

si ne cera

a
Di verseCi ty Wri ti ng Seri es
Anthol ogy

Awake

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INTRODUCTION

“We, at the Community Writing Center, believe that writing has the power to unite communities, and build bridges over social chasms such as economic disparity and racial intolerance. Because of this belief, we have created the DiverseCity Writing Series, which provides a way to develop small writing communities, and to disperse the thoughts and emotions of people whose stories may otherwise remain untold.”

This is the mission statement of the DiverseCity Writing Series (DWS)—the SLCC Community Writing Center’s writing group program. Our efforts to start this program began three-and-a-half years ago. At that time, we worked with one writing group at a time in two-month writing workshops that culminated in a small publication and public reading. In the first two years, we worked with four groups: Justice, Economic Independence and Dignity for Women; the Liberty Senior Center; The Road Home shelter; and Cancer Wellness House.

In the summer of 2002, we decided to expand the DWS into a multi-group, year-round writing project. Within the past two years or so, we have collaborated with community organizations, trained volunteer writing group mentors, and welcomed writers to write and share their work within the series.

In March of 2003, we began the mentor training to educate our volunteers about collaborative writing group strategies. In April of that year, the first writing groups met. In September, we published *sine cera: People Are Strange*, an anthology which houses the DWS members’ writing. Then in October, we had a public reading to celebrate the participants’ work and the publication of the anthology.

In the next few months that followed, we trained new writing mentors, a new writing group joined the series, while another revamped its group organization. Today, the DWS has six writing groups that meet biweekly for ninety minute to two hour sessions: the Community Writing Center group, the Salt Lake City Public Library group, the Gay and Lesbian Bisexual Transgender

Community Center of Utah group, the Community Writing Center Volunteers group, the Literacy Action Center group, and the Liberty Senior Center Group. Some of these groups have been meeting for over one year, while others have been meeting together for the past five months. Sometimes attendance is full, other times sporadic. But what matters is that the groups are meeting. People are writing. They are talking about their writing.

Though the second DWS anthology, *si ne cera: Awake*, has been published, the series is not over. The writing groups will continue to meet. Our volunteers have said they will continue volunteering. One or two new writing groups may join the DWS this spring, and that puts our total number of groups at seven or eight for the next six month run. And in October, at the end of the next six months, there will be more writing and we will publish it in another *si ne cera*.

We are pleased with our series and with the efforts of our writers and volunteers. We hope that over time, the DWS will continue to grow, that our writers will continue to write. And as long as people keep writing and keep coming, we will keep publishing their work because the Salt Lake community needs to hear the thoughts and stories of all its members.

If you are interested in becoming a part of the DiverseCity Writing Series, either as a writer, a mentor, or a writer/mentor, contact the Community Writing Center at (801) 957-4992 or cwc@slcc.edu.

PREFACE

DiverseCity Writing Series (DWS) writers are normal. They go to school, to work, to the Wasatch Range in the winter time, and to Gallivan Plaza in the summer. But, perhaps one difference between DWS writers and the rest of us is that they take a few hours out of each month to listen to the thoughts inside their heads, to write them down, to share them with fellow community members, and then listen to what they have to say in return.

What if our community were this reflective and communicative? How would it change? One of the many things I respect about DWS volunteers and writers is that they understand this communication and reflection empowers people and changes communities—even if just a little bit.

si ne cera: Awake is the title of the second DWS anthology. Not only does the title herald spring and the new life it brings, but it also heralds a new chapter in the lives of Salt Lake City residents. Winter has passed and it is time to wake from our slumber and recognize the blossoming diversity in our ever-growing community.

And so I invite you to read this anthology and revel in its diversity. The writers of this anthology represent all ranges in age, literacy level, economic background, and sexual orientation. To put it in other words, the writers of this anthology are just like us: they are human.

So, read *si ne cera: Awake* and understand that it's a reflection of the place we call home: Salt Lake City, Utah.

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WHY I LISTEN TO PUBLIC RADIO

by David Gravelle

The very pleasant interviewer
places one well-made shoe in front of the other.

She makes her way to a studio
at HYY Philadelphia/Wilmington.

The cacophony of the city street
rests just behind a heavy glass door.

In her seat, composed and settled,
she smoothes a woolen crease.

Her mouth grins slightly,
as she begins.

She describes a scripted scene
from a gritty, cable only show:

*The actor plays a prisoner in his cell.
This cell has glass instead of bars.
It's a glass box, a little like this studio.
The prisoner wakes up and is all but naked.
The camera follows the prisoner from behind,
as he walks to a stainless steel toilet.
The prisoner urinates.
Our point of view, the whole time,
is from between the legs of the prisoner.*

The interviewer turns to the actor.
She adjusts her glasses.

“Tell us,” she says. “What’s going on in the scene?”
She lets a pause settle between them.

When the actor speaks,
he describes a reality of prison life.

“You’re so close together, in the cell,” he says.
“That’s what you might see.”

She won’t let it settle comfortably.
“The appeal of a nude, attractive actor is not obvious?”

One carefully composed question after another,
the actor confesses that it’s pointless but sexy.

The very pleasant interviewer
places one well-made shoe in front of the other.

She makes her way from the studio
at HYY Philadelphia/Wilmington.

She opens the studio’s glass door
to the not so sexy city streets.

A TIMELESS SANCTUARY

by Mark Schroeder

I feel sort of tacky about taking the bus to the home of my blind date. But hey, I'm not taking any more chances. How was I to know that Janice, the woman who billed herself in the personals as "carefree and risk-taking," was a whip-toting white supremacist chick with a bad attitude and breath to match. Worst of all, she knew a cop who could trace my license plate number.

I have my own brand of masochism. I mean, who would torture themselves with an endless string of blind dates—thirteen in two months—that all end in disappointment?

Anyway, here I am, riding along Anderson Avenue toward the center of town, past the hookers and bars. Maybe I should get off here. A beer and.... Well, I can always come back.

I'm taking the bus south, all the way to Gladiolus Blvd. So, I kick back in the seat and enjoy the ride.

About five dates ago, I started this game that I play with myself, just for amusement, while on my way to the next fated romantic adventure. I imagine a woman made up of characteristics of the females for whom I have shelled out the price of dinner and a movie or admission to a concert, or whatever, since I started this dating spree. One of these figments, I call Margaret.

Margaret wears glasses that were once fashionable and a dress that goes well with her bobby socks. My eyes are drawn to the scaly makeup that hangs like flesh-colored lumps of clay from her cheeks and makes a definitive line where her hair meets her forehead. I imagine her standing in front of a mirror with a palette knife in one hand and a one-pound jar of rouge in the other. And I wonder what she is thinking as she applies the colorful camouflage that she hides behind.

Another of my imaginary composites I call Mabel. She's a doozy, a drunken elephant in a rose garden. Her favorite expression is "Oops!" She washes down her breakfast Nestlé's Crunch with a beer, in between cigarettes. Mabel never says anything but that doesn't keep her from talking—incessantly. She says she is partially deaf and that's why her voice "seems loud." She lives in a tenement with a goldfish named Arnold, three bare light bulbs hanging from the ceiling, a cracked and leaky toilet and sheer curtains that could have been white, are brown.

All of the Mabels and Margarets share one common element: the desperation of getting older in loneliness. It's the one thing I can't stand about them. It's a pleading in their eyes and voice inflections, and it makes me pity them and want to run. It's like looking into the future and it scares the hell out of me. So, I keep looking for a woman who won't grow old and out of touch, who won't remind me that the world is for the young.

Hey! I missed my stop! Too much daydreaming. Better get off here and take the next bus back. I stick a bill in the gaping mouth of the bus's money collection box and step out into the evening. I'm standing on Periwinkle Way. The bus had crossed over to Sanibel Island without my knowing it.

Ah, the breeze off the Gulf feels cool—makes my skin tingle. I love the way it rattles through the palm trees. I haven't heard crickets in years. Didn't know I was that far out of town. There's a melancholy settling over me. Rubbing elbows with the truth is sobering. I feel a little foolish now.

I walk toward the beach and give in to an urge to feel cool wet sand between my toes while the warm water washes over my feet. I feel a small pang of guilt about standing up my date but the water and sand are washing away my sins.

I see a bar I recognize just a block up the street. It's the first familiar place since I got off the bus. The Mucky Duck has an outdoor patio on the roof. Years ago, I sucked down a pitcher or two there. That was back when I refused to realize that youth was a passing phase. As I get closer, I hear staccato notes of the lead pan in a steel drum band and the hubbub of a crowd. With the crickets singing harmony, the pleasant mixing of sounds is inviting.

Walking through the door, I feel the excitement of the young man I was. The low lights, the smell of smoke and stale beer. I give my eyes a chance to adjust then look around expecting... well, I don't know, maybe a reversal in time of about 20 years.

Five guys sit at the bar. Two more are playing pool and one drunken Indian is tottering to the men's room. There is only one woman in the whole place. She's a silver-streaked blonde with brown skin. I can tell she's getting on by the love handles and the tired way she sits. There's only one unoccupied stool and it's next

to her. I take a seat. She smiles my way and I give a half-hearted smile in return. I don't want to encourage her.

Everyone at the bar is sitting in their own isolation, their own inner worlds, and I'm grateful for the silence. Three beers later I pull out my wallet to drop a tip on the bar and head for home. A picture falls out with the money and the lady beside me grabs it in midair. She hands it to me with a smile.

I hadn't really looked at her face before. Her age lines are a flattering framework for an undimmed and youthful beauty. Her smile melts my defensiveness. We exchange names and the usual trivialities and then, as if the subject is ripe for presentation, she asks if I would like to come home with her.

What does that mean, I wonder? Her gaze is steady with a slight smile on her face. She's composed and confident. She gives me a look both private and seductive. I feel like she's just looked through my filing cabinet of secret thoughts and has approved.

Her eyes are pools that I want to drink from. She laughs out loud through a steady gaze from those loving and lustful eyes. It's a delightfully infectious laugh. We laugh together. I find myself reaching out, putting my hand on hers on the bar. It surprises me more than it does her.

"Come with me," she says as she slides off the bar stool, grabs my hand firmly and leads me toward the door. If there are any reservations left, they are successfully buried under a layer of excitement and curiosity that refuse to be swayed by reason.

We walk to her black and white '56 Chevy. She smiles, throws me the keys and says simply, "Drive, please."

I fire up the old beast and we head north for a short way until we cross the bridge between Sanibel and Captiva Islands, then turn down an unpaved lane that winds through a dense thicket of saw palmetto, scrub oak and pine. The lane dead ends at a house sitting behind a huge banyan tree sprawling into the darkness. I can smell the salt air and hear the lazy whisper of the night waves rolling up onto the beach.

We sit in the car for a minute or two, drinking in the sounds of crickets, frogs and the sea, and the sight of an enchanted house in a magical wood. The effects are much stronger than the three beers I guzzled earlier.

She smiles at me from the passenger seat while removing the keys from the ignition. "I see it's got you," she says. "Let's go in."

I follow her into the house. The ceiling in the living room rises like a cathedral, with huge wood beams supporting the roof. The west side of the living room is all sliding glass doors and enormous windows facing the Gulf of Mexico. She opens one of the doors and the sound of the waves, just 50 yards away, rolls through the house, bringing the excitement of a moving sea. The moon is high and its rays skip across the water and into our eyes.

She moves her body into mine, her hip rubbing up against the inside of my leg. Reaching a hand behind my head, she pulls my face into hers and kisses my mouth in a way that quenches like water to a thirsty man. Her kisses cover my face then move down my neck. At the same time, she massages my chest. I give in to her touch like putty softening in the hands of a master potter.

We make love on the floor in a heap of pillows, touched by the light and warmth of the fireplace. I feel myself shaking inside as she opens doors to feelings I thought I had buried with youth. But the young and innocent man awakens. A calm trust and fiery passion dance in me, as she plays me like an ancient instrument.

It was a dream, and it was real: laughter and tears and a baptism in the warm surf and talk that sprang spontaneously and spilled onto satin pillows. I lay beside her in the dawn, watching her morph from night time seductress to middle-aged woman: freckles and little flecks of makeup on her pillow, creases in her skin and dried rivulets of sweat that flowed when she was driven by pleasure. Her full, soft lips quiver slightly as she breathes. I am soon lost in the memory of those delicious lips, the warm wetness of them and the passion behind each kiss.

Two hours later I am dressed and standing by the door. I want to say something but I don't know what. I feel like a tongue-tied kid. She puts a finger to my lips, kisses me one more time, and waves goodbye in that girlish, flirtatious way. Then she gently grabs my arm, turns me toward the door, and nudges me across the threshold of a new day.

As I walk down her lane, I feel the sun caressing with its warmth. Birds are singing praises and the dependable and steady rhythm of the surf rumbles low, like the serious whispering of gods.

ANDREW AND SANDRA'S RAINBOW

by Sandra Albertson

I like to walk my dog
at the park and through the
streams in the mountains that
go up over the hills and
through the rainbows of the sky. I have a
best friend and a
brother who is named
Andrew who takes his
dog to the park and
through the mountains
to the rainbow sky. As
we walk we see the
waterfall with all the
beautiful rainbow colors and
we slide into the colors
of the rainbow. Isn't
Scotland beautiful with all
the rainbows and mountains
and clouds and heather?

WHAT IF I AM A GAY MAN?

by John Wilkes

Am I sick? If I am it's because you infected me
With a virus designed to oppress the undesirable.
Directly or indirectly, millions of men, women and children died,
Because you decreed it, or did nothing at all.

So... what if I am a gay man?
Is that illegal? Imprison me!
It can't be any worse than shoving me back in the closet.
You can't render me invisible, because I have strength to fight,
Wisdom to educate, and a voice to shout out loud.
I've always been among you, and I'll never disappear.

What if I am a gay man?
Am I nuts? Institutionalize me!
If you fear what you can't or won't understand.
I want to benefit from a committed relationship,
The same as everyone else:
Ensure the safety of my family, secure a future,
Marry for love and raise children without hate.
But that's something you'll legislate away, if I allow you.

What if I am a gay man? Is that a sin?
Condemn me to hell, and to hell with you, too.
I'll pray (for you) in my own temple,
Even though I doubt you'll pray for me.
You think me a pariah, but I'm proud of who I am:
Intelligent, strong, talented, creative,
Loveable, sexy and beautiful.
I come in all the colors of the rainbow
And all the sweet flavors of life.

So what if I am a gay man?
Does what I do in the privacy of my own home
With my own heart, soul and body
Disturb you so greatly that you'd deny me compassion?
I'd like to hold hands, embrace, kiss, and tell, yell out my love
Without fear for my life or freedom.

What if I am a gay man? I've labored, served, struggled for
And dreamed of my unalienable rights, same as you!
I've marched, lobbied, demonstrated, voted and paid for them
On the street of every city from San Francisco to New York.
I've paraded and celebrated my individuality.
You can't make me ashamed!
What if I am a gay man? I'm still a man—a good man!
I deserve and demand equal respect, consideration,
Opportunity, justice and understanding.
I will not attack, but I will defend against
Any force which threatens my life, liberty, and pursuit of
happiness.
So you can call me Mister Faggot!
I'll always be among you, I have never disappeared.

ANONYMOUS DONOR

by Anne Chapman

Tall and strong in the shoulders, he tried to keep himself steady as he teetered down the street. His walk was a swaying rise and fall, knees bending in pronounced rhythm—as though his torso were following the swells of an ocean across a horizon that only he could see. He was on his way to nowhere in particular. His big almond-shaped brown eyes, crinkled at the corners, looked young and old at the same time—lines fanning out like half sunbursts from each shining window. Maybe it was the upward curve of those lines, the hint of a happiness in memory, a giggle made visible these many years later.

His voice was gravel and smoke. It startled me, sprung out from behind a bushy, gray moustache.

“How you doin’ today hon?” He stopped his undulating walk to ask the question. I looked up from my hurried one. He was a collection of contradictions. His long, peppery white hair lay scraggly across his broad, straight back. His arms hung relaxed by his sides, fingers curled quietly, brushing across the seams of his dirty jeans. His hands, knobby and wrinkled, sprinkled with freckles and spots, were yet lined with thick veins and shaped by dense muscle and callus. I could just make out the peeling letters on the worn, once-black t-shirt that stretched tight across his broad chest. “Born in the USA,” it read above a faded silk screen of Springstein holding a guitar aloft.

“Fine, thanks,” I said, not breaking my gait, not meaning it. I leaned my head toward him for an instant, answering more out of habit than acknowledgment.

“You look nice today,” he called back, as I passed him. He was facing me now, walking backwards, smiling and twinkling with the mischief of a child holding behind his back a gift he had made himself, asking me, silently, to pick a hand.

I slowed and turned to look at him, opened up and surprised at the break in the pattern between strangers on the street. A small sense of calm arose, as if from a long nap, then climbed down from amidst the rubble and noise in my mind, and rested deeply on my face. “Thank you,” I said, with a deep breath.

He paused. Then, with his eyes, made his offering. He turned away and continued on. I must have picked the correct hand. I

resumed my walk, holding his tiny gift, wrapped with a gentle invitation. When I opened the package, it felt familiar to the touch. It sailed out of its box and expanded—filled my empty spaces, replaced the years of tightness in my chest with soothing strokes across my head and gentle voices that sang me awake with a memory I once had lost. “You are enough,” it sang. “You always were.”

THANKSGIVING TIME: A TRUE STORY

by Ruby Wilcox

We were never alone
At my dear mother's home
But in the year of 1952
My five sisters and brothers, too
How on that day how we all cried
Our mother then had passed away and died
Two of my brothers' wives shared some good cooking things
And we were unhappy as human beings.
But I tried my best to make my two sons happy in days to come
And what we did to make it fun
My mother-in-law to one year and one day
She too in my arms had passed away.
I know in my heart they done their best
And they both now are at rest
We all will remember that fateful day as it broke my heart,
As the two I loved one year and one day, I soon from them did
part.
Take care of them both, God, you understand,
I know you didn't make that plan
To take them both to your heavenly home
And sometime soon we will all be together and never be alone.
To see them both with a happy face
To meet them both will be no disgrace.
Then we all will be happy as we can be
My husband and two sons as well as my family.

SASHANA GUDENHEIM'S COLLAGE



DOWN AND OUT

by Bryan Rich

The bell sounded, and the fight began. We danced around in circles like alley cats, looking for a good opening. Each one of us threw a few punches, but none that really landed.

We seemed to be feeling each other out. After what seemed like hours, the bell sounded again and Round One ended. I went back to my corner and sat down.

The assistant coach immediately began to wipe the perspiration from my forehead. "You are dropping your right again," he said. "Remember what the coach told you about that."

"I know," I replied, "I'm trying."

"You also need to mix it up a bit more," he continued. "You need to land a few blows if you expect to make any points."

"I'll try harder," I replied.

The bell sounded and Round Two began. My opponent and I both jumped up at just about the same time. I knew I had to be more aggressive or my 10 and 2 record would soon be 10 and 3. We began dancing around again, but more slowly this time. I began to move a little closer to my opponent, looking for an opening. As time started to tick away, I knew I had to do something. I began throwing a few combinations hoping to throw my opponent off guard. As I threw a low right, I felt my glove connect with something solid. I realized that I had hit my opponent in the ribs. As he staggered to his right, I threw a punch with my left and connected with his chest. As he staggered backward, I moved in for the kill. Just then, the bell sounded. I cursed the lousy timing, but felt good about the fact that the second round belonged to me.

"Nice combination of punches," commented the assistant coach when I sat down. "Too bad the bell rang when it did."

"I know," I said. "I was hoping to get in a few more punches and end this fight."

"When you get back in there," the assistant coach said, "start your attack early. This way," he continued, "if you can catch him off guard you can finish him off."

"Okay," I said, still feeling pumped from Round Two.

The bell sounded again to signal the beginning of Round Three. I moved in quickly to try and find an opening. I wanted to

get a few shots in before my opponent did. Both of us began throwing punches as soon as he realized what I was trying to do. As I jerked to the right to avoid a wild right cross by my opponent, he threw a left hook at my face. I realized at that moment that I had dropped my right arm.

I heard the coach's warning ringing loudly in my head as I attempted to compensate by moving my right arm back up. I felt his left arm graze my right. The next thing I knew, I was waking up in the infirmary with a doctor standing over me with smelling salts in his hand. I looked to my right and saw the coach, looking on intently.

"What happened?" I asked him.

"Apparently," the coach replied, "he hit you in your jaw, and you went down.

"I don't even remember him hitting me," I yelled.

"Most boxers don't," Coach said. "How are you feeling?" he added.

"My jaw hurts a little," I said, "but other than that I guess I'm fine. Do you think that I have a glass jaw?" I asked.

"Hard to say," the coach said. "Everything moved so quickly I really did not see it all. But you'll do better next time."

There would not be a next time. I had already made up my mind. If I did have a glass jaw, I did not want to get hit again. And so, at the age of 10, after almost 2 1/2 years of boxing, I hung up my gloves. Although I've been in several fights since, I've never set foot into another boxing ring.

I DON'T KNOW A THING ABOUT PIZZA

by Gregory Tippetts

In the year 2045, George climbed aboard his spacecraft and flew to the planet Manduka Canduka. He wanted to escape the crime, overcrowding, and pollution of planet Earth. When he arrived at his destination, he found the people to be very friendly. George was also pleased to find out there was almost no pollution, no crime, and no overcrowding. Manduka Canduka had awesome beaches, fantastic snowboarding, excellent golf courses, and most importantly, lots of beautiful women.

George had studied the Canduka language in college and both spoke and understood the language very well. He found a job as a parking lot attendant at one of the ski resorts. One day he met a hot sexy little snowboarder named Penelope.

"Vee vaa voom," said George. In Canduka that means, "Sugar you are hot!"

"Vee vaa voom voom," responded Penelope. In Canduka that means, "Sugar you are hot hot!"

That night they had their first date. The two got along exquisitely. Six months later they got married in the ski resort parking lot where they first met.

While snowboarding together one day George hit a tree. For weeks he lay in a coma. Each day, Penelope would bring fresh mumble peg flowers and take them to his room and hold his hand.

Slowly, George came out of his coma. Eventually, he was able to speak. "Pizza," he said. "I need a pizza."

"I'm sorry, George, but I don't know a thing about pizza," both Penelope and the doctor said.

Finally, he was able to leave the hospital, but he still wanted a pizza. So, he asked the other inhabitants of the small planet if they knew where he could find a pizza with soft dough, snappy tomato sauce, mushrooms, and pineapple.

Everyone told him the same thing, "I'm sorry, but I don't know a thing about pizza."

He even went on the Internet and asked, "Does anyone know where I can get a fresh pizza?"

Everyone responded, "I'm sorry, George, I don't know a thing about pizza."

George knew there was only one thing left to do: go back to planet Earth, buy a Domino's pizza franchise, and return to his tranquil life on Manduka Canduka. So, he said good-bye to his darling Penelope and returned in his spaceship to planet Earth. Soon after his return he asked the president of Domino's about building a franchise on Manduka Canduka.

The president said, "I don't know a thing about Manduka Canduka but I will let you build a franchise there."

Soon afterwards, George and his Domino's pizza franchise returned to Manduka Canduka. All the natives welcomed him home and everyone, including Penelope, loved his pizza.

Everything was going smoothly until George hired a man named Elmer to mix the pizza dough. On his first night on the job, Elmer put way too much yeast in the concoction; this caused it to rise too much. Early the next morning, the pizza building exploded. Pizza dough flew everywhere. The dough kept growing and expanding. Even the Manduka Canduka HAZMAT crew couldn't contain it. It finally stopped but not until the planet was completely covered in thick dough. The president of Manduka Canduka declared a state of emergency. George, Penelope, and Elmer knew they were in big trouble. The police caught them trying to board George's spaceship, "The Pizza One."

All three were dipped in tomato sauce and beaten with giant sticks of pepperoni-flavored tofu. Later, they were forced to help the rest of the citizens clean up all the pizza dough. They also had to help rebuild the house of Parliament, which had been leveled by a large wave of the sticky goo. Following the clean up, all three were forced to leave Manduka Canduka and return to planet Earth. Now neither George, Penelope, or Elmer can stand the sight of pizza.

I AM

by Amy Ruttinger-Jones

I am a stubborn slow moving river with feelings.
I wind my way through the giant humble Rockies.
My mind flies freely with the gentle warm breeze that covers the
hot coastal California.

I am a pure white rose, growing in a weed garden, glowing with
personality.
I am in a dark room, a lonely white candle shining like the heavenly
golden sun.

I am a responsible white dove carrying an important message
across many strange lands, some hard to overcome.
When I am done I feel like a young, innocent, dark skinned, native
playing her wooden flute, its sounds bounce off the walls
encouraging the night to come.

Peace is everything and everything is nothing, for we live in a small
place roaming around blindfolded, waiting for what life serves us.

Hoping it's good.

THE HAPPY REUNION

by Dexter McNeil

One spring day there was some snow on a mountaintop. The snow was melting away to water. The water was running down from the mountaintop. The water was going to the river below. The river was going by the walls of the canyon to the valley floor. Then it went by a bank of green grass.

The grassy area was a park and there was a road beside it. Just off the road was a big Flying J truck stop. Two men came into the café to eat. They saw a waitress who had blonde hair. She was five foot ten. Her name was Shannon. The two men were looking at her when a hostess came up to them and asked, "Would the two of you like a table?" Then she said it again.

One man, named David, said, "Bill, we are here, but where are you?" David hit Bill on his arm and said, "We have a table now. Do you think you can eat now?"

Bill said, "David, yes I can. I could eat a cow. How about you?"

David said, "No, but I could eat ham and eggs."

The hostess said, "First we will get a table for the two of you."

Bill asked if they could have a table in the blonde's area. The hostess said, "Yes, it's okay to have one in her area."

Then Shannon came to their table and asked, "What will you have today?" The two men ordered some ham and eggs and coffee.

David said, "I'd like to come here more often. We truck for farmers, and we'd like it for you to be our only waitress." He looked out the window and said, "The river looks good from here."

There was an island in the middle of the river that had three trees on it and there was also a big branch that crossed the river from the island to the bank.

Ten minutes later, Shannon looked out the window at the island and saw a little boy falling into the river. She screamed out, "There is a boy who just fell into the river!"

The two men yelled, "Let's go!"

The three ran outside to the river. Shannon jumped in the river and swam out to the boy. Then she brought him back to the

bank. The two men helped her with him. The boy was coughing up water.

One of them asked, "Are you alright?"

The boy said, "I am better now."

Shannon asked him, "Would you come with us to the Flying J to get some dry clothes on?"

The boy said, "I would like that."

As the four were walking back to the Flying J, another waitress named Candy was running up to them and said, "He is my son Ray." Ray's mother asked him, "Where are the rest of the boys?"

"They are in the Flying J eating some ice cream and cake," said Ray.

The mother said, "Why aren't you in there with them?"

Ray said, "I saw a rabbit so I went to get it. It went to a dead tree lying on the ground and hopped up a branch going over to the island. I followed him on the branch over the island. Then the branch broke and went down the river. I found myself alone and I saw a tall tree and I climbed up it and fell in the water."

Ray's mother said, "I don't think you should be running after rabbits. I don't like when you scare me like that. Come over here to me."

Ray went to her slowly. She knelt down and hugged him and said, "I'll always have you on my mind, and you have my heart forever."

Then she looked at Bill, who she recognized as her brother. She said, "What are you doing here? It's so good to see you again." She gave him a hug.

Bill said, "I was inside eating when we saw a boy fall in to the water. The three of us came running out to help him. It is so good to see the two of you again after ten years. I didn't recognize Ray. He was only two when I went into the army."

Ray asked Bill, "Are you my uncle?"

Bill laughed and said, "Yes, I am."

Ray ran up to him and hugged him. The family went into the café and had a good time with their happy reunion.

The End.

MY DAD

by Ruby Wilcox

Life can make me happy or it can make me sad
If only I can see my dear dad.
Dad he had one love like no other
Just one woman who was my mother.
But I am sure he had other things
Like birds and butterflies with golden wings
I know he told me love so true
And I know he loved you too.
He also loved all animals like a cat or even a dog
Though he also loved his only God.
I loved him always in my heart
And he was always with me when we were apart.
I'll always love him always anyway
In the night or even in day
For all that I can be and never be sad
As long as I can be with my dad.

THE MISSING DISH

by Margaret A. Olivas

There are no words to describe the journey to ecstasy, the exquisite pleasure I live when indulging in one of the best typical dishes from Puerto Rico! The main ingredient, I only know in Spanish: the panapen, a fruit (or vegetable) that grows on trees. Round and somewhat larger than a cantaloupe, the skin is green and bumpy, but inside... Oh my goodness gracious! Inside its color is ivory, with no seeds, and a porous center. People have explained to me that it is called breadfruit; it may look a little like bread inside, but to the touch, while uncooked, it feels rubbery. In order to experience the pleasures of the panapen, you need to peel the outside skin, remove the center, and finally cut slices of about 3 inches wide and 1½ inches thick. Salt to taste and cook it in boiling water for 20 or so minutes until the consistency is close to a boiled potato. The other components of my missing dish may vary with the preferences at the time (cod fish, fried pork, tomatoes, olive oil etc.).

Typically, this tropical food from paradise is served with fried codfish and onions. The type of cod, found on the island as well, comes dry, in large slabs, packaged in wood crates, and coated with “tons” of salt. For the fish to be edible, it needs to be rinsed to remove all the powdery granules, then boiled in water (nothing added) until it loses the extra salty taste, but is still flavorful, mind you. The water is poured out and it is extremely important to remove the bones. Finally, it is ready to be fried with onions in olive oil, which will later be poured over the slices of panapen, and voila! An express trip to cloud nine is always guaranteed! The combination of textures between panapen, codfish, and onions is an explosion to the senses! A climax never imitated: Divine!

Why do I call it the missing dish? Let me explain: I was so honored to indulge my taste buds with a wide variety of delicious typical dishes from different countries, but Puerto Rico stole my soul! The island is so warm and inviting, always ready to envelop me in tasty, exotic pleasures! Please don't get me wrong, I love dearly our mashed potatoes and gravy, steaks, wieners, etc., as part of our lives, in these United States, as baseball and Thanksgiving, which I do, painstakingly, miss while abroad. Like any other

Yankee, I have the undeniable need to survive with our daily requirement of “USDA CHOICE” foods! But while living in Puerto Rico, this delicacy would shout me out of this world! Now, I so long to eat panapen with codfish, but to this day I have not been able to find any Specialty Island Grocery Store in Salt Lake City that can sell me the fruit/vegetable! Also, the small tasteless packages of codfish I find here will never compare to the real McCoy in Puerto Rico. Oh! Do I ever miss my divine dish!

I will never lose hope to be blasted-off with food once more! The thought of such an experience has my mouth flowing like a river, drowning me, forcing me back to the painstaking reality that there is nowhere to run in Salt Lake to re-live the ecstasy of this tropical dish! It’s a tragedy I tell you! I do wonder... How long will I survive with out it? Oh my dear powers from above! Please, allow me again the glory of returning to Puerto Rico, buying tons of panapen, and bathing them in olive oil so I can, again, die and go to heaven!

MADGE KENDALL'S COLLAGE



FALLING

by Melissa Sillitoe

When did the falling start? I don't know,
but I freefell every day—it lasted years.
I mention it now because I know you know
what it's like to be windbruised,
the jerk of barely catching yourself,
that dizzy stopping without landing.
I fell a long way before I stopped.

Look up. No one else is falling.
The world is no wind tunnel,
but moist grass, bluest sky,
and the people you fell past,
whose eyes you missed,
are not holding still.

Just for now,
see what stays and is real:
trees that hold on,
flowers that push back,
a bee's short hops,
blossom to blossom.

WHERE THE MA'AFU TWINS WERE BROUGHT UP

by Siupelimani L. Muti

An enormous celebration was prepared for very carefully for the date of the noble Ma'afu Tukuiaulahi's wedding with Nua, the daughter of the noble Ngongokilitoto. Now Ma'afu is the noble of the village Vainte, and Ngongokilitotos is the noble of another village called Ha'angongo. These villages were very close to each other, and so were the villagers on the south of the main land of Tonga Tapu. Ngongokilitoto, beforehand, was once Benla's husband. Nua's father, Lo'au, had to make the hardest decision of whether or not his daughter should remain with Ngongokilitoto or respond to Momo's demand, for Momo was King of Tonga and wanted to marry Nua. He was dumbfounded by Nua's beauty, and of course he got his wish and declared her to be his wife. They say Nua was very fit, and was most of all very pretty, and by now, everyone knew her for her looks and also leaving a noble for King Momo. La'au Nua's father told the king up front that Nua was not a virgin anymore, and that she'd had a child. But the king's response was "Lie fena pe ka ko nu'a," which means, "I don't care what has happened to her—it's still Nua."

They were preparing the decorations for the upcoming wedding, when suddenly there was a great change in the weather from the direction of where the Ngongokilitoto family is from, and so the wedding was postponed for a better time and better weather.

When it was finally time for their wedding, Ngongokilitoto's daughter became very ill and died the same day as the wedding. There was great mourning in these two families for many days. Because of this great loss, the wedding decorations automatically became the decorations for her funeral. Her body was soon buried, but her spirit remained.

They say her spirit was transformed and she was reincarnated as a gigantic lizard called Ulie. It was very sad, such love being broken, for the lizard continued to appear every year at Ma'afu's house.

Everyday Ma'afu would go and take a bath at a nearby lake prepared just for him—Ulie knew this, so she always stayed by a huge tree next to the lake. It became her home. This proved her love for Ma'afu was unconditional because everytime Ma'afu came

to bathe, she always appeared. This great lake was called Tufutakele. It was named after the mother and the father, named Tufu and Kele, who always prepared and watched the lake and made the pulu, a bathing sponge made out of coconut husk. Ma'afu always used a pulu to scrub himself when he bathed; and every time after he bathed, he put the pulu right on top of the rocks near the lake. But every time he left it there, Ulie, the lizard would crawl by and swallow it right up. So it became a daily chore for the couple Tufu and Kele to replace Ma'afu's pulu.

Soon time went by and the lizard, Ulie, was pregnant. She then moved to a nearby beach away from the tree, and stayed by the water outside the countryside of Vainte Village. She gave birth to twin boys. It was very unusual the way these twins were born. They say that when the older twin came out of the lizard's stomach, it started running, so she named him Ma'afu Lele. But when the younger twin came out, he just lay still, so she named him Ma'afu Toka. They were built strong and were very outgoing and energized. They were brought up by their mother for all their youth on the beach.

One day, they were playing games and the twins were very curious where their father was, and they asked their mother, "Who and where is our father?" She sat them down and told them that their father is the noble Ma'afu, and that she named them after him, and that he lives in the village in town. She then told them to be respectful to others, and especially to their father. She advised them of the danger they would run into if they didn't watch themselves carefully because if they made the mistake of disrespecting anybody, they might as well be assassinated. Then she taught them about where their father would be seated. After she had advised them and taught them everything, they put on their necklaces and their spears, and they went out very excited to finally meet and get to know their father.

On the way to the village, the older twin threw his spear at the spear-throwing stand where Ma'afu and his relatives often launched their spears. The spear landed right in the middle of their fathers' stand and broke it into two pieces. He then threw it again towards the village where Ma'afu lives, and it landed right in the middle of the village. All the warriors and Ma'afu himself

stood up and were shocked at such a disrespectful act—to think that the twins were better or even equal to their noble Ma’afu!

When the twins came, they walked right into the middle of the circle in the village and sat in the middle of the circle facing their father, and soon everyone sat down to see what they had to say for such disrespect. All the townspeople were amazed because the twins showed no fear even after what they had done.

Ma’afu then asked them a question: “Who are you both? What is your purpose here? And why have you shown such disrespect?”

The older twin, Ma’afu Lele, answered him and said, “It’s Ma’afu Toka and Ma’afu Lele, the birth children of the Ulie, brought up in Tufutakele, Tangafia is our mother.”

Ma’afu, the father, then thought about what they had said and remembered what had happened to his pulu sponge that he bathed with, and he stood up and welcomed his twin sons home. He then called his people to come around and meet his sons. Hugs and handshakes were exchanged back and forth. The twins were very happy and stayed with their father for a long time.

A long had time passed, and the twins’ behavior had gotten worse. They misbehaved and fought with others for fun. They had an attitude of not tolerating what anyone said; it got so bad there were fights and people died. And then the people started to complain to the noble Ma’afu, and they wanted him to do something about this for they’d had it—they wanted no more of it. But most of the people were also worried that they might die, too, or even worse, that people would eventually become extinct because the twins had gotten so bad.

(There was a tale that a gigantic bird lived out in the west and that the bird ate anything in its territory, and it was called Toloa.)

The noble Ma’afu heard his people’s cry against the twins, and he decided to send his boys to the west to find some spinach and taro leaves for his guests to eat for dinner. The truth is that he was planning to lead them out to a trap so that the Toloa bird would drop in and eat them both.

The twins knew very well what this trip was about, but they were excited to go anyway. They had pride in showing their strength, so they were on their way up to the taro crops on the

west side, and they had begun picking leaves for dinner, when all of a sudden, out of nowhere, the huge bird dropped out of the sky and was about to have itself a snack, but Ma'afu Lele just turned around and grabbed the bird's neck with both of his hands and squeezed the bird's neck hard and twisted it, breaking it into three pieces. He threw a piece to his brother, and as he did he said, "Catch this and hold onto it for we will roast it for our father."

They had gathered enough taro leaves and so they were on their way home. As they went, people stared at them wondering what kind of men would have strength to do such a thing? When Ma'afu and his people saw the twins and saw the bird's neck, Ma'afu devised another trick to end the twin's lives because his people were getting more and more worried about their safety.

So Ma'afu once more told his sons to go out to the beach and gather up some water in a bucket made of wood. But, there was an enormous man-eating-fish called Humu, and he lived in the freshwater beach called Talikihaapai. They say that fishermen were always disappearing when they fished on this beach. People say that many people had been eaten alive.

The two twins knew what their father was trying to do by sending them to Talikihaapai, but once again they went anyway. They each took a huge bucket with them for the water and they went down to the beach. When they finally got there, they decided that Ma'afu Toka would stay on the beach by the shallow water, and Ma'afu Lele would walk out slowly towards the deep. So he walked out to the deep water and brought with him the two water buckets. All of a sudden, the Humu fish swam towards Ma'afu Lele, and the closer it came, the faster it swam. It was hungry. Just when it was about to attack, Ma'afu Lele just reached out and grabbed the sharp fins behind its back and grabbed its tail and picked it up and threw it out to his brother saying, "Hold on to this! We will roast it and take it back home for our father, Ma'afu."

When the twins returned with the man-eating fish, Ma'afu and his relatives and all the people weren't even surprised, but they had become scared and afraid—they thought that it was just a matter of time before the twins destroyed them, too.

Nevertheless, Ma'afu Lele and Ma'afu Toka were very sad and sorry. Knowing that their own father was doing this to them broke their hearts. The memory of not having a father for all those years struck them, and it was very painful. So, the next morning they talked to their family and relatives and said, "We have to be on our way now, and we will let you all live in peace. It's time for us to find out where our mother is and go and be with her—maybe she is the only one that can love and care for such misbehaved sons."

When they returned to where their mother had been, she was gone. They looked but could not find her anywhere.

So, as the tale goes, they searched for her everywhere, from the east to the west, from the north to the south. But, their mother was nowhere to be found. The tale says that they have been to the horizon looking for their mother, and they went and even changed into clouds, transformed into puffs of clouds so they can always watch for her. Because they took the Toloa bird and the Humu fish with them, they are still shown with them at night or day, still, to this very day. Many fishermen go to sea and are able to find their way back home because of the two long clouds connecting west to south and east to north. But, the twins always end up above, where their father and relatives are, close to where their mother brought them up. So, if it's night, and there're no clouds, the fisherman always follow the two stars, which are the bird and the fish that the twins brought with them.

TOO QUICK TO JUDGE

by Fran Crookston

A recent KSL-TV editorial (March 26, 2004) closed with “the very fringe of civilization is still too close for sexually oriented businesses.” I agree that areas zoned as residential should not permit sexually oriented businesses. I also am not interested in being a patron or an owner or an employee of a sexually oriented business. However, the tone of KSL’s editorial was that they were angered that communities had to allow strip clubs. They lamented the findings of recent court rulings on the constitutional protections of free expression and voiced the judgment that such businesses are no good.

At the same time, city leaders and KSL wring their hands at how Salt Lake’s downtown is dead. There are good restaurants and entertainment opportunities outside the downtown area where the parking is free. Utah’s alcohol laws are carefully designed to hold up persons who don’t drink alcohol as better in every way than those who do. Yet during the 2002 Olympics, everyone glimpsed what could be in the way of a vibrant, active downtown. I suppose the leadership would dismiss the relaxation of the liquor laws as inconsequential.

I make it a point to travel out of state often. A common destination in past years has been the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in the Black Hills of South Dakota. I’m not an enthusiastic participant as many there because I don’t enjoy camping (and that is how my husband intends to be accommodated). But two things are clear. One is that men are very resistant to lifestyle restrictions: they will do whatever it takes to do what they want to do. The other is that given this attitude, the environment can be managed in a profitable manner.

Another frequent destination of mine is Las Vegas. Of all the cities in the world, this is one that jumps out as a place where you are most likely to find many sexually oriented businesses. And yet, in more recent years it has also established itself as a family destination. Throughout all recent economic crises, Las Vegas has remained America’s boom town. It seems obvious. Men desire sex and liberty to do what they want. Women also seek opportunity and recognize that men who aren’t already committed to another

woman are free to help them achieve what they desire. Neither the men nor the women plan out all the contingencies when they get together for their entertainment, and thus families are begun. Because so many families are started in the same community with the same values and desires, the need is established to provide a place where children are also accommodated.

More recently I spent a few days as a tourist in New York City. Just before my trip, there was a feature on the *Today Show* about how thousands of millionaires live in Manhattan. As I walked around (you do a lot of walking in New York), there were sexually oriented businesses in many parts of the city. I had to look to observe them because they kept a low profile. Clearly not every citizen or tourist in New York is any more likely to patronize these businesses than the population of Salt Lake City.

I was there for St. Patrick's Day and used the subway for getting around where walking wouldn't do. The first destination of the day was a trip to Wall Street and the World Trade Center site. The parade was to start at 11 a.m. On the trip to the parade, a group of fire fighters got on the same subway car. Their behavior for the shared portion of the trip reminded me of patrons of sexually oriented businesses: a bit rowdy. These firefighters were also likely to be the heroes from September 11, 2001 and the subsequent struggle to get the city going again. They don't walk on water, but they did what New York needed them to do when they needed them to do it.

Another comment about New York is that I believe that people there have more realized freedom than people anywhere else in the world. But that freedom comes at an expensive price.

Well, I'm not trying to promote and don't want the greater Salt Lake metropolitan area to try and establish itself as another Las Vegas or New York. It just strikes me as foolish to hold such judgmental positions about sexually oriented businesses and then wonder why the downtown area is so dead.

The Bible attributes to Jesus the saying "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged" (*New Revised Standard Version*, Matthew 7:1). By holding the kind of position KSL made public, it is no wonder that many talented people leave the area and that our attempts at diversity end up being quite comical. Ultimately, Utah

is losing ground to more liberal areas which translates into fewer opportunities for Utahns.

Although I suppose my suggestion has as much chance as a snowball in the summer Saudi desert, I will make it anyway. Why not examine how sexually oriented businesses are taxed and regulated in communities that don't have too much of a problem with them, and allow them in Salt Lake with the same taxes and regulations? I believe that by taking a more pragmatic approach, Salt Lake can retain its Mormon heritage and attract and accommodate a more diverse population.

DATING

by Marylee Carla Clarke

Grandpapa Anderson told me stories of him and his best friend Pete and their wives going on some dates. They ran the batteries down by dancing by the car maybe all night, having lots of fun. They had to push the car to a hill so it would start going down the hill. They laughed and went home to their separate homes.

They had another nice night the next night, dancing under the moon and all the beautiful stars. Sometimes a breeze would come up and they would cuddle harder and longer until the car dying told them it was time to go home and take care of their families and jobs and whatever they had to take care of in their lives at that time.

MARILYN'S WISH

by John Wilkes

The first star hung low on the horizon, glittering against the twilight blue of evening. Marilyn sat on her porch swing, watching hundreds of fireflies emerge from the reeds along the riverbank and dance, wraithlike. They each reflected off the water's surface, foretelling a bejeweled night sky.

Marilyn sat here numerous nights throughout the summer, enjoying the cool of dusk after the hot, dusty, twelve-hour days at the mill. Exhausted from the bicycle ride home, Marilyn would immediately sink into a hot, sudsy tub. After her bath, she'd make herself a salad (she never cooked in the summer), pour a glass of iced tea and eat outside in the company of June bugs and crickets.

Enjoying the cool breeze beneath the night sky always set Marilyn to dreaming. She imagined herself in another country, in another house, with another...but they were just dreams: a new dress, a new automobile, dancing at a dinner party. Marilyn would swing and imagine all kinds of things she knew she'd never experience—not unless...

A gruff rasp invaded Marilyn's reverie. "Where's my dinner? You just sit out here daydreaming half the night away, well I need something to eat!"

Marilyn ignored the stench of stale whiskey and cigarettes that always accompanied her husband. She ignored his inconsiderate demands, his bulbous red nose and rotten teeth, his filthy clothes, and the madness in his voice.

And she wished upon a star.

ME AND MY GRANDPA

by Sandra Albertson

Me and My Grandpa
used to go fishing in the
mountains at the blue lake,
and talked and drank drum whiskey.
We used to skip rocks in the water,
and loved it very much.

To Elsie

by Elizabeth Carnahan

Pink sunrises, pink sunsets—secret messages wrapped in pink,
Playing make believe in the shade of pink hollyhocks on tall green
stems, whose
Petals magically create mystical cloth for princess dolls.
Pink lemonade, poured by Elsie, from a pitcher whose sides were
frosted with misty dew drops.
Peanut butter and banana sandwiches, crusts carefully removed, cut
into pieces,
Piled on a porcelain plate, and
Passed from grandmother to granddaughter, a sacred sacrament.

Pattering, pretending, laughing, two kindred spirits connect,
Pulling away the partition that separates young from old.
Persuasive melodies of joy, comprised of love, passed from
daughter to daughter to daughter.
Peaceful haze permeates their private universe, a powerful force
transcending time.
“Promise me that we’ll be forever friends,” asks the child, only
aware of
Pastel petals, cool breezes, soft clouds—life’s perils, shadows, and
valleys as yet unknown.

Pondering, Elsie lovingly shares her gifts—friends are forever, but
they leave.
Parting fills your soul with sadness, but nature’s pattern cannot
change.
Pain diminishes and life’s pleasures return, a paradoxical process
Proven by the perpetual return of green stems with pink
blossoms,
Pushing through the earth each spring, pausing and blooming long
enough to
Plant lasting memories, making a space where little girls and
grandmothers can
Play, pretend, pursue dreams, side by side.

Peace and love, messages that endure and repeat as do
Pink sunrises, pink sunsets, pink petal princess dolls.

DEXTER McNEIL's COLLAGE



SAVED NATION

by Kelly Coffey

I grabbed my coffee from the left side of the shelf. It was surely one of those days that grind on one's soul. I couldn't get away from the registers and cranky customers quickly enough. Through the turnstile, through the crowded entrance, through weekend shoppers, browsers and the city's students, I shoved my way and found the outside. I inhaled deeply, taking in the scents of cigarette smoke, car exhaust, body odor, roasting meat and their burning sticks.

Mmmmm.

My gaze fell upon a puppy leading its owner toward her own destination and away from the dreadful bookstore. I settled down on the step at the threshold of an antique store across the street as I usually do on my breaks. Something about this place makes it easy to think and embark in the zone.

A man was dozing against the building, sitting upon the same sidewalk rich and lazy people (inconsiderate alike) allow their doggies to defecate. Gross, I thought, oh well, whatever. I stared at him anyway: studying his faded leather jacket zipped halfway, his disheveled, dirty curly hair and the crusty corners of his mouth. His lips were dry and cracking: dehydrated from what I can only guess was a wild night in the city. I almost felt bad for him but imagined he was actually just a hopeless party animal like myself who happened to fall asleep outside the antique store because walking another step was far too much work. I felt really lucky at that exact moment, lucky he didn't crash on my step.

I looked beyond Mr. Sozzled and walked aboard the train of thought. Do days begin when I wake up or when I go to sleep? Could they begin at midnight or noon? What would I do with 84 million dollars? How much tax would actually be taken from that? That girl looks like a muppet. There's the guy who walks his cat on a leash. I need new wheels for my rollerblades. It's Saturday night in Union Square and I'm thinking I should do homework. I must look like a deep thinker.

I never heard the man who was now standing over me ask something as he handed me a pamphlet. The title read, "SALVATION," and I shook my head no. What would salvation feel like? Is it being forgiven by someone I hurt? Is it giving my

pennies to the homeless girl and her adopted pal? Is this man just trying to make himself feel better by trying his darn'dest to impose his beliefs onto me? Is he merely striving to reach his quota this day?

The magpie man turned his attention to Mr. Sozzled, still dreaming the sidewalk dreams, and offered him a pamphlet. Mr. Magpie was determined to save this comatosed soul. He tucked the pamphlet of salvation into Mr. Sozzled's jacket and lay his giant hand on his shoulder, mumbling something about a purified beginning, accepting jesus into our daily lives, blah blah and more blah.

Since I sat down next to him, Sozzled hadn't moved, until now. He lifted his head but his eyes remained closed. The index finger on his right hand came up trembling a little, pointing at the man's head. Magpie stood there with his hand on Sozzled's shoulder, encouraging him to speak. Sozzled was jogging his lips, trying to summon up the saliva, energy, sense to say something. His mouth shut and his chin hit his chest as he let his head fall again. His neck gave up trying to support such a heavy leaden head. My attention turned to my watch and I realized my break was over. One last sip of my coffee and I'd be off before the preaching really began.

I stood up and stretched, looking over my shoulder at Sozzled and just in time too. He lifted his head, opened his mouth and belched into Magpie's face. My arms fell to their sides and I took a step back from an angry Magpie. Then I heard the sounds of dry heaving. A memory of my cat heaving up hairballs in the kitchen when I was home alone one day came rushing back to me but not faster than the scent of the whiskey, beer and only god knows what else hit the air from the choking sounds. Magpie stood straight up, wiped his face and took long strides away while I stood there and watched Sozzled open his jacket just enough to retch last night's disco party into it.

These things probably happen every day to other people but I was somewhat fascinated at this point. It was certainly better than watching a car accident because no one was hurt, although I suspected that he'd hate himself later. When he was done I bent down and left my cup of coffee next to him. The smell was awful.

Hairballs didn't leave such a stink as far as I could remember, but in all honesty I never cleaned them up.

Sozzled reached into his jacket, took the pamphlet out and chucked it to the curb. I crossed the street returning to work and took a last look before I fought my way back through the entrance. Sozzled was drinking my coffee. The only thing I could think was, I hope he enjoys that coffee more than I did.

CENTURY OLD SOVEREIGNTY

by Chris Dunn

I.

Is still white
and bearing gifts from steel backs.

The morning claps
with apologies and gratitude
from the felon-sun and the begging lawns.

The monument of Shasta daisies
you, with planting parents put
in the side yard
is now a larded appetite
to move west, subdue, inherit
and stand at the lips of the bluff—
look into the arid red veins of the desert—
pull the tufts of the sage.

Or will you let the climate
of the season's miles
send you back
to scrape off your skin?
Abdicate the wise sovereign color?

Because the land's fist
is an aria of native grass
and a mist of timothy
underneath the blue vault testament
of the Big Sky Country.

II.

We have nothing
muslin and metal
inside a yard square.

And we are nobodies.
Mesh and thatch
the empty patch.

The Colossus next door
comes to court,
reiterate, and state.

Sovereignty is beside
a Bangladesh train
for twenty years.

The square patch
has been studied
exhausted and left.

Tonight the old
desire will be
replaced with new.

SUNRISE

by Christine Wink

What makes the sun rise,
or signals the leaves to fall,
the one who knows all.

What strength transforms man,
what courage underpins he
who is called our father?

Who can console us—
whom can we trust and believe,
ourselves, we are his.

BUNDLE OF STICKS

by Mark Dicosola

Step One

Admitted we were powerless—that our lives had become unmanageable

An island asteroid floated near a circle. The circle was wrapped with lines from north to south and east to west. The line that split the two halves from north and south was called the equator. I lived by the equator in the western hemisphere of the circle, in a country, Venezuela, in a city, Caracas, in a town, Santa Rose De Lima, and in a high rise apartment building, La Jarama. My phone number was 21-11-71. I was a ten-year-old foreigner. I attended an American school called Campo Alegre. These things I knew for emergencies.

The floating island did not exist. Mrs. Jewett told of an asteroid that cratered the earth multiple millennia ago. It killed life as it existed, in its tracks. The animals and plants had no idea until they burned alive and choked on the atmosphere. She woke me from my daydream with the loud “burned alive and choked” in a shrewd, raspy, and powerful voice.

It was Cub Scouts’ Day, so I had on my dress blues, kerchief and embroidered cap. I’d grown a lot since my uniform assignment, so my shorts were skin tight and riding up. My shirt fit, but had started looking pinchy and it was hard to tuck in and still button my shorts. My kerchief was noosed around my neck, rolled up perfectly, and fastened with a clear plastic braided napkin-ring slid up tight against my throat.

Mrs. Jewett made us return to our two person island desks to practice for the spelling bee after lunch. Victoria Ramsey, the Ambassador’s daughter, was my desk mate. I’d been to her princess palace the weekend before for her birthday party. I swam in the pool, watched my friend John French kiss Andrea, wondered why it was French, and was amazed by the size and shape of the windows. They were thirty footers, at least, rectangular windows supporting arched semi-circle windows on top. I spent a lot of time at the party admiring those windows.

Twelve minutes ago, I began tapping my pencil because I had to pee. Slowly at first, I tapped. Mrs. Jewett made a rule a few days earlier. I always prided myself with my regard for teacher’s authority

even though I'd never broken this particular rule in the first place: *There will be no going to the bathroom before lunch.* I remember her saying the rule as if the whole fifth grade got up everyday and ran to the bathroom at ten to noon. Okay, I'll just hold it. I shifted in my seat, crossed my legs, looked at Mrs. Jewett, read the clock that said nine to twelve and decided it wasn't a problem. I tried to forget, be good and obey the rule.

I grabbed my dictionary and flipped to find a stumper for Victoria. She looked at me wondering where my mind had gone. "Phantasmagoria. Spell it out," I said and clenched my teeth and shivered. I exhaled a deep mouth open blow and looked to see where Mrs. Jewett was. She vanished like my daydreams.

Victoria started reciting in proper-spelling-etiquette, "Phantasmagoria. Pee, Ache, Aye, En, Tee, Ay, Es, Em, Ay, Gee, Oh, Ar, I, Ay, Phantasmagoria." I wasn't listening. *Victoria, I have to pee bad.* I screamed at her in my head. She wasn't listening either. Sweat beaded with seven minutes left. I stood up, swayed, paced twice and fisted my hands while raising them. I just had to keep focused on holding it.

I sat back down, put my penis between my legs, and cut it off. No one noticed and I remember everyone looking at each other and not me. I looked at the door with the clock over it. It read five to noon. It pained me not to break the rules. Hot, wet juices filled my briefs. There was a moment of waking from sleep or a nightmare. I gasped breath. I trickled water on my legs, looked down to see my faded navy shorts spot to dark blue, stood up, felt the liquid reach my Cub Scout knee socks and soaked my shoes. I stood in place.

I left in slow motion with the island asteroid. Everyone turned around to look at me all at the same time. They began to laugh like they did in my naked dreams. Mrs. Jewett reappeared, cackled along, and stood in front of the door with the clock over it that read two to twelve. In that emergency, I lost everything I was.

Step Two

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity

It is possible to catch the sun in a magnifying glass and transform the sun into a small circle of harnessed energy that will start a stick afire. The stick will begin to smoke first, turn black,

and finally flame. The flame will die out if other sticks are not added when it's burning. A bundle of sticks will help the sustenance of fire.

Hal watched him fall. He saw him the moment before his back was flat in the dust with his legs in the air. In that moment, he was a figment, a virgin, a particle, a star's light that hasn't reached human eyes, a lullaby: solid, uncompromised, and invisible. None knew him. Hal bent over his head. The others gathered close around the monkey bar at the end of the field. He had just knee bended, flipped backwards and over-swung off a metal line in the bluest sky. The bundle of boys positioned themselves between the sun and the nameless boy. All magnified their gaze at his eyelids.

Hal watched him fall asleep. He gazed down at the new boy and thought he wanted him to wake up to his face. He looked him over and thought how perfect he was with his shirt tucked in, his tight black shorts, his tube socks pulled to the knee, his thighs hairless, his red thick lips and translucent skin. His eyelids shimmered when the boys' shadows swayed over his face. The boys' necks and backs started to burn in front of the sun.

Hal watched him open his eyes after the fall. His sight went from a white speck and grew slowly outward to a clear, colorful periphery. The new boy woke up in a foreign place and it sparked his body. The boys all bent over a little at the waist to watch him. He stared into Hal's eyes. Hal blew the words on the boy, "You're a faggot." A fire started behind his eyes and fed on his skull, his spine, his rib cage, and his pelvic bone. The boys scurried away like mice from a blazing field. Hal stoked the fire with a kiss and vanished. He burned alone.

Step Three

Make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to a higher power

Athene rides next to me in the Cadillac CTS, and her dark-chocolate feathered collar and cuffs rustle around her face from her breathing. She waves her acrylic nails, grabs my arm and leans on me. The car's warning lights keep coming on. The lights aren't red like normal, though, but electric blue. They weren't normal oil lights

either. They're different. One is the front-end bumper light. I pull in at a convenient store that isn't paved. I see big metal tubing, electrical spirals, and plastic coated wires coming out of the hood's seam. The pearl white Cadillac makes the wires look like a piece of spinach caught in a tooth. Athene releases my arm as I get out. "What's wrong?" she questions.

The hood has sunk toward the ground and the bumper plastic is gone, exposing the metal frame of the car. The silver tubing dangles like veins and contorts under the hood when I lift it. I shove them, hide them, and forget about them. I open Athene's door and tell her to drive. She perches her hands on the wheel, looks over her shoulders back and forth, marabou making wind, and slides the electric seat up, down, and close. "Where to?" she questions.

Over Athene's arms on the wheel, I hear an avalanche of rocks and see earth falling across the road. I notice she's cut bangs into her hair. They're short and poky with highlights and they frame her large brown eyes. "What the hell?" I wonder. Across the street from the gas station island pump, covered with the customary pagoda, is a granite rock mountain. She puts the car in R, turns toward the street, and exposes my view of the rock that rises straight up and canvases my windshield.

I lean forward looking up. A man with black-rimmed glasses and no shirt canoes down the mountain in a blue inflatable boat. His arms are strong and tan as he shifts the paddle across his chest and scouts his way without water down the cliff. Rocks and pebbles bounce, skip, fall, and land. The plastic canoe makes the sound of metal scraping over rock, that high pitched grinding noise. He teeters. He drops and the front-end folds like an elbow and straightens. He lands on the street and heads north.

Another smaller man, shirtless in sport shorts, grinds on a skateboard across the curb in front of us. Athene brakes for him. I watch his hard blue plastic brake on the back tail of his board slap the cement before he balances, and he pushes northbound with his left foot pumping like a stallion in stride.

Athene turns out of the dusty lot and scrapes the muffler pipes on the street. She passes the man in the canoe now in the gutter without rainwater to float him.

"How the hell?" I wonder.

The skateboarder is ahead. Athene idles at his side without me asking. She hoots “.. Like whom...” and I check him out. His right foot forward on the board sports Converse All-Star high tops loosely laced without socks. The shoes give way to short blondish leg hair, tanned skin, and toned calves. I look at his head. His hair is long from a crew cut that has grown without interference for a year. His profile glistens with sun, his hair flows from his face in the transportation-made wind, his lips smile, his Adam’s apple juts outward, his back to chest crater is deep. My eyes cover and swirl around his trunk in the shape of a question mark. Left to right, my eyes move across his pecks to his burnt sienna and hairless nipples. My eyes move diagonally down to abdomen muscles, rippled and hard like three uncrested waves, down to his belly button, a black olive resting on a ledge of flesh, and down past a textured swirl of trimmed hair in front of wet terra-cotta skin. I look at the baseline his shorts make and read him like a line of poetry: slow, steady and thoughtful. I make my way across the elastic line to his center. Athene hits the gas as I turn my profile to him.

She turns up Third Avenue where the city has just installed huge concrete planter boxes in the centerline of the street. Colorado blue spruce and lodge-pole pines line the median between the skyscrapers. I look past Athene and a carnival of dancers are doing the mambo. They swirl their hips to the Latin beat on the concrete island. One lead dancer holds the outstretched hand of a black and white ruffled, turbaned, and plump Haitian priestess laughing at the sky. He is dressed in flamenco style: tight black pants and a black and white checked flowing shirt open to his navel. His elbow is bent and raised to the furthest point away from his partner before he dances close to her again. “Why not?” Athene questions me and we smile together.

Athene drives on, makes a left, flips her hair over her feathers, and pulls into an abandoned gas station. The building has a faded red stripe around the top and the cinder blocks are painted white. The windows are large and cloudy and framed in gray metal. The asphalt-paved parking lot has potholes and has turned from black to flecked gray and white in the sun.

Zeus’s black convertible Mercedes is parked outside. I approach the building and night falls. Athene is gone. I enter the building and it has a living room with dark brown leather chairs and soft light

table lamps. There are throws over the arms and a man is watching TV. It's hard and I can't see. I turn around to see Zeus come into the room dressed in a black-sleeved baseball shirt and jeans. He isn't wearing shoes. "Hello, rich friend," he says. I hug him short and off center. "I'd love for you to meet this one," Zeus says and points to the couch behind me.

I turn my head to see, and he is before me smiling. "You have such a happy face," I say. I realize this is the man in the canoe, the man on the skateboard, and the dancer. He drifts, rides and dances as the three become one and the two become one. I do.

Step Four

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

The torch was making its way toward the cauldron the night Pat found out Rob was dead. Thousands were gathered in the streets waiting for the torch to pass by. After the anti-abortion rally had passed, after the Bear Creek Soup samples were given, and after the "Ignite the Fire Within" pennants were dispersed, we stood waiting. He wouldn't find out about his death until after the celebration. We stood in the center median together excited and anxious for the fire to pass to the next barer, a world record steeple-chaser, who we'd taken photographs with earlier to commemorate the event, to prove we were there, to remember.

While waiting, Pat told me about the last time he'd seen Rob. Pat was late and running for a flight for Salt Lake from Denver where Rob was living. Pat was preoccupied with time and boarded the terminal train forgetting Rob wasn't allowed on without a ticket. He thought he was right behind him the whole time but the glass doors closed and he was alone. When he made it to the gate and the plane hadn't finished boarding, he called him from the payphone. He left a message, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I didn't get to say goodbye or that I love you." The torch was running late, and I watched Pat's frosted breath disappear.

The flame was coming all the way from Greece and around the world now at our feet to ignite the fire within. We waved our pennants and cheered it onward. It was very cold outside so the movement warmed us inside. A Jazz basketball player surrounded by a squadron of police cars and bikes jogged toward us holding

the flame high. Pat and I locked hands when one torch lit the next. The steeple-chaser's torch was lit and the basketball player's torch was extinguished. The flame was carried closer to the cauldron on the mountain. All bundled up, I felt the warmth inside.

Pat's cell rang. Rob had driven his truck to a Denver police station, had written his name, his family, and Pat's cell number on a piece of paper, and shot himself in the parking lot. The funeral was the opening day of the winter games in his hometown at the base of Mount Olympus. The casket was closed. The family tried to gather excuses. Pat was described in the obituary as the "love of his life" but his battle with sadness prevailed. Love didn't win during the games. He disappeared and Pat drifted asleep, his last memory of his face speeding away from him in a glass train.

HILL BEAT BLUES

by John Wilkes

Affection I cannot express.
The hand I cannot hold.
A body that I cannot warm
Beside me, shivering, cold.

The double bed I cannot share.
Those lips I 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 always hear,
Fairy! Faggot! Freak!

In temples where I cannot pray
Bigots brew hypocrisy,
Presume to know what God thinks
Of my sexuality,

Claim inspiration from above
To further legislation
Outlawing who I choose to love,
Denying our consummation.

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

I've had my fill, Boys on The Hill.
You're really out of touch
If what I do in my bedroom
Concerns you all so much.

You say we're seeking special rights

Beyond what we deserve.
I can't believe that rhetoric.
You have a lot of nerve

Coming down on us like this.
It isn't at all cool,
Just because our intercourse
Yields naught for your clone pool.

No well-developed argument
Can widen your slim sight.
Invalidate my right to love,
but prepare for a long fight.

PING PONG

by Margaret A. Olivas

“Daddy!”

“Tommy, my boy! You are five years old today. What do you want for your birthday?”

The innocent eyes squinted while thinking and scanning the enormous room filled with all the toys any kid could dream of. “A ping pong ball!”

“A what? Tommy... If anybody sees that I’ve given you a ping pong ball for your birthday, I’ll be the laughing stock of Beverly Hills. I know! I’ll get you a mini racing car and I’ll build a mini race track so you can be the youngest NASCAR driver.”

11 years later...

“Hey, Dad!”

“Tommy boy!”

“I got my driver’s license and just like the written test, I passed this one with 100%.”

“Good job son! Since you worked so hard for this moment, what kind of a car do you want me to get for you? A Corvette, a Lamborghini?”

“Dad, no, I was wondering...”

“Yes? Oh! You want a motorcycle! I don’t know son...”

“Dad! Can you get me the ping pong ball?”

“Are you out of your freaking mind? Are you smoking pot! What on earth do you want a ping pong ball for anyways?”

“Well, I’ve been asking you...”

“Forget it! I’ll send the butler to find out what’s the hottest car out there and I’ll get it for you. We will not discuss this matter anymore and if you can excuse me, I’m on my way to an important meeting.”

9 years later....

“Congratulations son! You passed the bar. Legally in the state of California, you’re a lawyer! Tonight is the great reception in your honor. Your wife and I are so excited and proud of you! Tell me, what would you want me to give you for such a joyous

occasion? How about the building which is next to mine? Have my architect remodel it, with exterior/interior state of the art, deco and equipment for your office: the best a lawyer can have.”

“Dad, can I ask you a question?”

“Sure, anything!”

“Dad... How about the ping pong ball I’ve always ask you for?”

“Did all those hours of studying, reading, and writing fry your brain? Are you still insisting on that? For crying out loud Thomas! You are a married man with children of your own and now a reputation to protect as well! Tell me, what do you need a ping pong ball for? Forget about such a stupid request! Tomorrow I’ll send you the architect. Smile, here comes the governor.”

7 years later...

While in his own mansion, Tommy’s father was reading the newspaper. Considerably shaken, James, the butler, stormed into the study. “Sir! You need to rush to the hospital. Master Tom had a horrible accident and the doctors say that he may not make it through the night!”

He speeds to the hospital and in seconds he’s by Tommy’s bedside. Horrified to see so many machines and tubes connected to a body, he is in shock, he can’t recognize his son.

“Tommy! Talk to me! What on earth happened?”

“D-dad I-I’m go-going t-t-t-to d-die.”

“No you’re not! You’ll get better, everything’s going to be okay, you’ll see!”

“NO! D-d-dad l-listen t-t-t-to m-m-me!”

“Okay, okay. Tell me, but calm down.”

“I ha-have a l-last wi-wish.”

“But son, you’re not...”

“D-dad p-please! For once...”

“Sorry, anything you want, I’ll do it, and I’ll get it for you, whatever, I love you so much!”

“I-I s-s-still want...”

“What? Say it Tommy, what do you want?”

“The p-p-ping p-pong ball!”

“For crying out loud son! What kind of a wish is that? Every time I’ve asked you what I could get you for whatever the freaking occasion, you had to come up with such a crazy answer!”

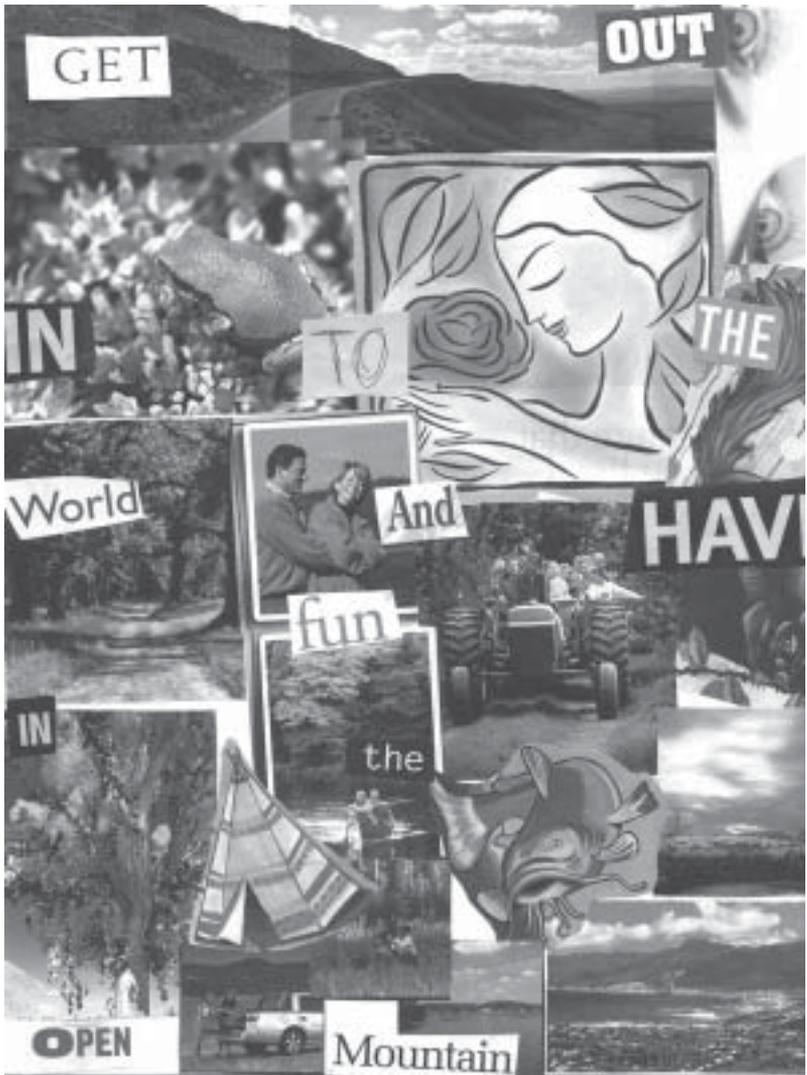
“D-d-dad!”

“OK, OK! I’m going right now to get you a ping pong ball! But do me a favor son. Tell me, why on earth would do you want me to buy such an insignificant thing?”

“Oh, th-that’s easy. The reas-s-s-son w-why I w-want you t-to buy me a pi-pi-ping p-pong b-b-ball is is, (cough, cough, gasp, gasp) is, i...”

Poor Tommy—he never got the freaking ball!

JOSEPH JIMENEZ'S COLLAGE



I MISS EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU

by Christine Wink

I miss your deep sighs, your breath on the back of my neck,
the sensation of your firm body pressed against mine.
I miss hearing the sound of your voice,
listening to you ramble incessantly.
I miss the sound of our hushed tones mingling together
And staring into your sparsely pigmented yet lustrous blue eyes.
Miss shampooing your hair in the kitchen sink.
Massaging your weary brain, while topless.
Every peek you take at me while I'm rinsing the soap from your head
Puts you in danger of having sudsy tear-filled eyes.
Still you take the risk; this flatters me.
I miss the slow and steady way you cajole and caress me,
Assuring me that everything is going to work out,
And then stealthily you always see to it that it does.
I miss everything about you.

THE OPEN PIT MINE

by Chris Dunn

I still sit on the afternoon of this cup
to make an offering of what it offers.
Man marries his land in this hole they cut
mining socket-mint in slack-dust stairways

endlessly refining ends of matters that
resign in governments of slag.
There is a submission in that pile of particulars.
It leaves the gulls breathless in treading seasons.

A lightly oiled will sustains the dying industry shoulder
while half-hands / half-sleep widens the abyss brim.
The old thin, the young fish lint.
The hill of residue surrounds, makes ground
To bury the fringe flowers,
cup the old echoes

of the dead singing in graves.
They fobbed the ore under sod.
Cobble-town crop, the hole drops
on my gray-day reclaiming.

I visit the dead and tell they,
“We drip the vessel,
the townsmen talk of how long.”

FREEZER BURN

by Amy Veach

She was an atheist, he a Catholic. This was their third official “date.” Decidedly casual, she met him at the rectory adjacent to the cathedral where he lived and worked as the full time organist. She pulled into the darkened driveway. Watching the lights in the rectory shine through the white gauzy curtains. She approached the figure in the courtyard by the fountain.

“Sorry I’m late,” she said.

“Oh no, you’re not,” he shook his head his eyes wandering past her. “I told you to take your time.” They embraced, his shirt smelled like fresh cotton from a dryer. “You look well rested,” he said. The porch light cast a greenish hue on his full face. Blending his blemishes like a flat monitor of a TV screen. “Time?” he questioned.

She looked at his bare wrist, then her own. “You don’t have a watch?”

“No.” He shook his head.

“It’s a quarter to—”

“Mass starts in fifteen, come on.”

“You didn’t tell me you needed to play. *Luke*. Are you sure it’s okay I’m here?”

“Yes, come on.”

“But—” she hesitated taking a step toward the car.

“Listen to me. Come hear me play. It’s only an hour, we can go out after.”

She followed him through the back door of the rectory, past an economy sized kitchen. She hung back as they entered a tiny vestibule lit by an orchestra of candles. “Luke, I don’t know if I—” he sped past her words into a crowd and motioned for her to keep up.

“I’m a giver, Marcy. The things I’ve seen here. I’ve seen a little of everything from funerals to births, and people respect that.”

She skimmed behind still uncomfortable as they climbed a narrowing staircase away from the foyer.

“People know what I’m playing. They hear me playing even if they don’t know it.” At the top of the staircase he made eye contact. “And I’m good. I’m one of the best.” His eyes were blood red.

He abruptly sat on the wooden bench in front of the organ. It rocked, scratching the blonde floorboards as he adjusted the wire music stand. “What?”

She shrugged. “Nothing.” She put her hand on the brass rail and leaned over the open gallery studying the stained glass windows. “It’s different up here. The music, I mean. It sounds less ominous, less powerful, which surprises me being so close to the pipes.”

“So what do you think of all this church business?” He asked it like an artist seeking approval of his latest composition. A test to see if she were worthy of the experience.

“I feel more at ease today. Like I’m an observer.”

“What do you see?”

She looked at his mustard button-down oxford, and red tie. He was twenty-six, dressed like a forty year-old, still in question of being fashionable. Indistinguishable from the copper pipes and warped choir chairs.

He was sweet, though still a stranger to her. It was only their third date, after all. Information gathering stage, she had told her girlfriends earlier that afternoon over Starbucks coffee. She collected his messages like costume jewelry, listening to his lulling voice, “I can’t wait to see you.” Again, “I can’t wait to see you.” And again, like the reflection of cubic zirconium all sparkle but still economical. But here above the linear pews, eye-level to the stained glass skeletons she gawked. Her physical presence as awkward as her spiritual identity. Should she stand, sit, or lean against the brass banister? When he nodded to a chair, she gratefully sat folding her hands to her lap, and crossing her ankles.

“And you. You call yourself an atheist?” he whispered as the priest spoke to the congregation below. “You don’t believe any of it?”

She realized how absurd her answer would be sitting in the organ loft with the congregation gathered in the cathedral below. Surrounded by believers, the tops of their heads and the sounds of their voices hollow in the granite bowels. She watched transfixed, emotionally moved by the physical splendor, the craftsmanship, the chiseled blocks of granite quarried, the artists, painters, sculptors: all artisans like herself, building a space worthy of worship, even if in the structure itself. “I believe in this building, but I feel silly saying it now.”

“Why?” He leaned close enough for her to smell the garlic on his breath. “Change of heart?”

“No. More awestruck.” She made a face in disbelief. “You *work* here.”

“Does it bother you?”

“It’s just not your cubicle gray,” she looked over the congregation again. “That must be refreshing, I guess,” she said still trying to convince herself. “You go to work in the morning and say you’re whatever they’re called, then do it all over again two hours later.”

He nodded, then positioned himself in front of the keyboard on cue. He attacked the stepped keys. His squat legs fluttered, a butterfly stroke, as the pedals crescendoed up then down. *Receive my confession, O most loving and gracious Lord Jesus Christ.* Suddenly she felt self-conscious, like coughing in the middle of a prayer. *Only hope for the salvation of my soul* chanted the priest. The congregation droned in repetition, as Luke pulled the stops, pumping a pedal, more stops, the keys cut by the force of his round, flat fingers. *Grant to me true contrition of soul, so that day and night I may my penance make.* Luke bounced like a restless peacock, pluming the voices and chords into melodies that sounded ominous but beautiful. She couldn’t help staring, mesmerized. She couldn’t help wanting to laugh.

On their fourth date, Luke led her up the stairwell to the third floor of the rectory. “Everyone’s out of town, so we’ll watch the show in Father John’s room; he has a better TV,” he said putting his hand on the banister rounding a second flight of stairs. It was hot. The walls were steeped dark like tea, and the carpet was worn, with stains camouflaged by the ember red shag. It glowed in the florescent lighting of the hallway.

“Is this Mary Magdalene?” She stopped to study a painting hanging in the stairway. “It’s incredible. Look at this!” she ran her finger across the gilded frame. “Is this from the Pope’s attic?” She blew the dust off the tip of her finger. “It looks like it hasn’t been touched for years.”

“Centuries.” He disappeared around the corner.

“Wait, Luke, what?”

Father John’s room was manicured with canary yellow walls, and a faux red fireplace. Bookcases covered one wall. She studied the furniture and decorations stopping to notice the details as he walked

towards the corner table with bottles of Vodka and Rum scattered on top.

“As you can see, Father John likes his liquor. Have a drink with me?” He set the carafe of cranberry juice next to the Smirnoff’s vodka and handed her a drink.

They sat on the sofa. Quiet. He sighed, then asked, “Would you have sex in front of a crucifix?” As if it was the perfect lead-in question to be followed by her favorite food, where she enjoyed shopping, or if she had seen the latest blockbuster movie.

She nibbled on the irony, the idea of dating a catholic now a delectable sweet she never tried before. She smiled, slipped her painted toes out of her strappy sandals and wiggled them. “Hum.” She perched forward on the edge of the sofa and let the question linger, studying the painted crucifix above the mantel.

“Would I?” she asked aloud. “Wait. It’s crooked.” She stood, and carefully adjusted Christ’s stiff arms to be parallel to the mantel then sat back down on a cushion next to him. “No. It doesn’t bother me.”

His tongue swelled out of his rounded lips, then back into his mouth, as though it were breaking the chill in the room. He finished his scotch and tonic. “Would you like another?” he asked migrating to the cart table.

“No. I’m still working on this one,” she held her glass forward. “Besides that was a little strong for me.”

“That’s the usual amount.”

“Ah-huh,” she nodded incredulously. “Tasted strong.”

He had the remote in this hand, clicked to the cable church network, setting the square remote down then sat on a cushion next to her.

“Come here!” He gingerly tugged on her fleece jacket. “Ohh, this is sooo soft.”

“It is, isn’t it?” Her voice bashful. He pulled her into his chest, wrapping his arms around her.

“This is much better. What does this do to you?” His fingers like raw potatoes were cold and clammy as he reached to take her hand. “I should ask what it does to me. Ooooh, look at your arm hairs,” he giggled, “I love them.” He held her shoulders forward in front of him, then tapped on her back, “Do you like this?” His

fingers spastically bounced along her spine. "I play organ pieces on people's backs, love to give massages and I am very good at it." His hand slowed, feeling the edges of her shoulders, rubbing the front of her neck. "Are you okay with this?" he asked.

"Ummhuh. It feels good." He stroked the front of her neck and chest. "You're getting lower." Her voice sounded an octave deeper.

"What do you mean?"

"You're rubbing lower down my chest. If I didn't know any better I'd say you were feeling me up."

"Is that a problem?"

"No, an observation."

Her back was warm against him.

She pulled out of his arms. "Does this bother you?"

"No."

"Going to Mass, listening to the priests, being here in the rectory?"

"No," he sighed.

"You don't feel hypocritical, or guilty or any sense of remorse?"

"Not at all."

"Wouldn't it bother you if Father John walked in on us?" He looked distracted over her shoulder at the door, his face turning two shades paler.

"Oh you're right." He shuffled past the couch to the front door, "We should lock it."

He came back and kneeled down in front of the sofa. He stuck his rubbery tongue in her mouth like a serving of eel between her lips. Then he kissed her neck.

"It doesn't bother me," she pulled away again, "that you've had sex in here before, that's not it. What bothers me is that you had to hide it. Your old girlfriend wasn't welcome in here. You had to hide her from the priests. It feels so damned high schoolesque."

"You're right. But it's where I live," his jaw tightened. "What do you want me to do?" He twitched like a bobble doll. "Get an apartment? I can't help it if this is my home."

"I know." She was quiet, as though listening to a prayer.

“I’m not a priest, Marcy.” He straightened his back. “I make my confessions. Working here is just my job.”

Voices chirped from the TV screen.

“I know that.”

“I assure you that you won’t be the last girl in here.”

“Oh I already know that. I don’t doubt it one bit.” She squirmed. “It’s not about you living here, it’s about integrity,” her face growing red like the knit ribbing of her shirt. “And that means something to me. Luke, I can’t do this.”

An hour later, he sat alone on Father John’s peacock sofa and poured another scotch. *In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.* He looked closely at the face, and the gold painted features of Jesus hanging on the wooden cross. For a split second they made eye contact. He took another drink. And blinked. He knew what he’d seen. Jesus had winked. With his hand in his crotch he walked to the crucifix on the wall. He took it down, held it tight and walked through the dark hallway of the rectory to the kitchen. He stopped at the green fridge, opened the door, and set the crucifix in the freezer next to the ice tray.

UNCONDITIONAL

by Amy Ruttinger-Jones

Unconditional Love

What does that mean?

Is it having to be a certain way?

Is it abiding by some rule that your person can't break,
if you do then no one will love you?

Unconditional Love

What does that mean?

Is it wearing pink or accentuating your body to attract the opposite sex?

Is it saying yes ma'am or no ma'am to mothers who don't respect you
and force their ideas of how you should be?

Is it saying yes sir or no sir to fathers who value their sons more than
their daughters?

Is it being nice to peers when they call you

Dyke

because of your short hair, refusal to wear lipstick, pink ribbons or satin
black dresses?

Is it when your religion says you have to be and act like a subservient
second class citizen?

They tell you to not voice your opinion even though you disagree.

Is this Unconditional Love?

Is this Unconditional Love?

I will not be afraid to portray myself how I feel best suits me.

My opinion counts.

I will be heard

Even if you call me a Bitch,
or some other derogatory word.

I will not be confined by religion's mold of

Self-hatred

In hopes of being saved, by my
Future Master
Who pretends that I am equal to keep me satisfied.

I will love the daughters
who are unwanted
By their fathers
Because of the large
Axe wound
Between their legs.

I will purposely wear neutral clothing to free myself from the
unwanted role of expected traditions.

If someone doesn't like it, I will LET THEM KNOW that it's
their problem, not mine!
They can't put conditions upon our "relationship"
In hopes that someday I will fulfill my side of our fake interaction.
So let me tell you this, if you want to be my friend, and be in my
life then stop setting down ultimatums and just let me be.

It's not me!
IT'S NOT ME!!

MEMORIES THAT LAST

by Marjorie L. Blackwood

There have been many occasions during the course of our lives that are forever imbedded in our memories—we relive those memories again and again because of the impact they have on us. Some are more interesting than others because they appeal especially to those desires or longings that have been realized or materialized either in the form of a dream come true or a wish fulfilled.

Having been separated from my siblings at a young age, I always felt that void which I thought nothing but seeing them again could fill. They had all migrated to the United Kingdom, not realizing how much I was hurt to be left behind. From that time onward I thought that I had treasures in the foreign land and hoped that some time in the not so distant future, I would stand on its soil. I little imagined the beauty that its glorious shores had to offer, having learned so much of the terrible snowstorms and torrential rains it would often experience in winter.

In the summer of 1976, I was privileged to visit England for the first time. The country had been experiencing its warmest summer in twenty years and the natives were busy complaining about the weather, but for people like me, coming from a tropical island where there is summer all year round, it worked out fine. I was thrilled by its vast meadows, beautiful rose gardens and old Victorian-style buildings; but seeing my brothers and sisters again was not the least of my happiest moments. Having been so fascinated with its green meadows, open countryside and beautiful rivers, I spent every day of my visit exploring.

My first stop was Stratford-upon-Avon. I had learnt so much about this village and its remarkable Sixteenth Century history and was more than thrilled to be there, to be experiencing it in person. The emphases in this village are the things related to the great poet and playwright William Shakespeare and the people who played a part in his life. I was privileged to stand in his bedroom, to see his little chestnut colored wooden crib in which he had lain as a babe. Things were surely different in those days but for such reasons we are blessed to have these things preserved so that we could experience them in our lifetime, I thought as I went from room to

room. I stood in his kitchen and by the fireplace. The cookwares were made of copper, some had handles approximately two feet or more in length, and although I realized that they were designed to suit the customs of that era, I was quite relieved that we finally had more modern ones. However, I cherished everything that my eyes beheld in that cottage, so ancient and so beautiful. I thought that I finally had a taste of what life was like for the wealthy of the sixteenth century.

Using a footpath across the field from Stratford, we came to the village of Shottery-in-Warwickshire, to a charming half-timbered farmhouse where Anne Hathaway, Shakespeare's wife, was born. The well-built thatched cottage with its beautiful rose garden extended a kind of welcome to passersby. It still seemed to radiate the warmth and dedication of the hearts of its occupants of those many centuries past.

The highlight of the trip, however, was the moment when I found myself sitting in a boat on the river Avon, with oars in hand. It took me only about five minutes to learn to row. Once I started, I felt a great sense of accomplishment and thought I had just outdone myself. My heart was light as the boat sailed smoothly along. I watched the white swans as they swam in front and alongside me in the same direction. The water was calm and a greenish blue. I cast my eyes toward the bank to admire the green well kept grass that carpeted it. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre towered to the left over Avon and cast its shadow upon the waters. The boat, the swans, and the ripples we made together brought new life to that picture we saw in the water. The moment was serene and I couldn't help but think, "Was the great wizard here honoring us with his greatest performance yet?" For the first time in my life, I was one with nature, as if I had suddenly been transported into another world.

The next day I was on my way to Snowdon Peak in Wales. The road, quite narrow, wound itself snakelike around the hill and as we were nearing the summit I discovered something very interesting: the entire hill was formed not from the rocks and earth of which we are so accustomed, but of slate. Excited, we decided to get out and do some exploring on foot. We were very busy trying to separate slabs of slates large enough to write on and also

small particles that we could use as pencils. Suddenly, I was in touch once again with my early childhood. I could not have been more than six years-old when my older sister and I used to hold hands and walk into the schoolhouse, my large slate tucked under my arm. The same childhood curiosity knocked at my brain as I viewed the surrounding landscape and for a moment I had forgotten all the responsibilities and obligations in which my now adult life was entombed. I was elated as I briefly relived those moments and heedless of what challenges I might face in my adult life, I would always find time to slip behind that ancient veil and give birth to a smile.

AWAKE

by Melissa Sillitoe

Morning comes cold in blue light.
One bird sings. I wake too soon
from unsolved dreams. My head is tight
as daylight blurs the fading moon.

Love, I prayed this greenest leaf
to unfold, to drink its dew in sips.
Last night's wine tastes less sweet
Without your teeth on my lips,

urging *now*. Morning waits at the door,
brings us doubts on a breakfast tray.
I won't want enough, just more,
when I show myself out today.

But while you wake let me speak
without words. *I'm yours*, I lie,
and mean it. You sigh and pull me
away from the half awake sky.

OUR THOUGHTS MIGHT HAVE TEETH

by Kendra Thompson

We're stuck in so much traffic
today. It's me, the girl-voice of kindness, my heart
and so much anxiety. I am about to give
up on this breath-holding contest. I'll take ten-
th place. The girl inside, she
whispers saying, "Kendra: listen...listen..."

Whenever I choose not to listen
I regret it later. For a moment, the traffic
subsides and the catholic nun inside my heart
brings out the ruler. My knuckles red, I give
into the Buddha-breathing. My ten
A.M. coffee begins to wear off, and she,

the woman at the stoplight, in the Lexus in front of me, she
is sighing. She applies makeup, checks her cell phone, her eyes
don't listen

to the blood-boiling, high anxiety traffic
inside her own Nordstrom-coated heart.
I switch my focus from inward to outward. I give
the girl in me a chance to reflect. Often

she finds the good. The child in me often
gathers happy moments. She
kind of drives me crazy with all that positive ju-ju...but "LISTEN,"
she tells me, "listen to that cracking breaking traffic
that splits up your insides. It makes your heart
crumble like drywall." Her interior words make me give,

I'm trying not to cry on the freeway, trying to give
an impression that "I'm okay, you're okay." Ten-
thousand internal alarms sound and she
shakes her head. Listen-
ing to yourself involves the hardest kind of traffic
to weave through: the prickly parts of one's heart.

I begin to engage my own heart,

hearing the worried warbled answers I give
myself. It isn't often
that we are able to give ourselves credit. She,
the girl inside, smiles at me, pleased that I have listen-
ed. Together, me and all my problems, supercede the traffic.

I give into traffic
often without deciding to listen.
The magical 'she' commends my reflective heart.

THE HMOs ARE SPYING ON US

by Gregory Tippetts

In the latest health insurance news, HMOs are now spying on policyholders and contacting them to make sure they are living a healthy lifestyle. I am currently insured by Firing Squad Health and Tree Trimming Service. The other day a representative from the Firing Squad called to check up on me.

“Hello, Mr. Tippetts, this is Twinkie Monroe, no relation to Marilyn, but I’m calling on behalf of Firing Squad Health and Tree Trimming Service. How are you today?” she asked.

“Just fine,” I said with caution.

“Wonderful to hear that, Mr. Tippetts. I just need to take a few moments of your time to ask you a few questions. Is that okay with you?” she asked.

“That’s fine, Twinkie, just don’t take too long.”

“I won’t. I promise. Okay, according to our records you don’t smoke, is that correct?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“But our records show you were seen smoking a cigar on a golf course in Miami last December.”

“Well, I never smoke cigars and I was never in Miami last December. I was in Jacksonville. Sending spies around the world to check up on policyholders sounds very expensive. No wonder my premiums are so high.”

“No, sir, according to our records you were most certainly in Miami last December. You were also seen smoking a cigar. As for the cost of spying on policyholders, nothing is too good for the people who count on our services. Remember our slogan? *Life is better in front of a firing squad*,” Twinkie said.

“I was never in Miami, I don’t smoke cigars, and I disagree with your stupid slogan. I really don’t want to continue this conversation.”

“Well, you sound a bit stressed out. This stress could raise your blood pressure, which in combination with your nasty smoking habit could lead to a heart attack or stroke. I hope we don’t have to raise your premiums,” said Twinkie.

“For the last time, I don’t smoke, I’m not stressed out, and I don’t have high blood pressure!” I said hanging up the phone. A few seconds later the phone rang again and I answered it.

“Hello, Mr. Tippetts, this is Twinkie Monroe again, no relation to Marilyn. If you refuse to answer the rest of the questions on this survey, I will be forced to cancel your policy. Now, shall I continue?”

“Okay,” I said in an unpleasant tone.

“Now, according to our records you jog five times a week. Is that correct?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“But our records clearly show you fail to wear sunscreen.”

“It’s none of your business if I wear sunscreen or not. Besides how do you know so much? Do you have sunscreen spies also?”

“I feel your blood pressure rising again. I hope we don’t have to raise those premiums.”

“Look,” I said trying to change the subject, “you told me earlier Firing Squad also does tree trimming. Is that correct?”

“That’s correct; we also trim trees,” said Twinkie. I guess she figured she had pestered me enough about my health habits.

“Well, I have some trees in my backyard that need trimming. Why don’t you send one of your tree trimmers out here about one o’clock tomorrow?”

“One o’clock? That should be fine,” said Twinkie.

That night I went to bed early and awoke to the loud sound of a chain saw grinding away in my backyard. I got out of bed and squinted out the front window into the dark night. I saw a Firing Squad Health Insurance and Tree Trimming truck parked outside. I looked at my alarm clock. It was one o’clock in the morning. I stormed into the backyard and told the tree trimmer to go away and come back at one o’clock in the afternoon. “You’ll wake up the whole neighborhood,” I told him. He got in his truck and drove away.

The next day I went to a baseball game with my friend Elvis. I think he is about ninety-five years-old. Elvis credits his longevity to all the Spam he ate in the Army. He loves beer and pizza. At the top of the ninth inning the score was tied and the bases were loaded. The evil Devilhorns were at bat. Mopeg came to the plate. “I’ll eat my shoes if Mopeg hits a home run,” I told Elvis.

The hard crack of the bat told the story. My team, the Dandelions, lost. Jogging shoes taste good with salt and Tabasco. And if you were wondering, shoelaces do taste like spaghetti. As I finished off my shoes, I turned and noticed a man in a black felt hat, sunglasses, and a trench coat speaking into a cell phone. "He just ate his jogging shoes. The rubber on the soles may clog his arteries. This may lead to a heart attack or stroke. We better raise his premiums," said the spy.

I came home with a bad bellyache. I drank two quarts of Alka-Seltzer and took a long nap. When I awoke, I noticed the tree trimmer had returned and finished the job. The trees looked perfect. Firing Squad has good tree trimmers but I wouldn't recommend their health insurance.

OUR COLORS JIVE IN A PAPER HOUSE

By Sandra Albertson, Jimmie Freeman Jr., Oliver Albertson,
Marylee Carla Clarke & Frank Slim

Red, yellow and green.

Bull is red color.

It look like a red house,
also part of our flag.

A pitcher on a table with a bottle of wine and cheese,
a vibrant bowl of fruit
and the apple.

Rose is red color and apple is red color and strawberries.

It look like the color of a fire hydrant a long time ago.

A rainbow shines on a windmill.

Stop signs and streetlights.

