being found and I went to give a statement—no one thought was relevant to the crime. But the officer, who took my statement, mentioned that his father once worked for you. Were you left there after a cursory investigation and your newfound friends came back to finish the job?

The Rapid City Journal and KELO-land news never reported anything about you after that—just that your mutilated body was found not far from the switching yard.

Rest in peace Louis, I hope your killers got what they had coming for what happened behind a saloon named after a famous cemetery.

# Love II

by Nicole Milgate

The pain comes and goes but is not far. I feel at a loss for words wish there was something to say to make you turn around and change your mind but instead you walk out the door. With a piece of my shattered heart, which I struggle to mend though most have already been lost in the dust. I wanted a new beginning and got a fucked up ending! I try to convince him it is not far from my mind, no matter what the price. We pushed and then shoved til the end. No surprise I'm standing there with my heart ripped out while the cold grip of reality comes. I keep re-playing everything the memories start to fill me up again and I can't take the hit. I want to take the bottle and slowly ease the pain while I stay here with sorrow in my eyes. So many things I should have done or said that I seemed to just let slip by. I want the comforting of numbness that I know, so the pain will seem like a distant illusion in the fog of my mind. He chose to walk away while I choose to fight. His eyes grew colder and more bitter as each day drifted by. Why couldn't you let me in and not shut the door. You promised you would never let me go, and now look I'm the fool with my heart in hand as you walk away and say goodbye.

# A Phone Call Too Late

by Elizabeth Ernstsen

She puts her phone next to her as she sits down in her chair. She picks it up and presses the “talk” button to make sure it still works. There is a dial tone and she knows it is still working and this gives her a small ray of hope. “Maybe today,” she mumbles.

She plays solitaire all day on her computer. She is happy to have something to occupy the quiet, lonely, never ending hours of the day. She hears a knock at her door. She shakes her head and wonders how long she has been staring at the screen on her computer. She clicks on the solitaire game then says, “Come in.” She looks and sees... oh, her aid comes in.

This doesn’t make her feel happy? She wonders, “Why?” Why doesn’t it make her happy? She has human contact with her aid here, but somehow it doesn’t make her feel much different. The aid gives her food, washes her clothes, cleans her apartment and even washes the dishes-yet there is something missing. She ponders on this as she lies in her bed watching the sunset through the bedroom window.

A new day comes and once again she picks up her cordless phone, pushes the “talk” button and hears a dial tone. She looks sad as she puts her phone beside her as she sits down into her chair. She ponders how long it has been since she received a phone call. She looks at her calendar and sees the days crossed off one by one, month by month.

She remembers when she moved into her apartment. How excited she was to have her own place, feeling no longer a burden to anyone, doing things the way she pleased, when she wanted and go where she wanted. It was fun-in the beginning. How long has it been? She starts to count the years. They add up to ten. That is a decade! She remembers sayings, “Remember, kids, I’m just a phone call away!” Hum-m-m, she reflects a phone call away. She hurts inside and is puzzled why?

She returns to the calendar on her lap. She looks through the months to see when she last got a phone call. Her heart sinks to the floor and tears come rolling down her cheeks and down her neck, getting her dress wet. It is as if she will never be able to stop

the tears. It has been six months and not one phone call not even a text! “Why?” she asks out loud, the tears still streaming down her face, now drip, drip, and drip into the pool on her lap as her head is bowed down.

The Tears stop finally, her head is still bowed, she doesn't move. There is a knock at the door. There is no reply. Another knock and just silence, the door opens and in walks the aid. The aid sees the old lady sitting in her chair with her phone clasped in her hand. There is a ring from the phone but no one answers. The aid is busy on her cell phone calling the morgue.

The old lady was sheltered, fed, and clothed- now gone. Did she ever answer her own question of “**WHY?**”

# Sixty Years

by Mary M. Fuller

Not loved then, I knew  
no love ever. All silence.  
What can I say to heal us?  
Hearts don't break. Minds do.  
Once a *She* came—left in days.  
Taking her promises; drugs.  
Why did I feel Love  
so quickly gone forever?  
Life does things- not Love.  
Married, we said, "I do."  
Then, he said, "I don't." His three-  
broken lives forever more.  
Mom not born in Love.  
Born in need, fearful-passed on.  
Lucky! HE stood by Her.  
Dead at seventy!  
Served Him right to be last one.  
I heard He cried then.  
My search, forever  
for naught-three families gone-  
lost. So I stopped trying.  
Ha! "Go to school?" became  
my mantra. Achieved Honors!  
Whom to tell? With whom to share?  
Mother Nature sometimes  
plays tricks, known too darn slowly.  
Both eighty, now we *share*!

# Lonely

by Shirley Fifer

I've been a widow a lot of years  
Its sad to grow old  
and not have anyone to talk to.

I have 4 wonderful adult kids  
But they are busy with lives of their own  
they are working hard to keep starvation from the door.

They love me but they just don't have time.  
They don't know I'm lonely  
they will miss me when I'm gone.

Mine want me to live forever  
12 years more to 100 is not enough  
But it's enough for me

You're glad they are successful  
And proud of them  
If you could only tell them

Oh well, they'll be here for Christmas  
And my birthday I hope  
I'll play bingo today

That takes up an hour  
And i get a point for the auction  
which will be fun

Don't cry for me, I'm only kidding  
And writing for those who cant write  
I am contented and have a good life

PS: And giving my kids a nudge  
I have to talk to them on the computer  
I can't do Email

If I get published  
They'll read it  
And be glad

If I get ink for my printer  
Thank heavens for a wonderful Senior Companion  
I'll HAVE INK TOMORROW.

# Ode to the Meds

by Elizabeth Ernstsén

*(for anyone who is stuck with a pill!)*

Here, let me help you! This is a brand new med out. It has the sleek outside with the latest delay release contents inside. It is designed to give you the most comfort of all the other meds on the market today. It takes only 2 months of your life to really get working in your system before you see any results. This one has far less side effects than others on the market today.

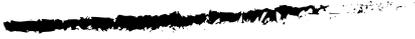
Now after 2 months trial we can make adjustments to it taking another 2 months out of your life to see if it works any better. Now just wait- the best is yet to come. If this model of med (now in the higher dosage which comes in the blue and white capsules) isn't working just right- well, we will just take you all the way off which is another 2 months out of your life.

If another one doesn't please you and me- well, we will just keep trying until we get the one that is right! Now don't get discouraged if the first one doesn't suite you- well, it is only six months in total and with the shape you are in now- what do you have to lose?

We can fix you up with another one for only another six months out of your life. We can be at this for a decade! Can you imagine that? Won't this be fun? Why just think in a few decades you won't be sitting there staring at the wall with a blank look on your face anymore like you are doing right now. What is a few decades of your life anyway? You are not going anywhere in the shape you are in right now.

Just think- I'll document all of this as we go and you will have done so much for the greater of mankind! Oh that reminds me: this new model of pill is so new that it hasn't been tested on a living human being. You'll be the first! Isn't that exiting? (Now if you'll just sign here on the dotted line so you and your family will not be able to sue me if anything bad happens to you.) We will be set up for the rest of your life!

# Dots



by Jonnathon Hardy

I see dots  
by colors and lots  
on the walls  
even on the balls  
red, green, and pink  
its makes me blink  
thinks about shock  
my mind locks  
my own dots.

# If Babies Could Fly

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by Jo Anna Johannesen

If all the babies could take flight...  
just think of all the wondrous sights.  
Oh nothing ever would be safe  
from the searching wandering waifs.  
They'd have so much to smell and touch,  
it just might prove a bit too much.  
How busy this new world would be...  
like thousand searching bumblebees.  
The flowers and birds just might get lame,  
Oh nature just wouldn't be the same.  
For this new world just might unfold,  
when curiosity takes hold.  
It's good that Babies do not fly...  
sometimes I feel they really try!

# Genetic Amputation

by Garrett Drage

Your finger traced my tiny gums  
as I sucked hard for mother's milk.  
Our love, like an agentic shift,  
complete with name, and silhouette

of circumstance, admittedly,  
took truest form within your arms.  
And such was ours. And such was ours  
upon the breast of purity.

You thought of ways you would convey  
a father's wisdom to his babe,  
then whispered proudly, in my ear,  
the stony poem from a birth.

But wisdom failed this moment's test  
of dreamed-up creativity,  
and just as we were introduced,  
a daughter left her father's clutch.

For what was I to do but cry,  
this valiant effort overlooked?  
A cry for needs of infancy,  
a cry that could not leave us be.

# Friends

by Jo Anna Johannesen

Friends are there anytime  
you need a gentle ear  
Friends are there  
your heart is full of fear  
Friends are there  
your world is filled with doubt  
Friends are there  
you feel the need to shout

Friends are like a clear blue lake  
reflecting reality  
Friends are like a rising Sun  
uplifting cheerfully  
Friends are like a clear full moon  
that adds a bit of light

When will you be the friend  
to someone who needs one?  
When will you be the friend  
when someone needs a bit of fun?  
When will you be the friend  
to someone who feels blue?  
When will you be the friend  
like those befriending you?

# Public Reading

by Karen Larsen

I was very nervous about going to the public reading at the library in Salt Lake City. I was scared to death, you might say! The only other times that I spoke to a crowd in front of a microphone was at church giving talks. When I was in the fifth grade, I was in special chorus and I sang, “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” solo, in front of the school and guests. Nervously, I kept rolling up my music sheet. Getting cross looks from my music teacher, I still couldn’t stop! The music sheet was for following along but rolling it up was a no-no!

Compassionately, I listened to the other stories. I could tell that everyone that read had that thing inside them that makes, or allows, a person to write.

When it was my turn to read my story, I had to force the fear and panic away, just walk up there and do it! Terrified, I started talking. When I heard that my voice wasn’t shaking, I felt myself stand taller and my voice was more forceful! To my surprise, I was comfortable with the situation. I can’t describe the feeling I had, reading aloud without my knees shaking! My self-confidence went up a few notches, and I felt wonderful! At the public reading, I had so much support there, with Deb, everyone from the Literacy Action Center, and everyone from the Community Writing Center. I was among friends!

I’m ready to make writing one of my number one things to do. With all the help and support I have around me, I will only get better. The more times I read aloud will help a lot, too.

# The Table

by Katherine January

disfigured by time and water  
hauled from disgrace in the garage  
for this occasion, covered with a vintage cloth  
and a bowl of late summer zinnias

the table changes everything  
transformed and transforming, the table  
brings the outside in and the inside multiplies

no longer unlovely, the table gathers  
guest after guest to its side, tiny votives  
brightening faces as the darkness deepens

the garden empties itself into basket and kitchen  
gorgonzola and honey find plump ripe figs  
the promise of basil hangs in the air  
and the ginger in the carrots deepens with each  
story, memory and poem

all that is needed can be passed across  
or side to side

and the table becomes an evening island, a vessel  
for storing the feast of summer's end, the winter fat

and what is within arm's reach  
will hearten the tableless hours to come  
for lovers, strangers and kin

# Don't Forget The Mustard

by Joyce Luttrell

The county fair's in full bloom,  
Cotton candy, the old pickle barrel,  
Quilts of every size,  
Guns, turkey shoot, prizes with collateral.

Prizes for everything you can think  
Of, from pigs to cattle, home made custard,  
I want a hot dog,  
Don't forget the mustard.

Let's go on the rides,  
Can we buy some post cards?  
Did you hear, I want a hot dog.  
Don't forget the mustard.

This ride ain't safe,  
I don't trust this guard,  
That's three times I asked for a hot dog,  
Don't forget the mustard.

Well seems the day was fun.  
And it's four times so far,  
Well it's about time, my hot dog,  
But where the hell's the mustard.

# Raspberries

by Ramona Maassen

“Raspberries,” she thought, “with peaches and French toast. I have coffee and creamer at home. What else do I need? Bacon! – just in case he’s a meat eater.” She smiled to herself as she walked along the aisles of the supermarket.

“I’ll get the thick slices. Should I get the peppered stuff, no, plain is better in case he doesn’t like pepper.”

As she stood in line at the checkout she suddenly remembered, “Whipped cream! I almost forgot the whipped cream.” She murmured to herself.

As she turned away from the checkout counter she nearly collided with a tired family waiting behind her.

“I forgot something.” She said in a bright tone of voice with a smile.

The apathy was evident even on the youngest family member’s face.

The mother said, “I’m not waiting till you come back I got work tomorrow.”

“No! Go ahead, I just forgot something.” As she squeezed past them she could smell the sour pee of the young child who looked through her.

Whipped cream! What was she thinking of? What if they didn’t get along? Here she was planning an elaborate breakfast and they hadn’t even spent an evening alone at either of their respective homes. In fact he’d never even seen her place. Oh God. Let him be the one. I am so tired of dinners alone.

As he came up the walkway to her house he smoothed his hair down with his right hand. She was so nice. He hoped that this would work out. He hated the dating scene. When she invited him to her place for dinner and to watch a movie there for the evening, he found himself full of anticipation.

He had met her at a friend’s gallery opening. Right away

they hit it off. They both liked the paintings of the people but hated the abstract stuff. They had been talking by phone and having the occasional cup of coffee. He felt silly that all he really knew was that she liked her coffee with cream.

Trembling a little he rang the door bell.

She opened the door after counting to three, running her tongue over her front teeth to make sure that her lipstick wasn't on them.

"Come on in." She said.

"Thank you. It smells good in here."

"I hope you like TV dinners." She said

He was taken back for a moment then realized she was joking. "Ah, sure!"

"Actually it's chicken cordon bleu. I'm serving it with a rice pilaf and salad. It's a specialty of the house. Do you want to pick the movie?"

She gestured toward the living room and headed back into the kitchen. Looking around he liked what he saw. She had a number of orchids in various stages of growth. The room was decorated with plush pillows and a deep leather couch and a love seat. A large carved coffee table sat in the center of the room. Near the TV he saw a book case filled with DVDs. They were organized by category. Comedy, action, thrillers, romance classics. There were so many that he didn't know which one to pick. He finally settled on a film he hadn't seen before *Death at a Funeral*. It was a British comedy. She came out of the kitchen bringing two sparkling waters with lemon.

"Oh that's a lovely one. Have you seen it before?"

"No, the title seemed intriguing."

She gave him a wide wonderful smile. "You're in for a treat."

"Do you want me to help set the table or anything? I feel like a loose thumb here."

"I thought we might eat in here, while we watch the movie."

"Ok."

"Unless you'd like to sit at the table? I just thought it would be more casual."

“That sounds great!” He felt like a dummy as soon as the words left his mouth.

She smiled. “I’m glad.”

They drank from their glasses

“Here take this. I’ll be back.”

She handed him her glass and went back into the kitchen. She came right back out with two napkins rolled around their silverware.

“Here. Set the table.”

Nodding to the coffee table where he had placed their drinks.

She disappeared into the kitchen again and she brought out two salads, which he set side by side on the coffee table. She went back in the kitchen and brought out the chicken already artfully arranged on the plates.

“It looks delicious” he said as he reached for one of the plates she was proffering.

There was something tangible about the moment. Times slowed and then seemed to speed up again. In his heart something had set off a ting. She blushed. Smiled hesitantly, the broadly.

They ate the meal watching the movie.

Commenting on the scenarios as they were played out. Laughing outrageously as the plots thickened.

Long after the movie had finished, long after dessert and coffee, there was a lull in the conversation.

“May I kiss you?” He asked.

They were still sitting side by side the pillows in the living room in front of the massive coffee table. She turned her face up to his. The kiss lasted the evening. He followed her to her room, their mouths still barely touching.

In the morning, for he did stay the night, she made pancakes. Raspberries and peaches lay nestled in mounds piled on top of the pancakes. It was then he told her that he was allergic to raspberries.

# One Summer Day

by Paul S. Loya

I love to golf, today's the day!  
When my pals arrive, I'll be on my way.

The sun is rising, in the sky.  
Today's the day, the golf balls fly!

I'm so excited, I can hardly wait!  
It's a quarter past 7, they're running late.

My mind starts to wander, as I check over my goods.  
I begin to fantasize, about beating Tiger Woods!

Since he stepped out on his wife Eeda,  
They have changed his name from Tiger, to Cheata!

That's not very nice, so I'll move right along ...  
This poem is so good, I should make it a song!

I hear the horn honking, finally they're here!  
Their only excuse was, they stopped for some beer.

I smile and smirk, as I jump in the car.  
So hurry let's go, for today I'll shoot par!

I'm not really bragging, but just so you know,  
One day with some practice, I'll probably turn pro.

Now at the course, nearly ready to start,  
I snatch up my clubs, and load up the cart.

It's my turn to hit, as I move to the box,  
In my cabby plaid hat, and my matching plaid socks.

As I step to the ball, I feel my pulse quicken!  
If I miss this first shot, my stomach will sicken.



# Rebuilding the Levees

by Christopher Steffen

I had sub-leased an attic room for three months on Burgundy St. in the French Quarter that boasted its own balcony space fully-equipped with wooden rocking chair. For what I was paying I could have found a place whose carpet didn't sink into moldy wood or kitchen boast a toilet next to the stove. When I first told Tony what I paid monthly, he exhaled like the sip of beer on his tongue had suddenly frozen. "For three hundred square feet," he kept repeating until it was no longer a question. I shrugged while sitting on the far corner of my bed and forced a smile as if to say what-do-you-do. The embarrassment of someone knowing I badly overpaid knotted my stomach worse than the realization that I was badly overpaying. I never mentioned the cost of my rent to anyone else.

I was to learn after my first week in New Orleans that no matter how many times I cleaned the wooden rocking chair, shiny poisonous spiders would cover it in webs, and that the balcony had a precarious tendency to lean toward the street below whenever I stood on it. However, I was an ascetic and my meager quarters suited me fine. I believed my limited comfort would push me to focus that much more on my writing.

For the first month, my living space hardly proved fruitful. I found that regardless of the hour of day, after twenty minutes of sitting in front of my small manual typewriter, I would feel the compulsion to immediately flee my surroundings. And in New Orleans it was easy to be out, because, no matter the hour, there was always something going on.

Most of my adventures would start at a small bar called The Copper Plate on Bienville that attracted me with the rock n' roll ambience I missed from the bars back home. The Copper Plate lacked the fancy cocktails of Bourbon St. or a row of televisions blasting sports wrap-ups. Through the dark lighting one could make out a few tattered concert posters for Led Zeppelin and The Clash poorly taped to the wall. It was a storyteller's bar, and there were always a few regulars sipping at their steins of beer and ready to tug on a newcomer's ear. I got to know all of the bartenders at The Plate, but in particular, a man named Tony, who was only a

few years younger than me (he was twenty-two), became a fast acquaintance and would often lead me around different Quarter haunts. Tony had been at The Plate for two years and worked at Lafitte's (the blacksmith bar) for a year before that (don't ask how). He was the one who introduced me to much of the working crowd I was to meet during my stay. He also championed my writing, and while I couldn't get any pieces into the New Orleans Weekly, I was able to get a few things into little French Quarter zines. My career started modestly.

One afternoon I met Tony in the Carousel Bar in the Monteleone Hotel. We drank Cuban Libres and made small talk with the bartender, a friend of Tony's. The bartender, Charlie, told us about a bar-hopping party that was being thrown for another friend of theirs, a waiter from the famous oyster restaurant around the corner.

"I don't know how thrilled I am to go roving the gay bars with a bunch of queers while Deon tries to score curious farm boys and discreet business men," said Tony and then turned to me. "Deon is straight as a fish hook."

"Suit yourself," said Charlie while shrugging, "but the only good pussy out tonight will be singing Happy Birthday for Deon's twenty-fifth. You know that boy only has two types of friends: gay men and beautiful women."

"I'd be willing to gamble on that," I said.

A lot of noise came from the hotel lobby with the arrival of a convention group. After a lull in the lobby noise, the bar filled up with graphic designers from some major internet company. Tony and I took a couple of laps chatting to heavy-set women from Iowa decked in J.C. Penny casuals.

Inevitably Tony would regale the tourists with his Noah-like tales of Katrina. Most of these involved him floating pets and the elderly down streets flooded in rat- and corpse-infested waters. He had constructed makeshift rafts using hundred year-old wooden doors stripped from landmark hotels and restaurants. You could hear the screams of people still trapped in their attics needing an axe to hack their way to freedom. His Katrina stories were always punctuated with his

*"Tony trailed off his sentences and glazed his eyes with just enough tear-gloss to break any woman's heart."*

desperate, albeit failed attempt to save his pregnant girlfriend from their first floor apartment. Tony trailed off his sentences and glazed his eyes with just enough tear-gloss to break any woman's heart.

Of course none of it was true. On a slow night during my second week of frequenting the Copper Plate, Tony confided in me that he had actually been visiting extended family in Detroit during the hurricane and subsequent flooding. When he was able to return home, he realized that aside from a moldy stench permeating the clothes in his closet, he hadn't actually lost anything except a current address. If Tony's stories seemed insensitive, it could be argued that they were only insensitive in proportion to the vampiric interest most tourists showed in the New Orleans locals. Everyone wanted to know what it had been like to survive the flood. They wanted to email friends disaster tales from the ninth ward, or revel in the sensory details of the tragedy. More than once, I listened to families from places like Iowa City or Lincoln interview a restaurant waitress about her experiences.

After another bar rush (another convention's arrival), Tony turned to me and asked if we should try and catch up to the Deon party. Charlie, rattling a cocktail shaker, winked at me as if to say, "You'd be crazy not to."

"Whatever," I said. "Let's leave. This spinning madness is beginning to dizzy me anyways." I had a strange predilection to speak in abstractions when I was buzzing from alcohol. Tony shrugged.

We closed our tabs, and Charlie made us promise to say hi for him. We made our way up to Bourbon St. to push through the drunken masses lulling in the center of the street or lured to dark doorways by baiting sironesque strippers. The whole exchange was one of my favorite things to watch and many nights I walked up and down Bourbon St. doing little more than adding mileage to my Payless Shoes. Occasionally, I wished I had the money to enter the dark establishments that boasted Live Sex shows and beautiful women (and a few times I almost convinced myself that I did have the money). I would unfold my wallet, exhale the poor man's sigh, and continue pushing dust down the street.

Tony knew some of the girls that worked at the different clubs and sometimes they visited him at The Copper Plate. While part of me was excited to listen to their stories, another part of me was disappointed by how mundane the girls appeared when not working. I'm not sure what I expected.

At the corner of Bourbon and Toulouse, I pulled Tony aside so that I could stop at a Lucky Dog cart.

“They re-use the water those things are cooked in. Do you get how disgusting that is?” He said this with so much exasperation that I felt bad disgusting him.

“Eh,” I said and shrugged. I paid the stout black man and did have to admit that my whole dining experience would have been nicer if the vendor was either fully-bearded or clean-shaven. In this man’s case, he was somewhere in between, as if he had decided to shave a beard and missed entire giant patches. He offered me a brown-toothed smile. A moment after taking my hot dog I was distracted from the vendor by the sound of someone throwing up in the gutter just off of Bourbon.

We continued down the street passing musical bar after bar. For a city so steeped in Jazz history most of the music coming from these bars was from Top 40’s cover bands. It annoyed me, but the old people ate this up. They loved coming to these places and singing along to Crosby, Stills, and Nash covers or Michael Jackson’s hits. On my first night in New Orleans I walked into one of the these bars and was thrilled that so many people were drinking and dancing on a Wednesday night. Then I paid four dollars for a single bottle of Bud Light and decided never to return to that bar.

As we walked, Tony continued to tell me stories about the different places in the Quarter that we passed. He had grown up in New Orleans and was enthusiastic about the Quarter in a way that I didn’t find common among most New Orleans natives that I met. For Tony it was something different. It was as if he was able to see the Quarter at all points of history at once. He would tell me which doorways had been frequented by pirates, which houses used to be safe for runaway slaves. He would tell me about how Catholicism affected the businesses when the Spanish owned the city. Then he would point to a courtyard I could hardly see through the opening in the wooden gate, and he would tell me that was where he paid for his first blow job. For Tony, he was a part of the Quarter’s living history. He was another stitch in the tapestry. I think this might have been why he was so excited to have a writer around.

I guaranteed Tony that Deon’s party would be at the Paradise Disco, a flashy, techno haunt replete with misters and lasers, but Tony wanted to start at Café Lafitte’s in Exile, because he knew all of the bartenders. Once inside Tony introduced me to Howard, a bartender he used to work with at Lafitte’s Blacksmith Shop, and

they started talking about the highs and lows of the season. How they expected more business during the Jazz Festival.

It was then that I noticed Enrique sitting down at one of the ends of the triangular bar, half-slumped over a rocks glass. His eyes were closed, but he maintained his upright sitting position on the barstool. I walked over to him and patted him on his back careful to avoid touching his banana-thick dreadlocks. Enrique opened his eyes and turned to me with a smile (technically smiling before he even recognized who had approached him). His eyes were heavy with alcohol, and I wasn't sure he knew who I was when he said, "What up, Buddy?" I had met Enrique when hanging out on Decatur St., one of the local vegan hipsters roughly around my age. Enrique was a street musician who played his violin every afternoon either on Bourbon or Royal. He had the nappiest dreads I had ever seen on a white person.

"Not much, Enrique. Trying to find a roving birthday party. What are you up to?"

"Hustling . . . always hustling." He smiled stupidly at me, and considering our setting I was a little confused as to what "hustling" actually entailed.

I decided not to inquire.

"Where's Lacy?" I asked. Typically, I would find Enrique at one of the coffee shops where, when he wasn't playing his violin, he would post like a hipster pressboard collecting and distributing bits of gossip or information. There would always be a few pierced and tattooed friends sitting with him, but the only person I ever talked to other than him was a fellow hippy named Lacy. I had assumed they were a couple, but was now trying to decide whether I thought Enrique was gay.

"Write any good stories?" he asked me.

"Nothing I would call good," I said.

He thought of something and brushed two thick dreadlock tendrils from his face. "This is something," he said and stood up from his barstool. He steadied himself, and, comfortable on his feet, made his way over to a table where a lone man sat with his legs crossed sipping some blue drink through two tiny straws. My first thought was, "this is a southern gentleman." The older man had almost plastically smooth skin and bright green eyes. His hair was completely white and I couldn't tell if it had greyed or if he dyed it that color.

"Don, show my friend the paw. Show it to him," Enrique said

to the man. The way Enrique was drunkenly pestering the man made me think of a gorilla trying to annoy a flamingo.

The man turned to me slowly with a placid smile and held out his hand almost as if I should kiss it. "I am Donald, and you are?"

"Gabe," I said and shook his hand weakly. It felt like dried leaves.

"Yeah, this is Gabe," said Enrique gesturing between us. "Gabe, Don. Gabe is a writer. You should show him your paw."

Donald smiled softly at Enrique and said, "I'm sorry. I don't have it with me. If you want, we can walk over to my place, and I can show it to you."

"That's ok. I can see it another time. Everyone..." I had gestured around the bar, and I think I wanted to say something about how everyone in the Quarter runs into everyone else almost daily, but the sentence died in my throat.

"I'm less than half a block away on Dumaine," Donald said. "It's really no trouble."

"Perfect," said Enrique with a hand clap. "Let's go."

"Wait, what is it I'm supposed to see? I'm sure I can check it out some other time," I said.

"No time like the present," said Donald and chuckled to himself.

"You have to see this," said Enrique. "You want to write about New Orleans? This is it."

Back at the bar Tony and Howard were talking about a woman that Howard had been seeing, two professional conversationalists hardly flexing their talents. I sensed that the conversation was less about Howard and the woman and more about Tony finding out how Howard had been, what he had been doing. For the bartenders I met, conversation was an oblique way of communicating. If you really wanted to find out what one of them thought or was up to, you had to ask about something entirely mundane. Indirect conversation was an economic advantage that these bartenders learned instinctually. The slower the conversation was they had with a patron, the more time the patron spent in the bar drinking and tipping. Direct conversation risked sending patrons stumbling down the street sooner than needed.

When I told Tony that Enrique and I were running over to Donald's place to see something, Tony groaned. "That guy is weird," Tony said scowling over his shoulder in their direction.

Howard laughed and then said, “Eccentric more than weird.” Howard chopped up the syllables of the word eccentric as he said it. Their familiarity with Donald simultaneously comforted and disconcerted me. I felt reassured that I wasn’t about to be murdered. Being propositioned still felt like it was on the table.

Enrique and Donald waited for me just outside the front door, and when I stepped out, Enrique stood in the street kicking the curb. The walk was short; Donald lived within throwing distance of Lafitte’s. He stopped in front of a door that was painted lollipop blue. When he let us in, we found ourselves in an appallingly campy courtyard that glowed red from a single bulb burning above the space. I felt like I had entered a party store’s bordello. A pink flamingo had been stuck in the dirt to my side and there was a plastic surfer floating in the Victorian fountain directly in the center of the courtyard. In the dim light, it took me a minute to recognize that the figure occupying one of the canvas lawn chairs was actually a male mannequin drenched in Mardi Gras beads and dressed in a glittery cocktail dress and a feathered headband. A few toy cars were posed on the lip of the fountain and the ground was littered with many more objects that were difficult to distinguish in the dark.

“You will have to forgive me,” said Donald. “I am a bit of a collector. Please, this way.”

Donald weaved his way through the tea trays and mini Santa Clauses and various-sized Trolls with the grace of someone who repeats the same combination of steps daily. Enrique plowed directly to the home’s entrance, tipping over little statues and overturning a metal fire truck. The raucous made my throat jump, but Donald waited for us in the doorway without blinking. It was convenient for me that Enrique went first.

The front room of the house was packed with more of the same: antique lunch boxes, a phonograph, metallic poster advertisements, and long extinct logo figurines. Donald went over to a fifty year-old refrigerator and removed a bottle of gin. He waved it at us. Enrique smiled and took a seat on an old yellow couch. I declined and sat next to Enrique. When Donald brought the drinks over Enrique was trying to open an old metallic toy car. A slight raise of Donald’s eyebrow was the only sign of disapproval.

“What do you think?” Donald said to me.

I had been in houses filled with kitsch knickknacks before, but not wanting to disappoint my host I said, “I’ve never seen

anything like this.”

Donald smiled into his drink and then lightly shook the glass as if he were savoring its smell.

Enrique took a gulp from his drink and said, “Donald has more classic stuff than anyone else in New Orleans. He’s made a point to try and save everything he could from the flood.”

Donald smiled at Enrique like a proud father. “Enrique flatters me.”

“It’s true,” said Enrique flapping his head. “Donald deals all of this stuff to restaurants and businesses all throughout the Quarter. He’s rejected rich collectors from all over the world.”

Donald shrugged, “I could never part with anything that was going to leave the city. These treasures belong to our home. I just want to make sure they stay here.”

The notion appealed to me even though I slightly questioned Donald’s altruism. There was something behind his smile that he wasn’t sharing. He was too quick to show his teeth when he smiled.

Enrique broke the spell that Donald’s objects cast over me and said, “Show him it. Come on.”

Donald’s mouth went wide, clearly enjoying the building suspense that Enrique added. He began, “Every great collection, it doesn’t matter where in the world you go . . . every great collection has a gem. Has at least one item that crowns the rest of the collection, a keystone if you will, that without which the entire collection might collapse. Mine is no different, and several months ago, I came across something extraordinary. A young boy was referred to me, trading a family heirloom for money to save his family. I paid him well for this item . . . some might say I shorted him, but that really is a matter of opinion and while this item may be of incalculable value to me, it is only because I have spent a lifetime making the connections that I made. If anything Katrina offered me the greatest windfall of all—two great changes in this city occurred. For one, everything that I possessed became extremely valuable as the sea stole comparable pieces from others. And, two, suddenly people needed money to start their lives over and were willing to part with objects that did little more than collect mold in their closets.”

“And all of the kids pillaging old houses,” said Enrique with a laugh.

Donald frowned, “I never paid for anything that didn’t come directly to me through its owner.” His argument seemed dubious

and unverifiable. Enrique shook his head to himself and chuckled.

Donald exhaled audibly and then reached over to a polished chestnut case to his side. He took a small key from his pocket and popped it into the case. With a twist the case was open, but all I could see was the green felt padding. When he handed it to me, I stared dumbly at the contents.

“I suppose you wonder why I don’t keep something like this locked in a safety deposit box,” Donald continued. “Why I don’t at least own a safe. The reason is simple. All of my pieces are entirely valueless without the right connections. I have nothing to fear, because I have found a way to store all of my value in my mind. Without the things I know, all of this,” he gestured around the room, “is worth nothing.”

I was staring at a shrunken black claw-like hand. I had no idea what it was, but it appeared delicate and I was hesitant to touch it. I looked at Enrique trying to figure out if I was participating in some elaborate prank, and then looked at Donald who stared at me with a steady, solemn expression. I started to say something, but realized there was nothing to say.

“You don’t know what that is, do you?” said Donald. This made his brow relax. “In this room is the single largest collection of remnants of New Orleans pop culture. I have amassed everything I could from the jazz and Dixie era, and even souvenirs from the Spanish and French colonial periods before that. But what you hold in your hands is the one thing that transcends all of those periods. It is something that comes from the original natives of this land. It is a lupin claw, that is, a werewolf’s hand probably from the sixteenth century. The last remnant of an extinct people that used to inhabit this delta.”

I had nothing to say. I had traveled to find something unique in New Orleans and had embraced a culture that I thought was specific to the Quarter, but up until the moment of staring at the claw, I hadn’t realized that there was something intrinsic to these people that would always prohibit me from truly understanding them. Something in that strange claw eluded me, and whatever it was that I couldn’t grasp, the thing that was capable of transfixing both Enrique and Donald (and all of the other locals who spoke about it in the few days following), it was that thing that struck me mute. This inexplicable essence erected walls between me and the city, those people. There was nothing I could do to reach them. Within a week my bags were packed and I had moved on. I caught

a bus heading away from the river and settled in New York where different things were asked of me. But these were things I could give. It took me a long time to learn how to write a sentence again.

# The Trespasser

by Steven A. Dame

In 2135, time travel into the past was outlawed. Too often criminals escaped justice, or someone went back to alter the past, creating serious problems for the current time frame. A little change one hundred year ago could create serious ramifications for the present. Leaders could change, political platforms could switch – people might be born who shouldn't be born. It was the butterfly effect.

Lazarus Temple was a shy man who had accomplished virtually nothing in his life. As a lab technician at LifeArts, Inc., he was responsible for making sure that the developing embryos contained the traits that were requested. Extra intelligence here, more body strength there – an athletic build vs. movie star good looks – these were all traits he manipulated. It was tedious work, done by a boring and tedious man.

He often dreamed of going back to a more romantic age, where people were born naturally and Mother Nature ruled, rather than the computer-manipulated pipette matrix which currently formed the future society. He yearned for open spaces where he could walk beside rivers, and smell the evergreens and wildflowers. Perhaps he would spot a deer, or see a fish swim in the water.

Lazarus was a short man, with bulbous glasses and a peculiar weasel face, which was rather pale. He had a weak, indecisive chin. No one paid him much attention, because he was trapped in the all-too-silent lab in the basement of the building.

His whole life seemed artificial. He ate artificial food for breakfast, had an artificial lunch, and worked under the unnatural buzz of electric lights all day.

For years he had been plotting an escape from his mundane life. Time travel was expensive, and was not only illegal, but was considered immoral by most. But Lazarus considered that escaping from his mundane life was worth the risk of committing a crime.

He planned on leaving during a two-week vacation. Perhaps he wouldn't be missed when he didn't come back. Maybe they would just forget all about him, and no investigation would be made.

It would cost \$400,000, and he had been carefully saving

this amount for the past five years. In the evenings in his windowless apartment he would look at books that had pictures of birds and wildlife. These delightful things had mostly been eradicated in 2135, except in extreme wildlife areas where man had not intruded – or sometimes they were on display at costly inner city zoos.

He would travel back to 2036. There would begin a period of 25 years of peacetime. It was also a time when all people were united in preserving the Earth. Petroleum fuels had depleted, so other non-polluting forms of energy were being used. Forests were being planted. Farmlands were increasing. Ways had been found to raise food without pesticides or other chemicals that damaged the environment.

On the first day of his vacation he went to the tall, bright-eyed Brazilian man with whom he had made arrangements for the time travel. The man had a smart, well-trimmed beard, and always spoke optimistically about the service he could provide.

Lazarus gave the man – who insisted on remaining nameless – a briefcase containing the \$400,000 in cash. The man in turn gave him a briefcase containing identification papers for 2036, and enough money from that time period to last the rest of his life.

Lazarus held the briefcase tightly. He looked down at the Brazilian's shiny, black polished shoes. He was very excited, but frightened at the same time. His stomach ached, and his hands trembled.

The machine was situated five hundred meters underground for privacy sake, and also because it would emit harmful radiation if it were used on the surface. Lazarus entered the chamber, sat in the seat and strapped himself in. The smiling man set the destination and the time, and turned the time machine on. Then he hid himself in a lead chamber and closed the door behind him.

There were flashing lights, and a dull, throbbing noise in Lazarus' head. He felt nauseous, and soon became unconscious.

He awoke in a grassy field beneath the spreading limbs of a tall oak tree. The sun filtered through the open spaces in the leaves,

*“The machine was situated five hundred meters underground for privacy sake, and also because it would emit harmful radiation if it were used on the surface.”*

and he felt its warmth on his face.

There was a rippling sound of a brook nearby. He picked up his briefcase, brushed himself off, and made his way toward the gentle, splashing noise. He bent down to pick a sunflower, which were numerous in the tall grass, and twirled it between his fingers.

There was a deep, pungent smell that emanated through the wood, of evergreens and wild roses. When he found the brook he knelt down and put his hand in the cool water, swishing it back and forth. *Real water!* He thought excitedly. *I've touched real water, not just from a pipe or container!*

He followed the stream until it came to an old wooden bridge. He peered over the side, enjoying the rustling water below as it dashed against rocks in a lazy manner. There was a cool breeze on his face.

An energy burst from inside him which shouted, *I'm free! Free of that awful future!* His heart beat faster, and he was a little lightheaded. He clutched the railing tighter.

A dirt road crossed the stream at the bridge. He saw a sign which said, "Gainesburg 2 kilometers." He started to walk casually down the road in the direction of the sign. Occasionally he would kick a dirt clod or a rock. He was thinking how his synthetic shoes and his manner of dress – no cotton, no natural fibers whatever – might appear strange to the people of this age. No matter, he reasoned – he would buy new clothes at his earliest convenience.

Lazarus found it strange and slightly primitive – in a fun way – that sometimes clumps of grass grew in the middle of the road, as if it were seldom traveled. He would sometimes kick the clumps as he walked, and felt a kinship to this new, beautiful land.

It was a wonderful plan, leaving his hated life to come to this paradise. Although he got strange looks at the small inn where he spent the night, he was glad that the gray-haired matron accepted his money without question.

Through his window on the second floor, he watched the street outside, which was surprisingly silent. There were no vehicles, but just a few people walking. He watched as the sun sank amidst the trees, creating a soft orange hue that spread across the sky.

In the morning he was sitting in the dining room eating a breakfast of eggs and bacon – real eggs and bacon! – when a uniformed officer came and stood beside him.

"You stayed here at the inn last night, Sir?" asked the sheriff.

"Yes, Sir," answered Lazarus nervously. "I – I trust everything

is in order?”

“Everything except you were seen coming from the forest. Aren’t you aware of the Land Protection Act of 2034?”

Lazarus’ stomach flip-flopped inside him. “N-No, I wasn’t aware of such a thing. Have I – have I done – have I done something wrong?” He stared down at his plate, afraid to look the officer in the face.

“As you should well know, everyone trespasses who ventures into any forest or wild area now. How else will our Mother Nature, as they call it, be able to rejuvenate itself?”

Lazarus was arrested and charged \$2,000 for violating the Land Protection Act. His fine would have been \$10,000, but he was granted leniency because – due to his strangeness – his court-appointed attorney was able to argue that he was mentally defective. He hung his head in shame during the short trial.

Worse, a ten-year probation was also added to his sentence – more, the judge said, for his protection than the protection of the community.

“You will be given counseling,” the judge said, “and you will live in the city like everyone else. You will not be allowed to violate the L.P.A. while this effort is being made to recover the beauty and usefulness of this great land.”

So from that point onward, Lazarus sat in a windowless apartment in the heart of an “urban jungle.” He was monitored electronically by a tag imbedded in his skin, to prevent him from leaving the noisy city. He was not able to explore the forests and wild lands for which he had waited longingly for so many years. Although he had escaped his dismal job, and the coldness of the people of his own time, he had not accomplished his chief desire – that of holding nature in his hands, of seeing it, and enjoying its fragrances.

Lazarus was considered by the other tenants in his apartment building as an oddity. He was the strange man who always carried armloads of books about birds, wildlife and plants that he had borrowed from the library or purchased at bookstores. Sometimes he stumbled a little as he walked because of the weight of the heavy books.

During the day he would sit at the fountain in the square, where a few petunias sweltered in the sun, surrounded by signs that said, “Unlawful to pick. \$10,000 fine imposed for violators.” He would study the pictures of deer, elk or bears in the books he

carried, or trace the leaf patterns of the various trees with his finger. Sometimes he gazed at pictures of wildflowers, dreaming of their fragrances, wondering how they might appear if they decorated the grass by the hundreds.

But the coldness and the aloneness of this new place, this other time, grieved his souls and made him miserable. He was a little man, an unimportant man who spent his days examining books, yet was never allowed to touch, see, or hear the life that the pictures represented.

And that, he thought, was the greatest form of unhappiness.

# Waterhole

by Diane Lockard

Sounds of wildlife and birds squawking drift across the waterhole with sparse trees on the other side. Caw – caw... “No one in sight.”

We watch as a solitary wildebeest appears and goes to the waterhole. He turns around and walks back to the trees. Where is the rest? It is time for the Great Migration. In the Masai Mara National Reserve, the migration is tentatively expected to arrive in August or September which is an unforgettable experience. Can you picture nearly two million animals moving through Tanzania and Kenya? Leaving a trail of dust behind them. Crossing the Mara River where the crocodiles lay in wait. First the strange looking wildebeest followed by gazelles and zebras. Nature has a life and death cycle, and the predators - jackals and hyenas are on their trail while the hungry lions wait for their arrival.

The cacophony of sounds swell... Up in the trees, something moves. I thought it was a leopard. A monkey swings to the next tree and he sits and waits. A second one appears, and they chase each through the intertwined treetops. The monkeys are calling each other, and the birds can be heard in the distance.

Later we watch two elephants with babies saunter by swinging their trunks as they go to the waterhole. It is hard for baby elephants to learn how to drink like their mothers. We watch while they put their mouths in the water. They sway side to side as they walk towards the trees. We wait not moving for the next glimpse.

When we arrived in Nairobi on our much-anticipated trip to Africa, the cosmopolitan city was a jumping off point for returning to nature and wildlife.

Lake Nakuru Lodge was one of our favorite stops with densely populated animals and a view of the flamingos for which it is famous. “As far as you can see are flamingos, all shoulder to shoulder or feathers to feathers.” Perched on the rocks at the edge of the lake. Other birds join them,

*“Crossing the  
Mara River  
where the  
crocodiles lay  
in wait.”*

flying and walking, swimming – Perpetual motion and sound. The lights come on in our Lodge, and they settle in for the night.

Last stop was Masai Masa Reserve where we stayed at Mara Sopa Hotel to hopefully await the Great Migration. The trip was wonderful even after we missed it, as it isn't just about a large herd of wildebeest.

Update: It is about the wildebeests and other animals plus the people. The Mara River is drying up from the defoliation of the Mal Forest. Without water, there isn't a Great Migration.

How many migrations are left?

“Kwaheri” – Goodbye in Swahili

# No More Belts

by Margie Gilmore

Ruth used to like to wake up early to get a good start on her day. She would get out of bed; go have breakfast, then get ready to go play in the empty field. She liked to run around and see what butterflies and insects she could find.

She would run around the field for hours chasing whatever she saw move. She would catch all kinds of different things then show them to her mom. One day she walked in the house to show her mom the dragonfly she had caught. Her mom screamed and dropped the tray of sandwiches she was holding.

Ruth looked at her mom in shock because she had no idea what was wrong. Her mom told her not to move. She reached for her waist. Ruth had on what she thought was a pretty colorful belt. Her mom reached around her and untied her belt. She threw it on the floor, grabbed Ruth and ran out of the room.

Ruth still had no idea what was going on. She asked her mom, "Why did you throw my belt like that?"

"It's not a belt sweetheart, it was a snake" her mom told her in a calm voice so Ruth would not panic. She was really nervous about where it was, for she did not see where it went when she threw it down.

"I thought snakes were mean and liked to bite and kill people. This one didn't bite or try to kill me mommy."

Mom told her, "Not all snakes are mean."

They walked into the kitchen and saw it slowly come out from behind the refrigerator and it then slither out the door quickly. Ruth was disappointed that her belt was gone. She asked her mom if she could go back outside.

Her mom said, "Just as long as you don't bring no more belts home with you." Gave her a kiss and let her go play. She watched out the window as her daughter ran through the field, chasing anything and everything that moved; remembering what it was like to be a kid again.

# In the Yard

by Scott Aldrich

Summertime means time in my yard and garden. There are several activities I enjoy. There are also some I consider a major pain in the rear door.

I like going out early before the sun is blazing, and it is quiet and calm, with very little traffic, people, or noise around me. I sit on my porch and drink coffee while smoking my morning cigarettes. It is very peaceful to be alone in the quiet of the morning.

I also enjoy spreading birdseed and watching the various birds discover the feed on the driveway. It's also relaxing to watch them, almost like looking at an aquarium, seeing the fish go about their business so aimlessly. It's quite similar to watching the birds eat the seed.

My cat Spliff provides a lot of amusement in the yard I love to watch him leap around while going after grasshoppers, moths and other bugs. He's not so successful with the birds but his pursuit of them is worth watching. It's quite comical too! He has recently discovered mice in the area and is quite good at catching them, he brings me little, furry gifts all the time now.

The garden is fun and rewarding in a different way. It takes a bit of work to prepare and plant the vegetables and herbs I attempt to grow. It's fun to play in the dirt during this process though! This season I have had good luck with the bell peppers and jalapenos. I'm not sure why all the jalapenos have turned bright red, but they are very colorful.

Unfortunately, my tomatoes are not doing well. I've managed about three or four tomatoes from all three plants. Lovely tomatoes, I might add. I see other tomato plants in gardens that are healthy and productive, and I wonder what I've done wrong. Oh well, there is always next year!

The herbs (oregano, basil, cilantro and chives) are flourishing. I love to use them fresh from the garden when cooking. That's a tasty reward!

My wife and daughter planted the flower garden in the front yard in the early spring. They spent a lot of time, effort, and

money on the variety of flowers they chose. For some reason, they lost interest in them after awhile despite their hard work in the beginning.

I have now become the caretaker of the flowers. I somehow feel responsible to weed, feed, water and manage them even though I didn't care if any were planted or not. So the gift of the flower garden (unasked for) had been a pain in the rear door. Although I'm sure I will survive.

All in all, these activities have been a great way to relax. They allow me to get lost in thought and forget some of my daily troubles. The rewards have been numerous and therapeutic. It's fun to observe the growth, nurture the plants and enjoy the harvest.

This is something I will do year after year, if possible. It can be time consuming but the small harvest, beautiful colors, and the aroma of all the fresh herbs make it all worth it at season's end. Yeah, for a short time life is good!

# Essence Gifted

by Annie Stakland

Night air flows  
through my lifted window,  
--wraps me in a comforter  
woven with the chirps of crickets,  
the fragrances of rose  
and lavender,  
of sweet basil  
which does not need  
my fingers' crush  
to release its pungency.

I breathe deeply,  
enjoy the vision of stars  
through the portal of  
the white-painted  
window frame,  
then close my eyes  
and view Orion  
and his companions  
with memory's sight.

The cadence  
of God's small creatures  
becomes my lullaby.

These moments let purity display  
while tucking itself  
in the innermost areas  
of body, heart and mind.  
This is why I open my window.

# Lovely Winter

by Shirley Fifer

softly falling snowflakes  
the weatherman said we'd get 14 Inches.  
We need all the soft rain we can get.  
Noone likes a drought  
especially in farming country  
the sourpusses say they like snow  
as long as its in the mountains.

Mother nature doesn't always be kind  
when she delivers. First there'll be  
howling winds and snow drifts to  
hide the car. The roads are slick  
and make the footing treacherous.  
The cars slide into the ditch  
and into each other.

The snow is so thick the drivers  
can't see what's ahead of them  
the children are so excited the  
driver cant think so he yells at them.  
Mom says Happy winter. Lets go home.  
Then mom will yell at dad for  
yelling at us. Sshh be quite. Its  
safer.

# The Stars of Heaven

by Steven A. Dame

I do stage hypnosis, in auditoriums. The publicity introduces me for a month with outrageous banners, like “Master Mystic the Great,” and “Greatest Hypnotist in the West.” Circus-type posters at bus stops. I do a couple of nights in one town, then move on to the next.

I met Melinda in high school. She was very good with watercolors in art class. That’s what she became, an artist. I received her postcard in May, from Salt Lake City. She invited me to stop in on the way to Reno.

Melinda was a wispy girl, pale-skinned and unhealthy looking. If she lost another ten pounds I would consider her anorexic. Her hair was dishwater blond and fell down to her mid-back in a careless manner. Still there was a fragile prettiness about her, like that of a glass-encased doll.

She showed me her paintings, mostly urban scenes, but with human hands and torsos in the shapes of buildings. Some of them melted, and others climbed the buildings. We went to the balcony and clinked glasses beneath the streetlight. She had me watch Trolley Square in the distance. It was about ten o’clock.

The water tower at Trolley Square is decorated with lights, which move illusively in circular motions. It looked nice from the Charleston Apartments, especially with a warm summer breeze. The scent of a barbecue wafted in from a neighboring apartment.

I remember her wine glass on the railing and her hand clasping the stem, but I remember no face. Her voice was a low, steady hum. The balcony door opened, and a man named Frank stood in cutoffs and an open shirt. He was smiling, his long red hair curling back over his ears.

The glass shattered then, and Melinda finished counting the drinks: “1, 2, 3 . . .”

I woke up on the couch at four A.M. with a thin blanket, shivering. The two sat across the room, on the floor, with arms entwined. They were wide awake.

I examined her paintings. One was of a cracked egg, with a man struggling to emerge. She had a collection of Dali prints. I

stepped onto the balcony and heard a dog bark. Then I went back to sleep.

In the morning, when the sun streamed through the window and began to heat my face uncomfortably, Frank had a question about the bathroom. We stared into the mirror together. His voice had a lullaby quality to it. He, too, kept counting to three. “Relax. . .” he repeated. I yawned. He went back to the balcony with Melinda.

Melinda talked on the telephone.

Frank took me to the mirror again, and showed me how to do a self-portrait. My eyes watered, and Trolley Square glimmered. The glass shattered, crumbling in my hands.

She put the plane ticket in my palm and bid me farewell while I stood with my baggage in the airport. I heard nothing but voices. The two of them stood side by side, smiling.

I woke up in the Eldorado Hotel in Reno holding a Bible in my hands, one of those cheap hardbound copies “Placed by the Gideons.” Revelations. I never understood Revelations. A Bible expert named Sam, a wayward would-be minister, sat with me at Dee’s Hamburger Grill in downtown Salt Lake once, sipping coffee and thumbing through his own dog-eared edition, trying to explain it to me.

It wasn’t too long before he was off on one of those stories about New York or Chicago again. He had gotten hold of some bad junk and lay comatose in the tangled brush of Central park for three days. Finally a policeman walking through the park saw him and got him to the hospital. “I might have died of starvation,” he said, and there we were again. I couldn’t get his mind back on Revelations.

I went downstairs to the casino and ambled out to the street. The usual Nevada crowds mingled on the sidewalk—sporadic, polyester mobs. Sixty-ish men with sixty-ish wives in the cheap, casual clothing of the tourist. I left the bright lights district and proceeded to a secluded cafe I knew about.

A blond teenager with frail, dull eyes recognized me above her coffee as the man on the posters plastered all over town. I

“We stared into the mirror together. His voice had a lullaby quality to it. He, too, kept counting to three.”

joined her at her table, ordered a late dinner and then excused myself to the restroom. While combing my hair, I felt myself succumbing to a sleep. I quickly diverted my eyes from the mirror and splashed cold water on my face. Darn that Frank! It all came back—the counting to three, the incidents with the mirror. No wonder I had lost so much time! They had hypnotized me, both of them, and left me with a slew of post-hypnotic suggestions to battle against. *Just to see if they could do it. Just to see if they could put The Great Hypnotist into their trance!* I thought.

The waitress delivered my steak and potatoes, and Annie, my newfound friend, asked the usual questions: Can you hypnotize me? Do people really get hypnotized on stage? I don't know if I believe all that stuff.

Baby, you're looking at him. Now quit tapping your spoon against your coffee cup. That series of threes again. Yes, you can have my autograph.

Memories flooded in. Annie looked at me strangely, like I was some kind of contortionist. I'm sorry I'm not feeling well perhaps you'd best leave me alone. Run on home, now. Yes, it was nice meeting you.

Rick Carmine was beside me. His hands clasped the poetry he had scribbled the night before. I tried to read the black, drooling letters, but my eyes were swimming again. We were back in Ohio at the Lebanon County Cemetery.

A stream goes through that cemetery and we were on the little curved bridge, overlooking the water.

*You get a feeling here*

*Are you afraid?*

*I leave in two weeks basic training in Texas*

*Why do you come here Rick*

*So much to see so much to do*

*Let's talk about other things*

They called the police to the restaurant because I threw the cups against the wall and overturned the table and crouched in the corner, weeping like some deranged fool while Carmine, and another boy Doug Payne—the one hit on the motorcycle age 16 Route 127, Friday, the date of his funeral escapes me—crouched in the corner and weeping—the evening crowd now a stiff pale glaze of boots and tennis shoes—the two ghosts, Doug and Rick—towered above me amid the crowd; my two best friends, trying to console me with their wet tired eyes—

*Fifty dollars fifty dollars for damages!  
 No I haven't been taking anything have bouts of grand mal  
 Scared us half to death*

*I'll be fine in my hotel room*

*Haven't I seen you before?*

*No officer I'm new to the town*

*Said he was some kind of hypnotist—*

The next morning, I met Clyde Miller, my manager, in the restaurant of the Eldorado for breakfast. I almost told him that I couldn't go on. Instead, I borrowed a valium, complaining of a restless night, and discussed the two weekends in Reno. "And after that is Sacramento," he said.

I had one more day to recover before the performance. That night I left my room and drank coffee for four hours in the lounge. I fell asleep on the counter, but the waitresses, recognizing me as the hypnotist due to appear on Friday night, let me be.

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Our car broke down in Cincinnati. It was the Mustang starter motor again, and my knuckles were bruised from trying to get it off. We left the car jacked up, with the spare tire beneath the right front wheel, and wandered in the winter air toward an open restaurant at 2 A.M.

That was the winter of '68, when I was a junior and Rick was a senior in high school.

The waitress at the Howard Johnson's was rude. A salesman in a dark blue suit kept tying up the phone with long distance calls. A pan boiled over on the stove, and the waitresses quarreled. A security guard sat on the last stool, reading a newspaper.

Rick was in army fatigues, with a blackened flak jacket, shoving me wads of poetry with his tightfisted hand. The coffee never came.

We wandered on the street again, leaving the Mustang behind us with its lights flashing. They were dimming now, as the battery was dying.

-----

We stood on the river bridge, the water lingering beneath us. The night air exploded and his face was charred—his camouflage jacket dripped in red. We left each other on the bridge. Parts of the river were frozen. Other portions held chunks of prior lives, dissolving downward. Automobiles floated in circles, sinking with the lives.

The waitress at the Eldorado led me to my room. Later, she reappeared, carrying a silver tray.

*I have seen enough of humankind*

*You were screaming in the lounge*

*Please stay with me Melinda*

*My name's not Melinda*

*Years ago in fifth grade I dreamed of our classroom descending*

*You're drunk*

Descending beneath the small town theatre three levels downward, each with a sign "Sub One," "Sub Two," like a movie I had seen before. We reached the "Sub Three" level, and most of the kids clustered about some soda pop and candy machines. They held bags beneath a machine that spilled out popcorn.

Down a corridor, away from the crowd, I found a gate. Beyond this gate was a cavern. It was a tremendous cavern, and was lit up with spotlights as tall as those at the baseball field. Inside, an orchestra was playing. I couldn't get the other kids away from the candy machines to come and watch.

The orchestra was booming in brass notes the music my father played on Sundays. The newspaper covered his chest as he lay sprawled on his back on the couch. It was Mahler's, "The Resurrection Symphony."

A custodian came from behind—in real life he was the custodian of the school—and said, "You aren't allowed in there."

"Unlock the door. I want to see them," I replied.

"You aren't allowed in there, Shane."

Two nights later, the dream was repeated, with the following variation: the gate was open, but the orchestra was gone.

The chamber was silent, like the autumn air above Rick's gravestone. I wept before it once, the wind swirling the leaves in circular motions among the granite stones. There was something that I had left here, and I tried to listen to that still small voice. But nothing, not even the echoes of the leaves rasping amongst the stones, twirling up amid the harsh embitterment that I felt, could bring him back.

I felt the first cold winter chill pass through me as I moved on to the bridge above the creek. Part of me had died with Rick. Part of me like the failing gray sky above me, vanishing into the horizon, closed in upon me as I walked back to the car. Once again, I was alone.

# Respect

by Jonnathon Hardy

Why do people always  
expect  
that thing called  
respect.  
for those who dont  
i guess i wont.  
for those who do  
just stay true  
for the world turns  
and people burn  
from the deepest  
part  
Just take it to heart  
respect isn't given  
Its earned  
so go yearn for it.

# Judge Them Not!

by Elizabeth Ernstsén

Remember what they loved in life!

**Judge Them Not!**

Remember what they lived for and not how or why they died.

**Judge Them Not!**

Embrace those precious, happy moments we shared with  
Them in our lives together.

**Judge Them Not!**

But Why? I don't understand it!  
Suicide is an illness of its' own, much like cancer: with some it  
Is long in coming – with others there is no warning.

**Judge Them Not!**

When one feels so great shame and guilt when it is so tremendous  
inside of us? *'Tis why we don't see it coming.*

**Judge Them Not!**

When such feelings and thoughts come upon them – *'tis over*  
*Powering* and they see only one way out!

**Judge Them Not!**

Love the moments we had with them, embrace them and  
Cherish them! Let go of how they died and why.

**Judge Them Not!**

'Tis it not for God to judge and for us to love?  
Then...

**Judge Them Not!**

But **love** who they were!

# Hate and Consequence

by J. Phillip Wilkes

Affection we cannot express;  
The hand we cannot hold;  
A body that we cannot warm  
Beside us, shivering, cold;

The double bed we cannot share;  
Those lips we cannot kiss;  
That perfect house we cannot buy---  
There's something wrong with this.

The orphaned child we cannot raise;  
The love we dare not speak;  
The epithets we must endure:  
*"Fairy! Faggot! Freak!"*

In temples where we cannot pray  
Bigots brew hypocrisy,  
Presume to know what their god feels  
About our sexuality,

Claim inspiration from above  
To legalize discrimination,  
And outlaw how and who we love,  
Deny its consummation.

If we tell our love, *"Forever,"*  
What does it mean to you?  
Does it shake your holy lifestyle,  
Crush your narrow-minded view?

We've had our fill, you on the Hill.  
You're truly out of touch  
If what we do in bedrooms  
Concerns you all so much

You claim we're seeking special rights  
Beyond what we deserve.  
We can't believe that rhetoric.  
You have a lot of nerve

Coming down on youth like that.  
It isn't at all cool  
When bright, young students kill themselves  
Because of hate at school,

Or words from one they love and trust  
Drive them to despair.  
They need esteem and hope and love.  
Wake up! Show them you care.

Your children are the future men  
And women who will lead,  
And they are good, and so alive.  
What reason do you need

To love them just the way they are?  
They need our *full* support.  
Your words of hate are killing them.  
Your reasons fall far short,

Still, well-developed arguments  
Don't widen your slim sight.  
So keep on spouting hate, not love,  
But prepare for a fight.

# Emotional Armor

by Barry Kesler

I shifted and prepared myself to life the lid of my emotional coffin then stopped. I asked myself, “was I well enough to go out into public without my emotional armor? Would I handle the searing white light of truth? Or were the wounds simply too deep and too fresh?” I tried to settle my mind for the pain of truth and shoved one more time at the lid as it gave way. It felt like the sticky sweetness of warm molasses as it began to pull away from my skin. In its place there was no anticipated pain, only the white light of truth.

The world began to spin and the nausea became a roiling torrent of confusion, I knew I was going to pass out but could do nothing to stop it. I had to simply find a place to sit down before I fell down.

The way of nausea passed just before I felt the lights begin to wink out and my head began to clear. The fog of anticipation that had locked me in this cage of fear began to dissipate. I slowly began the arduous process of freeing my mind from my perceived fears. Fears that had haunted me since childhood like a ghoul from seasons past never relenting its hold on my innocence or youth.

How had I lived for such a long time and never seen this light? It was not as painful as I had perceived it. It was difficult to look at the first glance, yet it held a warm sense of comfort and peace. I remember my mother’s gentle touch as she wiped away the tears of a skinned knee, gently fussing amid kisses of kindness and words of calm.

Even now at the age of 48, she was still there, waiting for her Phoenix to arise yet again from the ashes of his former self. A priestess of passion, calm and understanding that could as always shed a light in the dark places of pain and excess.

o who was the armor there to protect? A shy weak boy who would crumble at the first sign of conflict? Or a mother who for far too long raged at the world for the injustices dealt her son, maybe it was there to protect them from each other. The Boy who refused to be a Man, and a Woman who could not stave off the rancor of a troubled world any longer? Could those two be reconciled?

Perhaps the armor had become a tomb because I allowed it.

Perhaps it was there because I needed it and it would not be when it was no longer essential.

Yet here I was, the armor washing away like the cleansing of a gentle spring rain. Could I learn to live without it? It seemed as though I would soon find out!

# More

by Meg Burke

find more than you seek.  
dream more than you sleep.  
hear more than you listen.  
say more than you speak.  
witness more than you see.  
learn more than you teach.  
do more than you pray.  
believe more than you preach.  
nourish more than you feed.  
grow more than you harvest.  
inspire more than you console.  
hope more than you wish.  
share more than you earn.  
imagine more than you create.  
root more than you cheer.  
embrace more than you shelter.  
trust more than you expect.  
be more than you want.

# Witness

by Christine Lee

If Jesus Christ had never lived, I would have no less inclination to obey or admiration for his teachings. Though revolutionary for his time, medical science proves his admonitions lead to a more abundant life. A simple example can be taken from Matthew 6:34 which reads: *Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.* In layman's terms, don't worry be happy. Stress affects every system in our bodies detrimentally.

The great commandment found in Mark 12:31 *Love your neighbor as yourself.* when adhered to, eliminates the need for every law on the books.

The law of forgiveness touches me most personally. As I read the account of Corrie Tenboom describing her first encounter with the former SS man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck I am convinced that nothing short of the power of God could spontaneously lift burdens of this magnitude. He approached her and said, "How grateful I am Fraulein, to think that, as you say, he has washed my sins away!" His hand was thrust out to shake hers. And she, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept her hand at her side. Even as the anger and vengeful thoughts boiled through her, she saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ died for this man she thought, am I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, she prayed forgive me and help me to forgive him. She tried to smile, struggled to raise her hand. She could not and confessed she felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again she breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness. As she took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From her shoulder along her arm and through her hand a current seemed to pass, while into her heart sprang a love for this stranger than almost overwhelmed her. And so she discovered that it is not on our forgiveness anymore than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.

I have experienced this for myself. No, I've never been in a concentration camp, been a prisoner of war or even spent the night in jail, but I have forgiven my brother for outing me to my family. I have forgiven him for stealing from me and bearing false witness against me. You wouldn't know any of this to see us together today. I not only have forgiven him but I can honestly say I love him, for all that is; I take the good with the bad together. I can't love people in slices.

As a member of the Gay Writes group I feel it especially important for me to declare my faith so that others will know Gay Christians exist.

# Visions and Voices

by Evany Pace

I sometimes feel like I am at odds with my religion. My religion seems to want clean, dutiful, upright, exemplary, and cheerful people. That is not always who I am. I love my religion dearly, but I do not always feel like I can be my true self. I am a mess of emotions. I love to analyze and ask why. I go for guys with long hair who have that “bad boy” attitude. And I don’t always do what is right. My whole voice is not always heard. Recently I joined a community writing group. This group is a conglomeration of young and old, rich and poor, students and stay-at-home moms. In this arena everyone’s voice is heard.

A few weeks ago it was my turn to present a poem to the group. I have not written very much poetry in my life, but I was surprised to find how easily words and phrases were coming to me. My voice, trapped for so long under the constraint of my religion, was ecstatic at the opportunity to run free. I was able to come up with the following poem:

*Last night I caught on fire.  
Flames enveloped my quiescent body.  
It didn't hurt, at least  
not anymore so than the pain within.  
I watched the ethereal  
dance on my skin. Wondering, with charred limbs,  
if people would notice.  
They only see what they can't hide away.*

*Today the scars are gone.  
Couldn't they have stayed for a little while?  
My frail exterior  
heals, but leaves the soul to its blackened war.  
No one will seek me out,  
to understand the infernal inside.  
Sadly, repressed burning  
cannot ignite any heart but my own.*

*So tonight I take that  
scorching step into the weakened spotlight.  
Wishing terrors to come  
once again and calm my secret  
ashes.  
Hoping the seductive  
element is easier living than  
inextinguishable  
fears and people who run  
past the fire.*

**“My voice,  
trapped for so long  
under the constraint  
of my religion,  
was ecstatic at the  
opportunity to  
run free.”**

This poem is dark and twisted. It deals with serious issues and has a very negative tone. It is everything that my religion is not. As I wrote this and discussed it with the members of my writing group, I felt like I had been set at liberty. The thoughts, feelings, and actions that I had not allowed myself to indulge in because of my religion were out in the open. And, I felt closer to religion than I had in a very long time.

It seems that repressing the ideas in this poem was turning my heart away from God because I was ashamed for thinking and doing things that were contrary to the ideology of my religion. But, as I embraced who I was and spoke my voice, I came to understand that my idea of self is important and it is right to be who I am. I am religious. I love God dearly. But I am also critical, dark, and imaginative. And that is okay.

As I attend this writing group and work on my poems and stories, I am able to show that part of me that is “unacceptable” to bring up in religious settings. I understand now the difference between the practice of religion and the religion itself. While my fellow religionists may preach the “right” way to think, feel, and act, I know that God understands my whole voice and wants it to be heard.

# It's All Daddy's Fault

by Jill Ammon Vanderwood

Rain splattered, and dripped down the windows. It ran off the roof, splashing into a large puddle. The rain formed a stream, flowing down the hill below the house.

Seven year old, Nadean hurried to the window, hoping to see the sun. "It's still raining," she said. Nadean walked, with a long face, into the kitchen to eat break.

All morning Nadean sat in front of the window. She watched the rain splatter on the ground. She listened to the sound it made as it hit the roof.

"Honey, do you want to put on your rain gear and go out to play?" asked her mom.

"No," said Nadean.

"Do you want to color, or watch TV?" asked her mom.

"All it does is rain, rain, rain," said Nadean. "And it's all Daddy's fault."

"Why is it Daddy's fault?" asked her mom, surprised.

"Every time Daddy says the family prayer, he prays for rain," said Nadean. "Now all it does is rain, rain, rain, everyday."

"The rain is important for the farmers. When we don't have rain, there isn't enough water to grow the fruit or vegetables we eat," said her mom, handing Nadean an orange. "if you got thirsty, you couldn't get a drink, without the rain."

"The rain is so important, that we don't worry so much about getting wet," said her mom.

The door bell rang. Nadean ran to answer it.

"Do you want to play in the rain?" asked her friend, Davina, carrying two plastic sail boats.

"I'm glad Heavenly Father sent the rain," Nadean told her mom.

# My Father, the Stranger

by Garrett Drage

“Pancakes for dinner?” I ask him.

“Just wait until you try it,” he says.

I choose a table outside so we can see the ocean, and I think I can smell the seashore.

He says, “Sitting outside eating banana pancakes is one of the reasons I love Kaua’i.”

A server pours water into our glasses, takes our orders and walks back inside the restaurant.

I ask him, “Do you believe in God?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

He answers, “Because God would kill a child, but not a murderer. I thought we were just eating dinner.”

“Do you mind that I believe in God?” I ask.

He says to me, “Not at all, but which God do you believe in?”

I ask, “What do you mean?”

“What’s the nature of your God?” he asks.

If this trip is a disaster, it’ll be his fault. I ask him again, “What do you mean?”

Finally, he clarifies his question and says, “I believe in no God. Do you believe in one, male God, like Christians and Muslims believe, or do you believe in many Gods? Or do you believe that everything is God?”

“You’re so strange,” I say.

He laughs because he must agree with me. “Which is it?” he asks.

“I think you’re right, we’re just eating dinner,” I say. Then, I ask him, “Is your choice hard? I mean, is it difficult to not believe in God?”

“Just wait until you try it,” he says again.

This time, I can’t help but grin. “You really are strange,” I say.

Our plates arrive. He tells me to try coconut syrup with my pancakes. I choose maple.

# Prologue

by Nikki Hammer

The day that Galen decided to shoot himself was also the day he first met the angel. The crumbling apartment stank of nicotine and alcohol mixed with desperation. He'd been living there for a month when he finally decided to do it. It wasn't that he needed much persuasion, he just had to work up the energy. Galen stared at the handgun perched on the edge of the tub. He'd do this in the bathroom, easy clean up that way. No need to be a burden to anyone once he was gone. A deep breath, then cold metal was pressed against his temple.

"Now this is truly pathetic."

Galen frowned, his hand frozen in mid motion. His eyes shifted up and there she was. A woman with honey brown hair and dressed in seductive red and black clothing. She sat on the edge of the tub, her back turned to him. She was staring around at the tiny bathroom. Disgust wrinkled her nose and twitched her lips.

He couldn't decide what was happening. There was cool metal greasing his hand and temple and he had to be alone yet... He was hallucinating, no other explanation. Galen looked away from her and stared at his feet. Another deep breath, God he wanted another cigarette, and the gun shifted in his hand.

"Of all the places to do something like this couldn't you have picked somewhere clean? I realize you don't care but I do. Have consideration for others why don't you."

He wouldn't look at her. "What the hell are you? Too much booze, my brain misfiring, trying to convince me not to do this?"

"Oh please." She laughed and the mocking tone got to him. "Your mind isn't anywhere near sophisticated enough to conjure me. That's like asking a Neanderthal to appreciate a luxury sports car."

"Well...whatever you are," his hands were balling into tight fists. The gun's grip was biting into his palm. "Go away and leave me the fuck alone."

"Look at me." It took a lot of willpower to even try to block out the command in her voice. In the end he looked up and found himself inches away from her face. She locked eyes with him and

held him there. Galen gasped in surprise at her eyes. They kept shifting color, changing with smooth ease.

“As far as I’m concerned you are an insignificant fool. A tiny speck not worth paying attention to. You’ve turned yourself into a coward who’d rather run away than fight.”

Galen opened his mouth to protest and was cut off. She reached out a slender hand and clamped it onto his jaw and chin, keeping him from speaking. The mercurial eyes shifted to a dark blue.

“Don’t speak. All you need to know is that you’re being given a choice. To live and fight with a purpose, or have your brains splattered in this tub. Whether you say yes or no doesn’t matter to me. I’m just a messenger, a worker bee like you.”

She pushed him away with such force that the back of his head hit the wall behind him. The gun clanked against the side of his tub as his arm fell. Emotions rushed forward and he shut his eyes tight to prevent tears. The angel stood up, turning her back on him again.

“You...you have no idea what I’m feeling. What I’ve done.”

She scoffed. “That’s funny. You’re the one who hasn’t the faintest clue as to what’s going on not me.” She turned to face him again. He was a wreck of a man, grimy, trampled, and totally clueless. “You have no idea that you’ve been chosen.”

“Chosen? What the hell does that mean?”

“I’m not some mirage, I’m actually here. I was sent to you.”

“Sent by who?” He brought a hand up to rub at his eyes.

“By God.”

Galen began to laugh. It was a hoarse, cracked sound that hadn’t come out of his throat in years. This whole thing was beyond ridiculous. How did a suicide turn into being chosen by God?

“God?” His body shook as his laughter turned hysterical. “I can’t be chosen by something that doesn’t exist.”

“Believe what you want.” She shrugged, not bothered at all by his words.

“If you were sent by God,” he took in deep breaths, his hand back over his eyes trying to calm himself. “That make you an angel or something?”

“If that’s what you want to believe.”

“No see what I want to believe is that none of this is real. We aren’t having this conversation and I’m lying dead in this shithole bathroom.”

She crossed her arms and stared at him steadily. “Then do it, make it a reality. That’s your choice. Kill yourself and be done with it so I can move on to the next bastard who has more sense than to waste my time.”

Galen stared up at her. “I thought you said I was chosen.”

“You were but that doesn’t mean you’re the only choice we have. The blessing and curse of free will.” She smiled at the look on his face. “You thought that you were that kind of special? The hero of the day, the one who will save us all?”

She started to laugh, the mocking tone flooding the room. Galen’s fists tightened and his teeth clenched.

“Shut up...”

“Look at you, you can barely stand let alone bathe yourself. You’ve got some nerve to think of yourself as a hero.”

“Shut up!” He shouted and pointed the gun at her. It took no thought to fire three quick shots. They went through her and slammed into the wall sending chunks of plaster to the ground. Galen stared up as she smiled again and moved till their faces were inches away from each other. Her smile was dark and chilling, her voice cold.

“You’re just a man, full of up front weaknesses and buried strengths. You may be unique but being special is earned through your actions. Right now your actions label you as filth and not worth anyone’s time not even your own. All of that remains reality unless you decide to change it. No one else can decide your fate, only you.”

They stared at each other for what felt like an eternity. Suddenly all Galen felt was exhausted. He slumped back into the tub and all of his muscles let go. The gun clattered to the ground harmlessly and he started to sob. The angel leaned back and sighed looking slightly annoyed.

Galen finally squeezed his eyes closed and scrunched up his features to stop his tears. Then he vigorously rubbed his face with one hand. The hand that had held the gun had gone numb. When he felt calmer he spoke again.

“What,” his voice caught and he coughed. “What am I being chosen for?”

***“Right now your actions label you as filth and not worth anyone’s time not even your own.”***

The angel didn't speak for a long moment. She looked like she couldn't believe he was even asking. "It's not a single mission, you say yes and you're committing your whole life to the cause."

"What cause? Be a little more damned specific."

She looked annoyed again and scowled at him. "The world is crumbling all around us. Humanity has self destructed and it won't be long before you've picked each other apart." Her voice was heavy with contempt.

"We're rebuilding, things aren't perfect but we're trying."

"Trying?" She rolled her eyes and stood up again. "If you call reverting back to an even more barbaric period of history trying. I call it an exercise in futility."

"For an angel your viewpoint is really fucked up."

She couldn't help but smile. "Just because I'm God's messenger doesn't mean I can't accept reality."

"Reality is what you make of it." He tried to sit up straighter and couldn't. His muscles creaked and complained.

The angel's smile widened. "Exactly, you're catching on."

Galen clung to the sides of the tub as his mind raced and he took in steady breaths. He had been so sure that ending it all was what he wanted and he still did. But now he wavered, teetering between taking himself out of the big picture and having a new purpose. His heart sank and he slumped again. What was the point of a purpose if there was nothing else in his life? The angel stood there, her arms crossed and one foot tapping impatiently.

"Think of it this way, even if you say yes now you could always say no and shoot yourself later on. Not to mention the fact that the mission is dangerous. Who knows, you might end up dying soon anyway."

"I don't know. I'm not sure I see the point."

The angel sighed again and spat out at him. "Look, knowing your history the last thing you'd want is to die like a lazy coward. At least this way you could go out in a blaze of glory. Maybe even attempt to help others."

Galen's mind wandered and he thought about his life. All of the good and bad, the struggles and triumphs and all the darkness of the last three years. He reached over and picked up the gun again, turning it over in his hands. It could end in one flash, or continue for who knew how long. The only question was whether or not he had the strength.

"Would you hurry up and decide? I don't have forever to wait

around for you.”

Galen continued to stare down at the gun. He frowned softly and thought about what he might be able to change. “What the hell...why not?”

“Remember, this is not going to be a cakewalk. It’s going to be tough and savage.” The angel stood there inspecting her nails. “You’ll get the shit kicked out of you constantly. I doubt you’d last very long.”

Galen glanced up at her and gripped the gun. He thumbed the safety and shakily stood up in the tub. He gave himself a moment before stepping out of it and coming over to stand next to her.

“I’ll do it.” He said the words with conviction. It melted slightly at the sight of the smile on the angel’s face.

“Excellent. I hope you’re ready for this because you’ll be walking through hell.”

“I’ve been through hell.”

“Nothing like this you haven’t.”

He gazed at her steadily then spoke. “What will I be doing?”

She smiled icy cold again. “You’ll become the harbinger of death, and maybe somewhere down the line you just might become the hero.”

# Greyhound Adventure

by Marlene Arbogast

Three years ago I went to Washington for a vacation. I spent a week in Yakima.

Before I could leave Utah, a major snowstorm hit. I had to wait in the Greyhound bus station until 3:00 AM for my bus to depart.

I missed my connecting bus and was stranded in Stanford, Oregon for ten hours.

I arrived in Yakima a day later than originally planned. When I got there, I became sick with bronchitis and stayed on my sister's couch for four days.

My sister and I visited our mother and father. We both stayed at Mom and Dad's for two days. It was nice to spend some time with each other.

On the trip home, the bus driver said we could go no further than Stanford, Oregon, due to bad weather. The same place I was stranded on the way up. Instead of leaving, I stayed an extra day at my sister's house.

I finally got back on the bus to go home. It couldn't be this easy. Nope! The bus blew out a tire, and we waited a couple of hours before the bus could get moving again.

I returned home four hours late. My husband was waiting for me at the bus station. He had a big, stuffed, red bear with a heart for me. This was for Valentine's Day since we had been apart. What a nice homecoming.

# Summer

by Ms. Sadie (Catina Harper)

Summer was great! I went to Miami. I stayed in Miami Springs and I hung out on Ocean Drive. I took pictures at the Versace Mansion and I ate lots of Caribbean food. The people that I met there were all locals. They shared information with me on how they got to Miami, and why they chose to stay. We talked about where they came from and how long they lived in Florida. Most of the people came from an island or another country, and most of them spoke more than one language. I felt so off because I only speak English.

The ocean was so serene. It was quiet and calming. The sky was lit up by stars. The water had a light salt smell that was pleasure to my nose. The boats seemed so close even though they were far away from the shore. It was so surreal. Even though the ocean was quiet you could hear the music faintly playing from the night clubs on that famous street called Ocean Drive. The vibe felt so good that I didn't want to leave.

I left Florida and went to Chicago. I hung out with my family and we had a great time. My cousin flew in from Utah to join me. My cousin, my sister and I went partying. I couldn't drink because I was pregnant, but I still had fun. We went to one of my other cousin's birthday party. We went to a reggae club that lasted until 7 o'clock in the morning and we hung out and partied on the streets, and took pictures. There were people everywhere. The men thought that we were pretty so they tried holding conversations with us on every corner we passed. People were telling jokes which made us laugh and smile. This was so much fun. I met this guy at one of the parties on July 4<sup>th</sup> and he took me to Six Flags Great America which is an amusement park. We ate at a restaurant called Hermana Japan which is much like Benni Hanna's where the chefs cook the food in front of you on a hibachi grill. I had dinner at his sister's house that Sunday with his family. The barbecued fish was the best I ever tasted. It was firm so it didn't fall apart. It was seasoned just right and it was well done yummy!

I volunteered at the Pacific Garden Mission, which is a homeless shelter. I worked in the clothing room for two weeks in

July, fixing up and arranging the shoes. I met all sorts of people from a lot of different backgrounds. Some of the people had prior drug addictions. They moved into the shelter because they lost their homes and their jobs. Some of the men were on the bible program which is a program that teaches them to depend on their higher power for strength instead of depending on addictions. A lot of the women came from abusive relationships. It was my pleasure helping them because I had to assist them when they came to the clothing room for an outfit change. I got to talk to them and know who they were as people, and share in their joys and pains. We shared hugs, tears, and love. The experience left an imprint on my life, because I learned that people that live in shelters are really no different from me. I went through some of the same situations they were enduring. For instance I was homeless because of a domestic violence situation once, and I know people that were drug abusers before. By volunteering my time not only was I rewarded because I was able to share my story with people and give them some encouragement in order to help them along life's journey. I was also rewarded by being able to take home ten pairs of designer shoes. This trip was the best!

# Enough

by Katherine January

when Lindbergh took flight that May  
he packed five sandwiches

*when I get to Paris I won't need any more  
and if I don't get to Paris I won't need any more*

and somewhere over water  
and the whine of wind on steel

he ate ham and cheese  
and maybe beef

strapped to a lonely wicker seat with wings  
toiling above the relentless Atlantic

cheering throngs at both ends  
streamers, ticker-tape, confetti

and between two continents  
what there was

was enough

# Tool Time

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by Scott Aldrich

As an afterthought,  
like a windblown leaf,  
I combed my hair.

Changed once,  
dressed twice.

I marched.  
No, slouched.  
Slumping.

No coin. No reward.  
No thanks  
enough for this task.  
Ever.

The shovel, hard and cold,  
dug deep.  
Uncaring, unseeing.  
Like a death ray.

Now four sided,  
two yards down.  
The remnants of  
one man's life.

This hole a home.

The world no longer  
his oyster.

# April Tax Day

by Shirley Fifer

April tax day  
one advantage to no income  
is no taxes to pay

if you get angry  
don't shoot the tax collector  
they'll have a replacement

taxes are necessary  
to support the politicians  
abolish them by law

oh for a perfect world  
make some good suggestions  
join the battle

two brains are better than one  
even four half brains  
if they are used

# My Job Experiences

by Issa Mberwa

My name is Issa. I am 29 years old and originally came to the US from Kenya on June 8th, 2004, through Catholic Community Services. I got married in February 2005 in Salt Lake City, Utah. I now have three kids.

I started my first part-time job at the Sears store near downtown in November 2005 as the store was getting busy, preparing for the Christmas holiday. They hired me there as a full-time employee three months later. My job was an interesting experience. I worked in the Men's Department. My responsibilities were to help customers throughout the store by finding merchandize, answering questions regarding new items, taking phone orders, and folding clothing—making sure everything looked nice and in order.

The job was challenging and confusing in the beginning because customers had a hard time understanding me due to my accent. I also had a hard time understanding brand names, but my co-worker was there beside me, helping me figure out what to do—from working with people of different diversities to increasing my comprehension of the American culture, such as making eye-contact and smiling for customers.

I enjoyed working there because it was a clean and nice place to work. The customers were always appreciative, and my boss was caring. I'll always remember working there and telling my family and friends about the good experiences I learned from there.

I quit this job after a year because it wasn't paying well, and I had my family to support. As I was working there, I applied for a position at Home Depot as a cashier. I loved this new job because it was interesting. I am always interested in learning new things. I learned how to handle money and give change to customers.

Two years later, at my current job, I am working as a custodian for American Preparatory Academy. I love this job because of the excellent benefits and even better pay. For now, I am looking forward to earning my high school diploma and going to college for my social work degree. I hope it will open opportunities for better jobs in the future and be a good example for my siblings and my children.

# “In Business, the Generic Pronoun ‘He’...”

by Mary M. Fuller

My goal, in 1973, was to share my observations about the generic pronoun “he” used in newspaper columns announcing work opportunities for men and women.

Differences in the functions in the body of men and the function of females giving birth, determined the visualizations of different kinds of work men and women were “made for.”

Such a general statement though ‘true’ when a biological function needs to be met, a biological function does not fit *most* jobs performed in public.

On a late Friday afternoon during an economic recession in the 1973 I applied for an ‘Industrial Engineer’ job. All the qualifications and my education and work history matched!

The young clerk at the receiving desk said I could not apply for that job because the announcement (she showed it to me) said, The engineer... he will...”

Congress had passed a law recently that stated that equal employment for jobs could not be made on the basis of genders.

I would have asked to see the supervisor, but it was 4:30 on that frenzied Friday afternnon. Monday would be frenzied but there would be more time.

Happily, I did not have to return as I had a job offer in the mail box. Sadly, I did not take the opportunity to ‘educate’ a company’s Personnel Officer and his or her clerks that gender no longer mattered when applying for a job! How long had women been in the job market in jobs they could do but a man would be promoted over her. NO MORE! That is, if they got caught! Unfortunately, it still happens. Grrrr!

# The Best Layed Plans

by J. Phillip Wilkes

The southwest wind turned cold and it rained, a real gully washer, as he waited for the bus. It was late. It was always late. *For what you pay, you'd think they'd make an effort to be on time once in a while*, he thought. The umbrella did little to protect his lower half. In just a few seconds his pants were soaking wet. He sheltered his cell phone, iPod and wallet in the jacket of his suit coat. *This brand new suit is ruined*. He had thought about grabbing his overcoat, but it had been warm and sunny a few minutes ago. He hadn't really expected rain, not more than a sprinkle anyway, and he had been in a rush. The umbrella had been an afterthought, snatched from the stand beside the apartment door as he hurried out. *Should have brought the raincoat. Stupid. Why don't you listen to the weatherman? Why are you always so dumb? Huh, stupid?*

The storm was over in five minutes, and the sun dissolved the remaining clouds and the sun came out. The wind sighed a final gust, which turned the umbrella inside out, breaking two ribs and tearing the cloth. He deposited it in the trash can at the curb as the bus pulled up.

He stepped into the coach, swiped his fare card, and sat down in the nearest available seat.

"Excuse me, sir."

*Is she talking to me?*

Sir, can you please swipe your card again?"

He rose from the seat, took the card out of his pocket again, and swiped it through the reader. The device responded with a loud beep and a red light.

"Again, please."

Same response. Again. Same. Again. Swipe. Beep. Red light. Swipe. Red light.

"Sir, I need your fare, and I'm on a schedule."

*Oh and I'm not*. He fished through his pocket for change. A twenty. No other bills; no coins.

"If you don't have your fare, you'll have to get off the bus, sir."

He put the twenty and the fare card back in his pocket, next to his phone. As he exited the bus he realized, *The phone! The damn*

**“After today everyone who had ridiculed and doubted, all those who had advised him to trod the well-worn path rather than pursue his own, would be silenced.”**

*phone. The key card to his building had failed to work last week, and he had forgotten. Stupid! Don't put the cards next to the phone. Don't you ever learn, dummy?*

Today of all days he had wanted to be sharp, look smart, feel keen. He'd had a haircut, got a manicure, baked at the tanning salon. He had bought this new suit. He had soaked in a hot bath and used the exfoliating scrub. He had watched the

evening news with a green mud on his face and a mouthful of gooey gel that tasted worse than poi, in a tray that didn't quite fit his mouth. He had retired early, taking an over the counter sleep aid to ensure he stayed asleep all night.

He'd cooked himself a satisfying breakfast of scrambled eggs, English muffin, some fruit, juice, and milk. He'd even remembered to take his medication this morning, even though he had awakened later than planned, still groggy from the sleeping pill. Luckily he had set the clock an hour ahead to fool himself, laid out his clothes and everything he would need, the night before.

All had gone according to plan. Until now. Now he was going to have to walk, all because he had forgotten about the cards and the phone. *You have spoiled everything, you idiot. Can't you do things right?* He struggled not to express his frustration outwardly. *You might as well forget everything now. Just go home and go back to bed.*

“No!” he screamed as he spun around in the middle of the side walk, wringing his hands. *I will not! Too important. Cannot cancel this day.*

Everything was about today. His whole life had been leading him toward this day. He had hoped, prayed and wished for this day. Today all the determination, hard work, late nights would finally matter. After today everyone who had ridiculed and doubted, all those who had advised him to trod the well-worn path rather than pursue his own, would be silenced. After today people would listen. People would see him. Everyone would admire him and seek his company and counsel.

*Stay on track stick with the plan. Don't let it fall apart. Recoup. Recover.*

He stopped reeling and found himself facing the direction he needed to go. The way he *must* go. The first step was followed by the next, and the next thing he knew he was crossing the street. Then he was crossing the next intersection and another.

*Good job. Way to go*, he thought as he continued to walk on, making his way towards his destiny.

# Plagiarism

by Fran Crookston

I worked as a computer programmer for over twenty years. While computers are capable of an increasing number of applications, everything that a computer does is one of three basic functions: input, output, and processing. Likewise, each of us experiences life in three modes; the same input, output, and processing. At the Literacy Action Center, we are trading off some habits that inhibit our capacity for these processes. Reading is a developed skill for receiving input, but just listening or seeing or consuming food are methods of input that all of us naturally utilize. Speaking and whatever work we do are the natural methods of output, but writing is also a developed skill that allows persons to produce a more enduring output. What we think is how we process the input we receive to personalize our output rather than just parrot whatever we received in the way of input and mathematics develops the thinking process.

When considering the thousands of years of history, every way of interpreting the world has been offered by others and yet we are each called to offer a unique perspective of our environment. As adults with life experience that is beyond what could be taught and feelings in response to these life experiences, we can write about our world without having to reference other interpretations of the world. We need to develop the vocabulary and learn how to construct grammatically correct sentences and paragraphs. But this happens by first working on producing what is within each of us rather than copying the work of another. While what we write can outlive us, it must first of all be developed from our personal consciousness. It may be that as we develop a more complete and complex understanding of our world we want to find the source of our thinking and thereby do research on our sources, but while still developing the vocabulary and learning grammar, the basis for what we are writing needs to be kept personal in order for the output to accurately express what is happening within us.

# Discovering My Dream

by Sateki Kinikini

I wait for the wind to help me find my dream. I wait for a while, but there is no music or sound. I wait for a little longer but no spark or smoke. I sleep so I can see my dream but no frame or image appears.

So I scream, but only bubbles come out. There are words on the bubbles. Light shines on the words on the bubbles. The words say, "Wow, Dock, is any dream out there for you?"

It doesn't matter how, where, or when I go. I'm going without her to find my dream.

I go to the motorboat. The motorboat is good. It doesn't matter how the weather might be, she always keeps her point on the target. The trouble is, I don't have enough education to operate the motorboat.

I go to the sailboat. The sailboat is good, but she depends on the weather. She makes too many turns to get her point on the target. I take the sailboat.

I look back to the land. I see the mountains, hills, forests, valleys, and cities. I say, "Farewell. Farewell to you all. I am going to find my dream. I don't know how far or how long it will take. Farewell, farewell to you all. Farewell to the family, friends, and everyone I have seen. Farewell, farewell to you all. I'm going to get my dream. I don't know how rough or tough it will be. Farewell, farewell to you all."

Way out, farther out onto the ocean, the birds fly around my sailboat singing their songs. I don't know what they are saying. I think I know what they mean. They say, "Wow, Dock, we don't know where you are going. When you find what you're looking for, grip it, hold it tight, and don't let it go."

I say, "Thank you. Thank you to you all."

They fly away. The dolphins come along on both sides of the sailboat. They jump up and down and up and down, and they jump and flip four times before they hit the water. They jump and tiptoe their tails on the water. They go fifteen feet before they sink down in the water. They do this over and over, again and again. They sing a tune, a melody of love. It is beautiful, like the parade on the

Fourth of July in the United States of America. I don't know the tune they are singing, but I guess I understand the melody of their song. They are saying, "Wow, Dock, we're delighted to have you in our parade. Whatever is in your heart, if you see it, take a good look and make a picture in your mind."

I say, "Thank you. Thank you to you all." They swim away in order, turn back toward the west, and swim on their backs. Their flippers wave goodbye. I continue to sail east.

The whales come along on the right side of the sailboat in order. Ten of them are blowing water out of their blowholes twenty feet in the air. They jump up and fall to the right side and splash. They jump up again and fall to the left side and splash again. They dive down and whip their tails against the water. They do it over and over, again and again. It is beautiful. They dive down and jump straight up sixty feet high. Their flippers are straight out. Water runs down their huge bodies like waterfalls. The sky is filled with clouds of different colors. The light from the sunset reflects on the many colored streams of water falling from the whales. It is beautiful, like the parade on the Twenty-fourth of July in the state of Utah in the U.S.A. The stars come out of the waterfall, all different colors. Each star has a different word telling me to eat all of the stars with words.

The whales start swimming away. I eat the stars, and they are sweet like honey in my mouth but bitter in my belly. The words come out of my mouth, saying, "Dock, we are grateful to have you in our parade. Please let the Green Peace know that we are grateful for what they have done to save us from the people. They hunt to kill us for their need. They use us for our meat to feed the fox farms. They use our baleen to make cosmetics. We throw up our ambergris, and they collect it to make perfume. They use our oil in their lamps. They also kill us for scientific research. We have the right to live in the water. It is our home. The Lord, our creator, created us with our huge bodies, our big flat tails, and our flippers so we can swim from the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean or from Atlantic Ocean and to the Arctic Ocean."

"When we see the people on the ocean, we like to entertain

*"I eat the stars, and they are sweet like honey in my mouth but bitter in my belly."*

them. We try to do our best so they'll have fun with us. Sometimes we are afraid to come close to do our entertainment. We fear for our lives. For the people, they hunt to kill us. Please let the Green Peace know to continue to save us."

When the sun hits the ocean surface, a straight line comes toward me, so shiny and bright. It says, "Oh, Dock, do you see it all? The sky, the clouds, the colors, the sunset, and the waterfalls? We all connect together."

Then the sun says, "I'm going down now, so it will be dark. Close your eyes, and think about the beginning of your trip. You still have the light in your mind to see the beginning even though I am gone. Goodnight, see you tomorrow. When I come back, we will talk more about it."

In the morning, when the sun comes back, it is such a beautiful morning with a beautiful sunrise. There is a nice clear blue sky with the wind blowing. My sailboat is still traveling east.

The sun says, "Oh, Dock, your dream is not far. It is not on the other side of the world, deep in the ocean, or up above the heavens. It's in you! It is in your thoughts, your feelings, and your mind. That's how you create your dream. Once you create your dream, you have the driving force of your heart, your strength, and your energy. Whatever you hear or see brings good feelings to your mind, and then you know there is something to think about. Then use your driving force to work on it."

He also says, "The good comes word by word, sound by sound, meaning by meaning, feeling by feeling, to build the shape of your dream. The spirit will come alive, you will see it and hear it even when you're asleep. You will know you are great at dreaming. The weather is getting bad, beware and go home."

I reply, "Thank you. Thank you, sun."

I prepare my sailboat and turn northwest. The wind is blowing from southeast, thirty miles per hour. I let the sail go all the way, the boat starts to speed up to eighty miles an hour. I feel the boat's rudder tiptoe on the surface like she is flying in the air. The wind whistles on the different sizes of the ropes. The sound comes out like a quartet. No music or sound, but the tabernacle choir is singing. No spark nor smoke, but September eleventh, two thousand one, remains forever in our hearts. No frame or image, but I am alive and well, walking in my dream. Only bubbles came out before, they were starts for a reward.

I arrive at the docks. I make a left, cut through the wind, let

the sail go, and drop the anchor. The wind blows the boat backward close enough to the dock.

I walk off the dock, kneel down, and kiss the land of happiness. As I rise up on my feet, I glance toward the mountains and see the view of the mountains, hills, forests, valleys, and cities. I lower my knees and jump up and shout, "Wow!" My voice hits the mountains, hills, cities, forests, and valleys. It echoes and gets louder. It sounds as if the echoes are calling each other. It comes down to just one voice, a small voice, saying, "Lana, where are you?"

Lana says, "I am here, and I love you."

# Daytona 500

by Julie Liljenquist

I like NASCAR because it has a way of challenging my brain. I enjoy trying to figure out how many miles an hour the cars are going and how long it will take to finish the race. I like watching then wreck the cars because I like to see how many racecar drivers dodge the cars in the pile up. I also like NASCAR because I know the leaders change every once in a while at every race, and I like to see the excitement the drivers put into making the race successful. I also like the different things the drivers do for children. My favorite excitement of the whole race, however, is seeing number 88 come out on top and win the race for that weekend.

Last year, I went with my little sister's family to see the NASCAR racetrack. Our tour guide drove us around the track in our mini-van, She showed us how cars took the corners and rode the walls. This freaked out my little sister because the mini-van didn't belong to us. After riding around the track, I sat in my chair at the finish line yelling my head off, cheering on car number 88, even though he wasn't there. I was so happy!

Now I really want to see a race live. I want to go to the Daytona 500 because it is the first race of the season. I want to go to the Daytona 500 with my little sister and her kids. I want to pay for my family to go because it will be a lot of fun, and I need their help to travel. I need to figure out how to raise money. I'm anxious to see how much it will cost for us to go as a group.

Once a year, all the racecar drivers give money to Autism Speaks. The children draw logos for their favorite drivers' cars on a website. The drivers select some of the logos to put on their cars for Autism Speaks Day. The children whose logos are chosen get a free trip to see the race. Winnings from the race are donated to Autism Speaks.

Since I am not autistic, I am going to have to find a different way to get some money to take my family members to Florida to see the Daytona 500. My first idea is to decorate my chair with all the logos that are on the number 88 NASCAR. I also want to wear NASCAR's number 88 racecar suit. Then I want to send a picture of me in my decorated chair to Dale Earnheart Jr. I am hoping he will give me some of the money because I decorated my chair with his number. My second idea is to have my own fundraiser in my chair at home. I will sell candied apples, popcorn, and lemonade

from my chair, decorated with my favorite driver's car number and sponsors' colors, to my neighbors. I will have to get my little sister to help me make the lemonade, candied apples and popcorn.

I want to become a mighty racecar driver myself. My only problem is I don't drive a car. I only drive my chair. Until I raise the money, I will continue to enjoy the races on TV.

# The Dragon (working title)

by David Goodale

Later on when he was older he had several occurrences of a vivid dream, which usually woke him up.

He and his big sister were traveling at night across a blasted, cratered landscape. Trees were partly burned away. Weird flares lit distant scenes: houses on fire, moving figures silhouetted by fire. His sister hurried along and dragged him by the wrist. He couldn't keep up; he stumbled and delayed her; she spoke to him sharply when she spoke at all. He had a big, pale, swollen head and goony staring eyes. He was what they used to call a mongoloid idiot. She was all that was keeping him alive.

Warplanes flew overhead. Sometimes his sister dragged him into concealment behind bushes or into the forest if there were other people near, because they might be dangerous.

The funny thing about the dream was that he didn't have a sister or even a brother.

He always had a very strong connection with his mother, perhaps because of experiences that they both had when he was very young, perhaps even before he was born. A previous memoir, "Storm Children," describes one such experience.

When he was very young he loved his mother helplessly. She was a great lady; she was fun and pretty and her blue eyes could sparkle so much that he knew that there were little lights in them. Sometimes being with her was like heaven. He helped her and he was her little hero. She was smart and she read books to him; she was the best book reader in the world. With her help he learned to read and write way before he went to school and she was proud of him. And she could be funny; they were funny together; they were the great comics.

But all was not well somehow. Sometimes he was afraid. Shadows scared him and sometimes his room scared him. The toys that were hung over his bed scared him sometimes. He had bad dreams ... sometimes in his dreams he saw his mother's angry face

and he felt desperate and helpless.

When he was about four the family moved to Scotia, New York, and he went with his mother to look at a house that was for rent. She was angry with him and he kind of hung back. She peered into the oven and he was scared, because he thought of Hansel and Gretel and the witch who put children in an oven.

He knew she would never put him in an oven. But it was then that he fully realized that she was angry at him a lot. Sometimes he knew why and sometimes he didn't, but it seemed like she didn't really need a reason. Inside he felt cold toward her.

Over the passage of time the memory of this event took on a dreamlike quality and became a lifetime reference point for his early memories of her.

Sometimes at night he cried, because he was sad that she was his mother and would always be his mother, and there was nothing he could do about it. He started having headaches, cruel migraines.

Every year, in the summer and at Christmas, they drove from New York to Ohio to visit relatives. This was before the state freeways were built and the trip took two or three days. He sat in the backseat looking out the window for hours, watching the countryside go by, wishing that everyone in the world would just die. Everything would be so much better. He could live where he wanted and get food from empty supermarkets. Hopefully all the dead bodies wouldn't make too much of a mess; perhaps they could all just dry up and blow away.

He wondered if food lasted forever in tin cans. He guessed it wouldn't and sooner or later he would have to get his food some other way.

The headaches got worse until they were really severe, and then, when he was about eight or nine, they stopped. A change had come over him, or had finished its progression. He had become a rather solemn boy, and he didn't feel things so much anymore; he didn't like to get involved. He could interact with other people and do things with them but he preferred to be alone. He didn't smile much or show emotions. He spent a lot of time reading. He stopped crying; in fact he would never cry again.

He spent a lot of time reading and he took long walks in the countryside. They had moved to a rural area near Scotia and to him the forests and fields were a wonderful escape from a home where

things seemed to press around him. Sometimes he would bolt from the house and plunge far into the woods, later finding himself in a favorite spot with no memory of how he had gotten there.

The teen years occurred. School was not going well. He didn't do much homework and his grades were mediocre. Teachers said he seemed detached and unmotivated in his general demeanor. His sense of humor had returned but now there was a destructive edge to it. He discovered that he was attracted to girls but had zero impulse to do anything about it.

The word "depression" began to find a quiet commerce in the family household. His parents sent him to medical specialists who examined him for physical problems, with no results. A psychiatrist was never tried, but psychiatry was not well-known or widely available in America in the 1950s.

During his senior year in high school he realized that no matter how averse he was to reality he would have to engage with it somehow. He raised his grades to straight As.

Next step: college.

Note: this account may seem rather dark, particularly in the portrayal of a lady who is no longer around to give her version of events. It may be erroneous in some ways. But it is true to my memory.

However it is far from being the whole story of my mother and our relationship, which continued long after the events related above. Good things happened too. Time and understanding can do amazing things.

# Chores

by John Boles

Paul smashed the window with a rock, brushed aside a few shards and crawled into the house. "Shit," he said, as he saw blood drops on the floor. Paul put his hand to his mouth and sucked on the cut. A little cut hadn't changed anything; he had just walked away from the work detail at the Oregon prison farm. They would be looking for him by now. A gun, some money and a change in clothes were what he wanted at the moment. He went straight to the bedroom. He found money on top of the dresser, about \$50 in small bills. He searched the drawers for clothes and found a Smith and Wesson .44 Special under some T-shirts. There were two boxes of shells as well. The clothes sort of fit. He needed to roll up the pant legs a little and the waist was about an inch too big, but a belt fixed that. There were plenty of shirts to pick from; he picked out a red and white striped shirt with a buttoned down collar. He even found a tan jacket with zippered pockets. His 5' 11" frame cut a nice figure in the mirror. He brushed his red hair back pompadour style, smirked, thinking that things were working out. He knew for sure that he wasn't going back to prison.

Thoughts of his son Steve interrupted his tranquility. Paul hadn't even seen a picture of him in the five years he had been in prison. Did he look like him? He felt tears well up at thought of finally seeing his son. Joyce had refused to have anything to do with him after he was caught robbing the restaurant. He'd show her a thing or two. Somehow he had to get over to Depoe Bay where she lived with her folks.

He found a few Mars bars in the kitchen, which he shoved into a jacket pocket. There was even a 16 oz. can of Bud in the fridge. He gulped it down and said to nobody in particular, "Man -- that tasted good."

There were no wheels to be found; that was his next task. He headed out the back porch and past the chicken shed and started walking along the fence line bordering the field of winter barley. He pulled his collar up as he walked along the path as if to shield him from the fog that rolled in from the west. He wanted both a car and a driver. He would need to be hidden in the back seat in

case of roadblocks.

A black and white cruised down the road on the other side of the field. Paul felt well hidden by the blackberry bushes that grew wild along the fence line. Night was coming soon. Ahead he saw a farmhouse surrounded by a white picket fence. The house and the outbuildings were painted white with a black border. Two cars were in the driveway, a '49 Merc and a '35 Ford coupe. He saw a faint light coming from inside the barn. It looked as if someone was walking around inside with a flashlight. His steps quickened as he approached the barn.

"How about that cop car that went by? Bet they are looking for the prison farm runaway," said Mark.

"Sure thing, what was he in for?" asked Dave.

"Armed robbery. He robbed a restaurant in Portland. He locked three people up in the cooler. The waitress almost died from hypothermia."

"Damn it," Dave said, as a screwdriver slipped. Dave was rebuilding two Stromberg 97 carburetors on the dining room table. Dave was always working on his 35 Ford 3-window coupe. One of his hobbies was ET drag racing. He was a master of the required consistency and precision. Dave was a senior in high school, lettered in wrestling, and didn't know what he wanted to do other than work on his car and race.

Dave and Mark were brothers about two years apart. Mark was thin, blond, six feet tall with a flattop haircut. He was sophomore in college, liked science and math, thought he would like to be an aeronautical engineer. He also had a passion for military history.

"Dave, I can hear Bubble's Goldie bellowing out by the barn. She wants to be milked, they all do. We gotta do chores, and you need to get those parts off the table before Mom gets home from work."

"Keep your shirt on for God's sake, I will be done when I'm done. Turn on the radio and see if we can hear what is happening about the escaped con."

The latest news was that the escaped con had broken into a house and stolen an undetermined amount of money and a pistol. Luckily the owner wasn't home at the time. The estimated time of the robbery was about an hour ago. The con was assumed to be still on foot and not far from the penitentiary.

Mark picked up a book he was reading for his history class.

He was doing extra credit work, writing a report about a famous Revolutionary War General, Nathaniel Greene. He was intrigued by the General's skill in retreating, yet causing the British pain.

Dave, "Have you heard of General Nathaniel Greene?"

"Of course not. Why?"

"Well," Mark said, "he is famous for retreating and living to fight another day."

"Sounds like propaganda to me. Retreating is for sissies. Did he win any battles?"

"No, not really."

"What did I tell you, he was a yellow belly?"

"And you're a nitwit. Damn it, Dave, let's go and do chores before Goldie explodes."

"All right, I'm going." Dave got up, tipped his chair over, stomped through the kitchen, and grabbed the stainless steel bucket. He hurried out the back door, the screen door slamming shut behind Mark as he followed him out. They walked down the cement walk, past the rope swing where Dave had broken his arm last year by seeing how high he could swing, then letting go. It was a compound fracture. Mark had almost fainted at the sight of the bone protruding from Dave's arm. In contrast, Dave was a tough soldier, he didn't even let out a whimper.

Everything was wet from the thick fog, and it was almost dark as they went through the gate in the white picket fence, past the chicken coop and into the barn. Dave said, "Let's keep the lights off and do the chores by flashlight. It'll be fun and the cows won't mind."

"I mind, but anything to humor a nitwit."

"Another 'nitwit' from you and you will do the milking by yourself."

The cows came into the barn in single file putting their heads into their wooden stanchions. Not one of them tried to get in the wrong one and cause a fight. Mark put the young calf in his pen. Mark treated the animals as he would his best buddies. He couldn't stand to see them mistreated. Mark hoped that the calf would be kept on the farm and wouldn't go to the slaughterhouse. He would work on a plan to save the calf. Mark was starting to teach the

*"Mark had almost fainted at the sight of the bone protruding from Dave's arm."*

calf to drink from a bucket, letting the calf suck on his fingers and coaxing the calf's mouth into the formula. Mark heard the stream of milk hit the metal bucket just as he saw a shadow appear at the barn window. There was a sharp rap on the window. Mark and Dave could hear movement along the side of the barn. They looked at each other. Somebody scurried by the door and a light pierced the darkness through the window at the end of the barn. Mark pointed his flashlight at the window in an attempt to see who it was, but the intruder had moved on. He put his finger to his lips and glided over and switched on the lights. Dave was still sitting on his stool with his head against the cow as he milked. He cried, "Who's out there?" As if to answer Dave's call, they heard the bolt slide on the machine shop door, then the door opened and banged shut. Mark yelled out, "What do you want?" All they could hear was the cows chewing hay. The calf leaned against the pen's door, let out a bawl, looked up at Mark for another drinking lesson.

Dave picked up his stool and bucket and came over next to Mark. He whispered, "What are we going to do?"

Mark whispered back, "Follow my lead." He picked up a three-pronged pitchfork. David picked up a piece of wood. Mark called out, "Hey you better say something. We're coming after you." They marched down to the end of the barn and turned into the narrow passageway that led into the machine shop. They went single file, Mark leading. A shot rang out and the bullet thudded into the wall next to them. "Run for it," Mark yelled, dropping his pitchfork and turning around with Dave right behind him. They crashed out of the barn through the picket fence gate and up behind the garage.

Mark yelled at Dave to take off to the neighbor's house and call the cops. Mark could hear the con running up the walk after them. The con hesitated for a moment when he saw Dave turn and head for the street. Dave didn't question Mark's command. He sprinted to old man Krauss's house. A bullet slammed into a tree trunk to his left, spraying him with splinters. Dave kept running, crossed the road and met Krauss who was standing on his front porch with his M1 rifle firmly in one hand and a lantern in the other. Krauss was a WWII veteran and a retired shoe repairman. Dave jerked the M1 from Krauss's hand and said, "I've got to get back and help my brother."

Krauss, holding the lantern behind him, said, "No you don't. You stay here."

Dave didn't argue but commanded, "Call the police."

He went back toward his house staying next to the trees and bushes along the side of the driveway. Mark must have made it into the house. Where was the con? He came to the corner of the garage by the Merc where the switch for the yard light was. He heard a snap. He raised the rifle and took aim at the snap while moving his elbow to the switch.

Mark made it into the house and locked the door. Luckily the house was dark. He grabbed the double-barreled shotgun from the rack in the parlor, broke it open and shoved in two slug cartridges. His heart was beating so hard he thought the whole world could hear it. He wiped sweat from his eyes and peered through a crack in the curtains.

Nothing happened for what seemed the longest time. He thought about making another run for it. Where would he go? Maybe the escaped con had left. He wished for the cops and Dave. He thought about getting a chair when the yard lights came on and there was a shot and a yell. The con stood by the corner of the garage outlined in the light, pistol pointed at Dave who was slumped against the wall holding his arm.

Mark jabbed the gun barrel through the window sending glass tinkling. He fired first one barrel then the other. The con jerked backwards, arms flayed out, eyes wide as the first slug smashed into his breastbone. The second slug plowed through his kidney and out his back turning him 180 degrees. He fell face down into the bushes.

Paul tried to keep his eyes open. He thought it odd that he couldn't feel anything. He was sure he wasn't going back to prison.

# Martha Reformed

by Andrea Garland

“Hey Doris! You’re my lawyer, right? I mean, you used to be my lawyer?”

I turned. Martha Jarlsberg stood behind me. I hadn’t seen her in three or four years. “Hi, Martha,” I said. “It’s nice to see you.” I raised an eyebrow. “What’s going on?” I thought of the files in my bag, all other clients. I hate it when a client shows up at court and I don’t have a file.

“Oh, don’t worry,” she said. “I’m not in any trouble. I’m just here with my girl friend. I’m here to offer support.”

A chubby woman with a large toddler in a baby stroller stood behind Martha.

“Oh good,” I said. “I’m happy to hear that.”

“I don’t do that anymore,” she said, shaking her head.

“That’s fabulous,” I said. “You look great.” She did look great. She was dressed in conservative clothes. She had gained some weight. When I represented her, she was super-skinny.

“Thank you,” she said, one hand on her hip. “I have my own apartment. I have a good job now, too. I sometimes even go back to the treatment center that I went to. I’m like the poster child. The counselor once told a bunch of drug addicts that if I could do good, they could do good. They let me lead some of the group meetings.” As she spoke, she punched the air above her head.

“That is really fabulous,” I said, shifting my bag of files from one shoulder to the other. “I am so happy to see you finally got clean and you’re doing good. Thanks for telling me, and good luck to your friend.”

Her friend, who had been staring at her own shoes while Martha talked, looked up, gave me a half-smile and nodded. They went into the court.

I followed after them into the court room, but walked up the aisle to the counsel table where I could pull my stack of files out of my bag. One by one, I called out my clients’ names. One by one, I took each one out to the conference room outside the court to talk about their cases. One by one, I represented each before the judge. At some point, while I spoke to a client, some other lawyer called

Martha's friend to the podium and did something with her case, got a new date or something-have no idea what. I finished my calendar.

I walked out to the parking lot, threw my files in the trunk and got in the car. I turned on the air conditioning as soon as I could. First it blew hot. I had to open all the windows into the one hundred degree day.

As I drove by the bus stop, I saw Martha and her friend and baby, waiting for the bus. I shaded my eyes and paused by the bus stop. No trees or any shelter shaded the bus stop-it was just a sign stuck in concrete on the curb. There wasn't even a bench. Martha, her chubby friend and the baby all stood at the bus stop, sweating in the summer sun.

"Hey Martha," I called. "You guys want a ride?"

"Yes!" Martha said. "I mean, if you're sure it's no trouble."

"I'm going downtown," I said. "I'm in no real hurry. I'm okay with a detour."

"Hey, thanks, Doris," Martha said, as she and her friend stuffed the toddler into my daughter's car seat behind me. There wasn't an easy place to stow the stroller, so we stuck it on the front passenger seat. My trunk was too tiny, plus it was full of stuff. Martha's friend sat in the middle in the back seat. Martha sat next to her, behind the front passenger seat.

"It's a hot day," I said.

"You're not kidding," Martha's friend said as she got in the car.

"Where to?" I asked.

"It's an apartment," Martha's friend said. "Thirty-third South, three-fifty West,"

"Okay," I said.

We took off. I rolled up the windows, because the air conditioning had finally started working. They smelled sweaty, like cigarettes, and some other scents I could not place. I rolled the windows down again a little, just to let in some air.

"Hey Doris," Martha said. "Remember when I stole the ice cream truck?"

"Stole the ice cream truck?" I said "You didn't steal the ice cream truck. You rented it. Then it got stolen from you," I said.

"That's what I told you, Doris," she said. "I sold it to the dope man for some dope."

"Really?"

"You made me plead guilty to it, anyway," she said.

“Well, I guess we could have gone to trial, but it was part of a larger deal,” I said. “We really didn’t have any defense on your other cases.” I looked in the rear view mirror at Martha. I laughed.

“Plus now it turns out you were guilty on that all the time, I guess I made a good call.”

“Oh yeah,” she sighed. “You did.”

“So, how are things going now?” I asked.

In the rear view mirror, I saw Martha and her friend exchange a look.

“Real good,” she said. “I left Jonathan.”

“Excellent,” I said. “No offense, but he was bad news.” Martha’s friend frowned.

“He wasn’t all bad,” Martha said.

“No, he sure wasn’t,” her friend said, shaking her head.

“He’s her brother,” Martha said.

“Oh,” I said, looking at the friend in the mirror. “Sorry. I’m sure he has his good points. At the time, I just thought he was kind of a bad influence on Martha.”

“Bad influence?” the friend said. “Why, she was -”

“Hey,” Martha interrupted, “We were just bad for each other.”

“Uh, huh,” I said, watching traffic as I waited to turn right.

“He went to prison,” Martha said.

I turned. “Oh,” I said. “Well, lots of people go to prison. It’s not all bad. There’s programs, and if someone has a drug problem, at least they stay clean for awhile. I just thought that since you got all those arrests at the time you were with him, well, I guess you weren’t good for each other.” I nodded to Martha’s friend.

“He brought me a lobster,” Martha said. “It was for Thanksgiving that year you represented me.”

“I remember that,” I said. I did remember. I had called to speak to her about her drug cases, the day after Thanksgiving. I called her in the Drop-Inn Motel, and she said she was eating lobster, which I thought was odd, the day after Thanksgiving. “That was pretty nice, him buying you that lobster.”

“He didn’t buy it,” Martha said.

“Huh?” I asked.

“He stole it,” Martha said.

“How did he -?” I started to ask.

“He knew someone-” Martha started to say.

“It wasn’t just him-” the friend interrupted.

Martha interrupted her friend. “He didn’t get caught, but he

got caught later. He picked up too many retail thefts and they finally sent him to prison.”

“He took some charges for someone else,” Martha’s friend said. “He gets out just before Christmas.”

“I’m not getting back with him, though,” Martha said.

“Your sobriety is important,” I said. “He’s not a bad person, but you need to be with someone who is totally sober and law abiding, or just try living alone for awhile. You just got each other into trouble when you were together.”

“Oh, I know,” Martha said. “My sobriety is so important.”

I’m not sure, but I think I saw her give her friend a little kick.

Her friend shook her head. “So important,” she said, then leaned over and fussed with the baby.

“I’m with someone now who doesn’t do anything like all that,” Martha said. “He’s a church guy.”

I’m not sure, but I thought her friend rolled her eyes.

I slowed. We were in a sort-of residential area, right next to some railroad tracks. It looked poor but sort of new and in okay repair.

“Turn here,” Martha said.

Two guys and a woman stood on the corner. All wore dirty, loose-fitting jeans. The woman had long stringy hair parted down the middle. She waved at our car. Martha’s friend waved back. I frowned.

“It’s just up here,” Martha said, pointing to an apartment building, twenty-five yards from my car. “You can stop here, though.” She indicated the corner, just across the apartment driveway from the three people standing around.

“I don’t mind taking you up to your door,” I said. “It’s a hot day.”

“No, really, Doris. You’ve been great. We really appreciate the ride. But, I need to, um,-” Martha said.

“That guy is a neighbor,” Martha’s friend said. “We need to talk to him to get the key to her apartment. Martha forgot it this morning. We need to get out here too because I need a little bit of a walk before I go in and feed Jayden, here.” She put her hand on the

**“They were all smiling but none of them looked at me.”**

toddler's head. She was already unstrapping him.

I stopped the car.

"Thanks for the ride, Doris," Martha said, as she got out. She came up to the front to get the stroller. I rolled down the front windows.

Martha's friend got out, walked around and pulled Jayden out of the car seat. "Yeah, thanks," she said.

"It was nice to see you again," I said. "I'm glad to hear you're doing so well. Good luck."

Martha smiled and waved. She and her friend crossed the street to the two guys and woman on the corner. They were all smiling but none of them looked at me. A tall skinny guy, his tooth chipped, his complexion grey and acned, high-fived Martha's friend as I drove by.

I stopped at the stop sign. In the rear view mirror, it looked like Martha handed something small to the man who had high-fived her friend, who now handed something to Martha. I couldn't see what it was. I honked and waved my hand out the window. Martha looked up. She noticed I was still there. She gave a big wave, her thumb closed around something. I waved again, just so she could see me. I imagine I'll see Martha at court again pretty soon.

# Diamond in the Rough

by Paige Kimball

(a story about a boy sent into the wilderness)

There once lived a boy who forgot his own value. He became angry and confused, and every time he looked in the mirror, he saw someone worth less than the pile of junk on his bedroom floor. His parents tried their best to help him, but it wasn't long before the boy forgot how to smile.

"This is serious business," they decided, and they devised a plan. Two days before the holidays, they took the boy for a ride. It was a fall day like any other, except that the boy would not be coming back, and a terrible storm was brewing in the sky.

When they explained their plan, the boy flew into a tizzy. He ranted. He raved. He shouted naughty words and pounded his fists into the dash. The boy even tried to jump out of the car.

But when his parents left him in the wilderness, the boy didn't look so tough anymore. His shoulders were hunched, his stare was empty, and his heart was lying somewhere near his feet.

"They're throwing me away," he thought. "Like a holey shirt or an old pair of socks, they're throwing me out with the trash."

What the boy didn't realize, was that his parents knew he was much more valuable than old stuff. Or even brand new stuff. He was actually priceless. Like a rough gemstone, they knew he must be tumbled and scrubbed in order to shine.

Everyone cried that first night apart—the boy under his crude shelter in the snow, and the parents under their warm, silky sheets back home. No one slept. The boy felt so small and alone, and the parents had to swallow their tears, though it was hard to swallow past the lump in their throats.

Days passed and nights dragged on, and at first the boy made plans in his head. Plans to escape, plans to run home, having watched the signs and landmarks into the wilderness. For the tumbling and scrubbing had begun; it was painful, and his feet were very, very cold.

But the wilderness held surprises. There were others there. Others like him. Others who wanted to help. And even dogs to love

and talk to. In fact, there was everything he needed to survive.

Others showed the boy things he had never considered before. They cracked open his thoughts, and straightened them out a bit. As the snow blew and his stomach grumbled, the boy began to feel grateful. Grateful for a warm sleeping bag. Grateful for rice and beans. Grateful for the dirty tarp that covered his head at night, and even grateful for the people who had thrown him away.

He realized he just might love them. And he began to suspect that they just might love him, too.

One especially blustery day, the boy's parents came to see him. The boy led them through the rocks and the snow to a fire he'd made all by himself, with nothing more than a couple of sticks. And then, like a real boy, he cried. His tears fell like a waterfall, soaking their coats. The boy and his parents hugged and cried and loved and hated, all at the same time.

A wise woman with dreadlocks reached out to the troubled boy in his flood. She asked him to identify his feelings, to find a spark of hope inside. And when the boy finally gathered himself, he made a new spark. With his sticks and his parents strength, and a wee speck of dirt, they created an ember together. They blew on the glowing thing until it became a flame. And as they warmed themselves around the fire, the boy's parents secretly hoped his heart was burning, too.

That night, the other boys joined them at the fire. The wise woman, and some wise men sat with them, too. They talked about the things they had discovered in the boy's head—things to celebrate, things to ponder, and things that needed fixing. They talked until the fire burned into ashes and the Milky Way rolled across the sky. They talked like brothers, like family, bonding through the pain of numb fingers, smoke filled eyes, and impressionable hearts.

Something about the wilderness softened all of their hearts that night, and the parents were glad. For their boy's heart had been locked away for so long.

As the boys marched off to bed in a line, the wind whistled through the junipers. And just as they nestled into their cocoons, the storm blew in. The boy and his parents snuggled like sardines under a tarp, safe from the fury. And though the frozen ground hurt his parents' old joints, and snow tumbled in through the cracks, the boy was happy, sandwiched between the two people who loved him most in the whole wide world.

Sleep was fleeting. The arctic chill bit them in the night. But in moments of slumber or perhaps imagination, they dreamed of living and loving together in a warm home that smelled something like chocolate chip cookies.

At first light, the blowing had eased, but the air was still bitter, more so because the parents were leaving. They lie in their bags, unwilling to welcome the cold morning, discussing why polishing hurts. And the boy knew he was beginning to shine. He knew he must keep trying, even through the ache and the loneliness the coming days would surely offer.

His parents layered on their high-tech warmth, and the boy slipped into his wool pants and mittens, now soaked with sweat and smoke and the grime of his labors. The parents were pinched with pity, knowing the comforts that would soon envelop them. But they knew this was their boys place. The wilderness had become his growing place. His head-cracking, heart-opening, soul-polishing, learn-how-to-be-real place. Though a day and a sleepless night seemed hardly a token to carry them through the coming weeks of winter, it would have to do.

One of the wise ones took the parents back. Over rolling white hills and fields of frozen sage, they rumbled back to civilization in an old four-wheel drive. They left their boy standing in a snowdrift, tears freezing onto his windblown cheeks. Left him with the dirt and the smoke and the fire-making sticks, and the wise ones teaching the boys just how priceless they were.

They hoped one day the boys tears would be the joyful kind. The kind that cleared his eyes and helped him to see a jewel when he looked into the mirror.

\*\*An account of our first visit to Eli at Elements Wilderness camp. January 2010.

# Getting Lost: Finding Myself

by Michael D. Whitworth

I sit and consider the choices that I have made some good and others not so good. I imagine what life would be like if I had taken another road. I had the chance to go to Arizona State University for next to nothing. I choose to enter the United States Army. Sometimes, I think I made the wrong choice. I also consider the opportunities and experiences I would have missed. One of these experiences that I would never choose to lose is a hike I took while stationed in Korea.

In the early summer of 1989, Greg, another soldier who I worshiped with, and I took a hike up a nearby mountain called Aspan. Standing 790 meters above the city of Taequ and 4.5 km from downtown, it was in a park of the same name. We walked easily up the trail, after the many mornings of PT, Physical Training. About three quarters of the way to the summit, I noticed a building to the right of the trail. It stood by itself among the bushes and small trees, none taller than the building.

“What’s that over there?” I asked Greg.

“It looks like it might be a temple.”

“Let’s go see it,” I suggested.

“Okay.”

The small building was about five feet by six. It was white with red trim and had a small door way covered with a coarsely woven brown cloth. There was a small group of people gathering in front of the door way. The Koreans who stood around the building were dressed plainly. They didn’t exhibit the wealth that was implied by where they lived. The group ranged in age. Some appeared to be as old as the structure. Others were no younger than the Republic Greg and I were there to protect.

The spiritual nature of the place awed me.

They opened the cloth opening, when Greg and I walked up.

Even though it was different from anything they had seen before I felt close to these people and God.

Greg and I greeted elders of the group in our limited Korean.

We were greeted warmly and through hand gestures it was apparent that the Koreans invited us inside. These were older

Koreans that still remembered the invasions from the North and respected the Americans for their part in repelling the North Koreans and as saviors of their country.

In my heart, something settled. I felt at home and at peace with these generous strangers.

We accepted and joined six other people already inside.

The first thing we saw in the gloom of the interior was a Buddha, about two feet high against the far wall. The smell of incense and old wood gave the building a timeless feeling.

There were votive candles burned in front of the statue. They gave a supernatural light to the scene before us. The Buddha glowed with an ethereal sheen that seemed to come from within its bronze skin.

An offering of fresh fruit sat high in front of the statue. The fruit was not the normal fare I had seen in the market stalls. It was perfect. There were no blemishes anywhere. The Koreans also placed small dishes of rice, kimchi, and cups of homemade beer as offerings to the Buddha.

Long fingers of incense burned next to the tapers giving the room a musky but pleasant aroma. On either side of the Buddha sat a small vase of fresh flowers. On the left side of the altar a color photograph of a young Korean male completed the array. He was well dressed in a shirt and tie, clean shaven with each hair in place.

The picture impressed me. For some strange reason, it touched my soul. I immediately felt a kinship with the young man in the photo, much as I had felt with the soldier that committed suicide in basic, but without the trauma. It touched me to think it was a memorial photo of a deceased relative.

The family members gathered in a small group before the altar, their hands clasped in prayer and bodies rocking in rhythm to their incantations.

We stayed a while longer before saying our goodbyes. The trail was lush with green vegetation. When we reached the summit of the mountain above the tree line, we could see the whole eastern side of Taegu. The city of Taegu stretched out as far as they could see.

“It’s gotta to be bigger than New York City.” said Greg with a slow southern drawl.

The sheer size of Taegu surprised both of us. Phoenix wasn’t small. However, Taegu was more densely populated than my hometown. All we could see from the peak was the city. There was

a beauty to the view. The distance hid the squalor of the city.

Arriving at the peak, Greg and I pulled sack lunches that the mess hall had prepared for us. The baloney sandwiches were slightly warmer than room temperature. We also purchased drinks from the gondola station there.

“I didn’t know there was a gondola,”

Greg expressed with a bit of surprise.

“We would have missed a lot by taking that up,” I retorted.

“I have been up here a few times and never saw this before.”

“Well, good to know. There’s a quicker way down.”

“Yeah, but the walking is good too.”

“Yeah.”

We ate our lunch. By this time I had developed a taste for the pungent kimchi and offered some to Greg, who refused. We then continued our hike. A few minutes into walking, we realized that we were lost.

“Where the heck are we?” I chuckled.

“We came from that direction.” said Greg. “Why don’t we just follow this trail, I mean it’s going the right way.”

“It works for me. It can’t take us too long to get down.”

We were both wrong. It took two hours to get to the top but four hours to reach the bottom. The second trail was longer but less steep. The scenery was a bit different too. It was more groomed for the tourist or day hiker than the previous trail.

About half way down, we saw a second Buddhist temple.

This one was older and more formal. Outside of the temple, there stood a monk. He wasn’t dressed like most people but he wasn’t that different either. He welcomed us as warmly as the family before. This temple was large and open. It also had more fresh fruit that was perfect in shape and color. There were several doors opening into the large courtyard.

I hadn’t been exposed to Buddhism in this form. I was open to new experiences. I wanted to learn. I also felt the presence of God. I could see the God I knew despite the differences in how the Koreans worshipped Him.

In that one afternoon, I learned so many things. Many people were my teachers. They will never know the impact they had on

*“In that one afternoon, I learned so many things. Many people were my teachers.”*

me. I wouldn't be the same without making the choices of my past. Sure, I made mistakes. Some have altered me in ways I do regret. I continue to live with the consequences of my choices, but today, I wouldn't change a thing.

# Back to Basics

by Karen Larsen

Brent and I have been together for ten years now. Brent worked, as a maintenance man, for the past 6 years at the apartment complex where we lived. When he lost his job, we lost our home. All of a sudden, we had no money except what I was making, which was minimum wage at twenty hours a week. We stayed as long as we could at the apartment, until we were evicted.

We have a trailer that has been in storage for years. We got the trailer out of storage, filled the two propane tanks, and put water in the water tanks. We were in our new (old) home!

We parked our trailer in Glendale, Utah, on the street behind Brent's Aunt Janene's house, but we had to move after two weeks when we got a 48-hour notice. Glendale has an ordinance against parking a recreational vehicle on a public street. We moved to Rose Park where Lois, another of Brent's aunts, lives. We've been there ever since.

We shop for groceries every few days because we don't have a lot of room to store stuff, especially in our propane refrigerator. Sometimes things freeze in there, because it is hard to keep the temperature adjusted just right.

Our stove, oven, and furnace run on propane, too. I don't use the oven very much because it costs too much. We fill the propane tanks once a week. During the winter, it costs \$25.00 to \$40.00 a week. In the summer time, propane only costs \$10.00 a week.

We have a bathroom with a sink, toilet, and shower, which are heated by propane also. In December, Brent had to get underneath the trailer and insulate the pipes because the water in our brown (used) water tank froze. For three or four days, before Brent got it fixed, we had to go really easy on the fresh water we used, for fear that the brown water might start freezing in the pipes.

I've used a microwave oven for at least twenty-five years, and I will NEVER get used to not having one. There are only three appliances we brought with us to the trailer. The first is a waffle iron. We both like waffles. The second is the hand mixer. I definitely could not go without that. The third is the coffee maker. Brent needs his coffee everyday. He says he cannot live without that!

In the trailer, everything has its place. If things are not put back right after being used, it gets all messy, and it's hard for us to move around. I like living in the trailer. There isn't much space but it's cozy. I'm finding out that we really don't need much more than this to be happy as long as we are together! We are in it for the long haul.

We are embarking on a series of adventures and looking positively to the next thing that comes along. I would not trade my life with Brent for anything in the world no matter where we are.

# Hold Still, *or* Rain

by Jackie Skinner

Hold still  
Hold still my love, and close your eyes.  
Like the ocean tide retreats from it's lingering kiss to the beach,  
Close your eyes and let the world flow away  
Standing quietly in the middle of the vortex as the chaos swirls  
around you  
Rain puddling around your feet,  
I see the sorrow pulsing from you in bursts.  
Let it go, my love  
Let it go  
I look into your eyes, but you're seeing things I have no part in,  
The rain cascading down your face like tears.  
I want to be the rain streaming over you  
So I can caress your face and learn the patterns of your skin and be  
so close that I melt into you.  
I want to be the rain that cleanses you,  
That washes away the sadness and everything you've ever feared.  
I'd carry it so far away it wouldn't even exist as an echo of a sound  
you thought you heard  
It wouldn't cast even the faintest wisp of a smell that would bring  
back bitter memories.  
I would free you, my love.  
I would flow through you and take the pain from you,  
Release you from it, and you could see what living really feels like.  
I'd elevate you as you soared on the wind and I'd cool your feet as  
you buried them in the earth.  
I'd wrap myself around you, water protecting you from fire  
So you could see the passion in the flames through me as you  
closed your eyes to its warmth.  
You'd settle into me then, and I'd comfort you  
You'd melt into me and we'd merge into the same person and I  
would love you for eternity,  
For water is fundamental and everlasting.  
I would be replenished and renewed, molded into infinite shapes  
and forms, and in all of them I would love you.



# Author Bios

**Scott Aldrich** is a Utah native who enjoys volunteering at Literacy Action Center, and interacting with the wide variety of readers and writers there. He is a jack of all trades, father of two beautiful girls, and a proud grandfather.

**Marlene Arbogast** is married with a son. She is a housekeeper from Yakima, Washington. She has been living in Utah for 16 years.

**Denise Bell** is a member of the Veteran's Affairs writing group whose piece "Little Girls" appears in this publication.

**John Boles**, after retiring from a life in the tech world Boles has had fun exploring the creative world of writing, short fiction in particular.

**Meg Burke** enjoys mentoring the King's English Writers Group and lives by the belief that the journey is as important as the destination.

**Fran Crookston** has lived in Salt Lake since 1976 and held a variety of occupations but now considers writing her main job. She has been married for 28 years.

**Garrett Drage's** favorite authors include Poe, Dickinson, Gwendolyn Brooks, Alice Walker, Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen.

**Steven A. Dame** I'm writing another novel. The narrator is a 15 year-old boy named Dallas, who is psychic. His girlfriend is Anna, who is deaf. They get into lots of trouble!

**Randy Eggert** teaches linguistics at the University of Utah and owns a black dog.

**Elizabeth Ernstsen** I never thought of writing (other than my personal journaling) before this year. It is a very fun adventure! I enjoy reading books over the phone with my granddaughter even though it is long distance. I highly recommend this activity for everyone to enjoy!

**Shirley Fifer** is the co-mentor and founder of the Avenues Courtyard writing group.

**Jaron Frost** is an aspiring novelist with a love for fantasy and young adult fiction. He also plays a lot of video games.

**Rachel Frost** has been writing ever since she could read. She loves fantasy and is currently working on a novel, as well as artwork and musical composition.

**Mary M. Fuller** is a founding member of the Avenues Courtyard writing group whose peices “Sixty Years” and “In Business, the Generic Pronoun ‘He’” appear in this publication.

**Andrea J. Garland** I am from the state of Alaska. I have worked twelve years as a public defender.

**David Goodale** I’m a retired programmer/analyst. I lived in the San Francisco bay area for 40 years and three years in Utah. I like writing, hiking, photography and art.

**Joseph Gilmore** is a 13 year old, eighth grader at Clayton Middle School. He is sharing his experience and feelings by submitting his story. Besides, “You don’t always get this opportunity ... now do you?”

**Margie Gilmore** is a co-mentor of the Friday afternoon Literacy Action Center writing group. Her piece “No More Belts” is featured in this publication.

**Nikki Hammer** is a member of the Columbus Writing group since 2009 and an avid reader of anything that catches her attention. She loves to write sci-fi and especially fan fiction. She has been a huge fangirl since her discovery of Joss Whedon.

**Jonnathon Hardy** is a homeless and agitated author.

**A. Nikki Inkcraft** enjoys writing fiction novels and poetry. Inkcraft loves steampunk, horror, gothic and Victorian literature.

**Katherine January** writes and farms in Bountiful, Utah. *The Blue Giraffe* (2010) is her first collection of poems, and she also writes children’s stories. She works as a psychologist in a healthcare setting.

**JoAnna Johannesen** pieces “If Babies Could Fly” and “Friends” are featured in this publication.

**Peggy Kadir** is a descendant of Mormon pioneers. Her life has been equally divided between Salt Lake and Baghdad, Iraq. A painter, she finds equal joy in writing.

**Barry Kesler** is a writer in the Literacy Action Center group, whose piece “Emotional Armor” appears in this volume of *sine cera*.

**Paige Kimball** loves to create images with both paint and words. She hopes others will enjoy her images as much as she enjoys creating them.

**Stateki Kinikini** is always working for money, but hasn’t got any yet. She hopes that writing classes will help her to achieve her goals.

**Karen Larsen** is a 58-year old widow with a 22 year old son, Matthew. She has written poetry all of her life, and is just now learning to write stories.

**Christine Lee** is the author of DAD, an e-book of poems honoring the intimacy that exists between a father and child. Sample/purchase at: <http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/2589>. You can also visit <http://chysramblings.blogspot.com>.

**Julie Liljenquist** is a forty year old that has been married for twenty-five years. She has three cockatiel birds. Two of them are grey African Cockatiels. Writing has turned her life around.

**Cyndi Lloyd** is a Diverse City Writing Series Mentor for the Literacy Action Center. She has an Associate’s Degree from SLCC, and is pursuing a degree in English at Westminster College. She is a dog lover besides a book lover.

**Diane C. Lockard** is a co-mentor for an open Senior Writing group; member of the University of Utah Osher Lifelong learning program and activities like riding Front Runner to Ogden.

**Paul S. Loya** is a recovering drug addict and alcoholic. He has started golfing at the age of 48 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

**Joyce Luttrell** loves to write, paint, cook, and have a good laugh. She loves to be around good people and loves life at 82 years young.

**Ramona Maassen** is a “Jill of all Trades,” voracious reader, loves the outdoors, people and animals.

**Issa Mberwa** is a member of the Literacy Action Center writing group whose piece “My Job Experiences” is featured in this publication.

**Nicole Milgate** is people oriented and thrives off of others energy. She has experienced many trials, and has been described as very wise and insightful .

**Tali Morgan** describes herself as “rich and famous.”

**Dr. Joyce Murray** is a foundig member of the Avenues Courtyard Writing group.

**Greg Near**’s play “The Mysterious, Happy life of Brown Bag” produced by Pygmalion Theater recently won both Audience Awards at the local Page-to-Stage Festival.

**Evany Pace** is a wannabe writer from Salt Lake City. She loves books, movies, and unicorns, and wants one day to star in a production of Jane Eyre alongside Sean Bean.

**Rudy Pederson** is a member of the Literacy Action Center writing group whose piece Yesterday and Today is featured in this publication.

**Robert Rischel** is a member of the Palinca writing group whose peice “A Murder in the Switching Yard” appears in this publication.

**Paul L. Rosser** works at Wade’s Automotive and with West High School’s Athletic Director. He likes to read and write, and also likes NASCAR and University of Utah football.

**Ms. Sadie (Catina Harper)** My name is Ms. Sadie. This is the name I like to use as a writer. I have been writing for 20 years. I have a book that is yet to be published called *White Gurl Money*. The Community Writing Center helped me improve my writing skills.

**Jackie Skinner** values the creativity and freedom she finds with writing. She also enjoys working with animals and spending time outdoors. She loves trying new restaurants and new styles of cuisine.

**Annie Stakland** is a member of the CWC writing group whose piece “Essence Gifted” is featured in this publication.

**Christopher P. Steffen** publishes the zine “Legacy” available at bookstores and coffee shops. He also maintains [www.pathtoliterarysuccess.blogspot.com](http://www.pathtoliterarysuccess.blogspot.com) and <http://pathtoliteracyfailure.tumblr.com>.

**Jill Ammon Vanderwood’s** piece “It’s All Daddy’s Fault” is featured in this anthology.

**Kelly Verdejo** is a member of the Veteran’s Affairs writing group who has an excerpt of a personal memoir featured in this publication.

**Fantasia Ward’s** piece “The Girl Who Was Gone!” appears in this anthology.

**Michael D. Whitworth** is a long-time member of the VA group.

**J. Phillip Wilkes** is a co-mentor of the CWC DiverseCity Writing Series group “Gay Writes.” He has lived and written in Salt Lake City for Twenty-five years, and has enjoyed publication in several editions of this anthology, as well as a number of local alternative, independent, publications.

**Ray Wright** is a member of the Literacy Action Center whose piece “My WWII Report” appears in this publication.







