

sine cera

A DiverseCity Writing Series Anthology

Writing It Down

Volume XVIII

April 2015

sine cera is published by the SLCC Community Writing Center

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sine cera: Writing It Down

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Introduction

Everyone Can Write!

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

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

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

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

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

DiverseCity Writing Series Groups

Asian Association

Copper Quill

Gay Writes

Homeless Youth Resource Center

King's English Group

Mt. Olympus Senior Center

The Literacy Action Center

Silver Pen

St. Mark's Tower

Veterans Affairs Salt Lake City

10th East Senior Center

We look forward to the future growth of the DiverseCity Writing Series and are happy to present our sixteenth publication:

sine cera:
Writing It Down

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Writing It Down

Volume XVIII
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Preface

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

—DiverseCity Writing Series Mission Statement

After nine days at the Capitol Reef Field Station, I sought refuge from my six companions in the solitude of the vast desert. I grabbed my black leather journal and headed down a winding, Navajo White dirt road. The sand was hot and dry, the scent of sage and juniper hung in the air, and cicadas created a roaring hum that vibrated in my eardrums. A small, light-brown cottontail bunny hopped across the path, paused to look at me, and hopped behind a large red rock.

I ventured off of the road and down a well-traveled dirt path that led into two towering stone walls that formed a long canyon. A chalkboard sized rock felt like sandstone as I ran my fingers along the surface, stopping just before a faded white name and date painted on the rock—perhaps an early surveyor of the area. I paused at a small wooden fence built to protect archaic petroglyphs created by the Fremont people. I tried to interpret the stories held in the images of animals, hunters, and halos. As the canyon walls narrowed I came to a large panel of names etched in stone by people passing through the area: Jed Herbert 1931, the Clark family, Grace and Emory, and so on. The dates ranged from the late 1800s up to the current year.

I felt compelled to add my name and the year, Shauna Edson 2014, to the list on the massive rock wall. I tried to conjure up a single word I could add to define where I stood in that moment: travel, channel, passage, causeway, progression, or chamber. I thought of the story my images would tell and wondered how my stories would differ from the stories of those that passed through this canyon before me. Stories of the past, of celebrations and sorrow, and stories of future adventures waiting to be had.

Stories are a commonality that draw communities together—everyone has a voice and a story to tell. In the SLCC Community Writing Center's DiverseCity Writing Series writing groups, a diverse range of writers meet at differing locations along the Wasatch Front to discuss writing, read works, and offer constructive feedback, support, and inspiration for all writers to tell their stories by Writing It Down.



Writing It Down

by Cheryl Banks

List, Letter, Poetry
Story, Journal, History,
Cursive, Print, Calligraphy,
I'm writing it all down.

On Paper, Newsprint, Palm of Hand,
Scroll, and Stone, and Metal, and
Wall of Cave, the Internet—
It's been written down.

With Crayon, Stylus, Feather Pen,
Lipstick, Lead, or Fountain Pen
Etched in glass or Drawn in Blood,
You can write it down.

Apologize, Request, Create,
Advertise, Communicate,
Announce, Remember, Decorate,
By writing something down!

Sermon of a Wayward Child

by Doug Woodall

From a very early age, I caused my parents more problems than any other child. I was selfish, resentful, and obstinate. Also, I hated people lording over me. When I started school, I wondered, "What makes the teacher think she can tell me what to do?" This became the basis of my friendship with every principal I ever had. Today I'm much nicer and well behaved than I used to be (I did grow up), but at age 21 I gave my parents a new worry. I started walking away from their faith. So how did this bad boy and wayward child end up teaching Dad lessons about how to treat other people?

The second week of November 2011, Dad was supposed to get on an airplane and head to Arizona to spend Thanksgiving with my second oldest sibling and his family. Instead, he fell seriously ill and ended up in a long-term care facility. No one expected him to live longer than a few weeks.

My oldest sibling claims he was inspired to tell Dad he could choose to live or die. When my brother spoke the words, Dad opened his eyes and said, "You know, I'm not going to die." He didn't. Instead, he lived for 33 more months, but he never lived in his home, again.

Out of all my siblings and in-laws, I had the most opportunities to visit Dad. From the beginning, I started making friends. I can't help myself. I do this everywhere I go. Starting when I was 19, I've had one job after another where I've had to talk to people, even help them with serious problems. Then I tend to like most people. This is why, whenever I went to see Dad, I talked to the receptionist and director; the CNAs, nurses, and cafeteria workers; the physical therapists and the people in charge of recreation; and most of the residents. I knew them by name, and I learned something about their lives.

By contrast, Dad knew the administrative staff, his CNAs and nurses, and some of the cafeteria workers. Because he went to church every Sunday, he knew the people who led the services. The ones he didn't know well were the other residents.

I had more friends than Dad, but I never thought about this. Someone else in the family saw it, and then she discovered one habit Dad had. He didn't call the other residents by name. Instead he used pronouns. "She always plays with her food," or "I don't understand anything he says." When he was asked, "What's her name?" or "What's his name?" he didn't know. But why? Finding the answer, took several months.

Dad didn't see the other residents as peers. Terry, who suffered from Huntington's disease, had lost most of his motor skills. His speech was garbled. He had difficulty holding objects. This meant he had to be fed every bite of food and helped with every drink. Russell, who had a stroke, couldn't speak. He was confined to a wheelchair. Although he could feed himself, he needed someone to bib his napkin at his neck, cut up his food, and put his fork in his hand. Virginia was over 90 years old and blind since birth. She needed people to guide her, say something to her when they were passing her or sitting in the same room with her, and tell her the position of her food on her plate. Dad, who was right in mind but feeble in body, saw himself one way and everyone else another way. He was normal. Everyone else was a freak.

I had no idea the way I acted was going to be a sermon. When I went to help Dad with lunch or dinner, he watched me cut up Russell's food, bib his napkin, and put his fork in his hand. Then I sat between Dad and Terry. I gave Dad a bite of food from his plate; turned and gave Terry a bite of food from his plate. When I saw Virginia, I said hello. Sometimes I got to tell her her chicken was at six o'clock and her potatoes were at three. All the while, I talked to Dad, Terry, Russell, and anyone else who wanted to talk to me. And I did my best to understand their garbled words.

I don't recall saying anything to Dad, but I know that one member of my family kept pressing him to learn the residents' names. After about 18 months, Dad started to realize most of the other residents were victims of unfortunate events. They didn't choose Huntington's disease, stroke, or blindness. That above all else, they were human beings.

**"I
had no
idea the way
I acted was
going to be a
sermon..."**

When Dad decided he'd made a mistake, he started to learn who my friends were. He got to know them. He talked to them as if they were vigorous in body and mind. After some time had passed, he started introducing me to people. Still, I always had more friends than Dad. Why? Although I can't prove anything, I have two thoughts: Difficult children are judged harshly and they hate it, and wayward children have fewer criteria for deciding the worthiness of others.

OK, the truth is I don't know who had the most friends. I'm just trying to see if this wayward child can teach one more sermon.

Table Number 9

by Kathleen Rice

At the assisted living center, in the dining room, we are assigned certain seats at certain tables. If we don't feel comfortable at a certain table, we can request to move somewhere else in the dining room.

I had been sitting at table 6 for a long time, by my friend Judy. One day Judy fell, breaking bones and needing surgery, after which she was sent to a rehabilitation center, and didn't return. Judy's seat at table 6 is now occupied by a huge woman, Florence. She is a nice lady, but too big. We couldn't sit up to the table without our legs touching.

At breakfast, another lady, Lois, was wheeled to our table to sit next to me. This woman couldn't do anything. She tried to drink out of an empty glass. I poured some water in the glass and she picked up my napkin, dipped in the water and sucked on it. She kept sliding under the table. We had to call an aide to come pull her up and when they did, Lois slid back under.

We had an interesting thing going on under the table with my long legs, Florence's big legs and most of Lois's body, all fumbling around under there. I couldn't stand it. I asked to be moved and I was told to pick out a table where I would like to sit.

I decided I wanted to sit at either table 2 or table 9. I was given table 9. At lunch time, I went over to look for my spot. Nancy didn't sit at that table at that time, but she knew people at table 9 well. She had taken an interest in me because I am acquainted with her granddaughter.

Everyone was sitting in their spots when Nancy introduced me. I had seen some of these ladies around, but I didn't know them very well.

"This is Kathy," Nancy said. "Be good to her, she's a special lady."

Hailey, Ginger, Lynnette and Donna, introduced themselves.

Hailey remarked, "I've heard that you don't talk much. You can't say that about me. My talking gets me in trouble."

Ginger remarked, "I heard that you are a writer. I'm a reader. I like murder books."

**“...she
kept falling
down, usually
breaking a bone,
but she just kept
trying...”**

At first I was worried about them not liking me. After a while I became fascinated with their different personalities. People with all kinds of backgrounds live here. Some are obviously well to do and others appear to have come directly from the homeless shelter.

Hailey can be kind and thoughtful, if she likes you, and she likes most people. Her kids are ballet dancers and soccer players and they are good at it.

There is not a person in the world like Ginger. She is funny and thoughtful, always trying to have a good attitude. She attends most of the activities. Her honesty is shocking, but hilarious. She smokes a lot and keeps liquor in her room.

Lynnette was soft spoken with spunk. She was in her nineties and she kept falling down, usually breaking a bone, but she just kept trying. Everyone complained about not being able to hear her or me, as we both had

soft voices. She complained about being left at the table by herself, because everybody ate too fast. After one of her falls, Lynnette broke her hip and went to Rehabilitation. She later returned.

Donna was a pretty lady, but she was flakey. She had a hard time with her memory and couldn't seem to get to meals on time. She would ask something

like, “Now, what was your name?”

“Kathy,” I replied.

She would be eating and again she would say, “Now what was your name?”

Every few minutes, she continued to ask me my name.

Hailey had a problem with Donna. Donna came down for breakfast greeting Hailey and I. Hailey didn't respond. I don't know why. Donna got right in her face saying, “Good morning!” Hailey still didn't respond, so Donna hollered, “Hey you!”

That caught Hailey's attention, “Don't call me Hey!”

After that there was always tension between the two of them.

When someone offends Hailey, she holds a grudge. Ginger tries to tell her to get over it. Ginger is her best friend and the only person who can tell Hailey that kind of thing.

One morning at the table I said, “I've been playing with my cell phone.”

Donna blurted, “You've been playing with yourself.”

“My cell phone! Not myself! My cell phone!”

Nobody laughed. I didn't think it was funny either.

Before breakfast, another morning, Hailey while leaving her room, opened the door, and found Donna laying there in front of her. Hailey called and aide, who called 911 and she was taken to the hospital and didn't return.

Hailey talks a lot. I noticed that she talks like some people write, going into detail, describing and explaining everything she talks about.

One day, she and Ginger were talking about polygamy. I interrupted saying , “I used to be engaged to a polygamist.”

Both ladies dropped their jaws. Hailey responded, “When these quiet people start to talk, it's surprising what we learn.”

We at table 9 are people watchers. Trying to talk soft, Hailey and the rest of us huddled towards the middle of the table. “Look at George flirting with Beth. His wife just died a couple of weeks ago.” Hailey commented.

Ginger stated. “You have to admit, he has a nice butt.”

“I'm 89,” said Hailey. “I've been told women's sex drive surges at 90.”

“At least you have something to look forward to,” Ginger commented.

After Donna and Lynnette fell and were taken away, Hailey invited a man, Herman, to sit at our table. Herman is a nice man who seems to enjoy our company.

We got another lady, June to share our table. She seemed to want to control everything. When she ordered breakfast, she told them that she wanted 1/3 cup of Corn Flakes, with no milk but orange juice, to moisten her cereal.

I decided I wanted to switch chairs, the one I was sitting in faced the wall and I couldn't see anything. I went to sit in Lynnette's old chair. Nancy came over, saying that she wanted to sit at our table. She didn't want to sit in the chair that faced the wall, so she switched the names on the seats, taking June's place.

It seemed that nobody wanted to sit on that chair facing the wall. June was not happy. She and Hailey exchanged some words and Hailey suggested she find another table and June did.

Lynnette returned from Rehab. Although, she was in her 90s, little, and frail, she kept her wits, teasing once in a while. We were trying to be nice to Lynnette. Nancy seemed especially nice. I wished I could be more loving.

At dinner, we were all sitting in our places, when Lynnette pushed her call button. When the CNA, Jacob arrived, she asked him to take her back to her room. Ginger asked, "Are you alright?"

Lynnette replied, "No."

That evening, she went to the hospital. In the morning we asked about her and were told that she was not doing well. She had a massive stroke and died later that day.

Nancy started crying. Hailey remarked, "Nancy cries easy."

Nancy said, "Hailey doesn't have any feelings."

Another lady Phyllis was assigned that seat, but she rarely eats in the dining room. When she does come, Nancy is unbelievably rude, telling her she needs to get out of bed. Phyllis asked, "Why do you worry about me getting out of bed?"

"You're charged for ordering trays in your room." Nancy replied.

"It's my money," was Phyllis's reply.

We watch people and ambulances. The details are confidential, so my friends and I speculate about what was wrong with people who were taken away.

People here fall a lot. They don't always get hurt. One of the men here was gigantic and whenever he tried to sit down, either the chair would break or he would miss it completely. He fell two or three times a day. He always refused to go to the ER. The ambulance drivers had to pick him up. I don't think he ever got hurt. I think his fat served as padding, preventing broken bones. I believe he was told to find another place to live.

Once in a while someone breaks a hip or an arm. Sometimes, when people fall in the night they lay there for hours waiting for someone to find them and help. They gave us emergency buttons which we wear around our neck in case we are in that situation, but I have heard that sometimes it still happens.

I had a neighbor who was the craziest person I had ever seen and I've seen a lot of crazy people in my life. He was

a big man who did rituals. On his patio, he stood chanting and moving his fingers like he was operating a cash register, but nothing was there. In the dining room, he first closed some doors, then walked to a certain spot, and leaned on the wall before walking to his seat. He repeated this at every meal.

Somehow he made an awful noise from his throat. It sounded like he had sand in his throat. In my room at night, I could hear him making that strange noise and then he would start cussing. I was scared of him, but whenever I saw him in the hall he would run back to his room. I realized that he was scared of me.

I was sitting in my room when Nancy knocked on my door. "Did you see what happened? The police are chasing your neighbor."

I looked out the door and saw the police tackle my neighbor, put him in an ambulance and take him away. By the end of the day, he had returned. Two weeks later, he was gone again. He had moved out. I am speculating, but I think they brought him back to wait for a bed to open up in some kind of mental hospital.

While talking about it at our table, Nancy and I were saying that he belonged in the State Hospital. Hailey didn't know what a State Hospital was. She asked, "What is a State Hospital? Is it a hospital for low income people? How do you qualify?"

I replied, "All you have to do to get in the State Hospital is be crazy. It's a mental hospital."

I spend a lot of time writing and I get excited about it. It's hard for me to sit at the table and not talk about my writing. Sometimes, that's all I can think about. One day Nancy said, "I'm looking for a good book to read."

"Should I offer my book to her?" I asked myself. I thought about it for a few minutes, then I said, "You could read my book. The one I wrote."

"I don't want to read something depressing," was her reply.

"Not everything I write is depressing. I wrote a story about my family that's kind of fun. I'll go get it."

When I brought the story to the table and handed it to Nancy, she pushed it aside, so I handed it to Hailey who accepted it. The next day she brought it back to me saying, "You revealed yourself in this story."

I said, "Thank you," while thinking to myself. "If she thought that was revealing, she should read some of my other stuff."

I don't encourage people here to read my book, the one that is extremely revealing. It's not that I don't trust them. I get paranoid and think that everyone would treat me different if they knew my personal stuff.

I made a notebook with my poems on colored paper and I shared it with Hailey. She seemed to enjoy it. The thing about Hailey is, if she says she likes something, she probably does. She doesn't seem to have difficulty saying what she thinks.

Ginger is a fun, fun person. When they are slow waiting on us, she'll say, "It's because they like us so much, they want to keep us in here."

Herman doesn't talk much, but he laughs at us.

Hailey doesn't know much about Mormonism. The church ladies came to visit our table and they brought us each a little poem and set it on our place mats. Hailey was offended saying, "If I were interested in their church, I would tell them. They don't need to be pushing it on me."

When I told Hailey that Judy may be coming back, she remarked, "Then we'll be back to step one." I hadn't realized that anyone knew about my Judy problem. Hailey thinks I have blossomed since Judy left.

The ladies at this table are very picky about what they eat. At breakfast, Hailey will ask for toast, bacon and fruit, no egg and always tells them to toast the bread on both sides.

Nancy orders either a banana or yogurt and sometimes a bowl of shredded wheat.

Herman orders corn flakes, scrambled eggs, fruit and no meat.

I usually order cereal, unless they have either pancakes, French toast or omelets.

The waitress always gets it all mixed up. Hailey gets toast and egg. Nancy receives a banana, yogurt and a bowl of cereal. To Herman they bring, everything including the meat and I receive a hard boiled egg and a banana.

We all stare at our plates. Hailey says, "Herman, I'll take that bacon that you didn't order."

Nancy says, "Hailey, I'll trade you this yogurt for your egg."

I asked Nancy, "Do you want your shredded wheat?" "No, you can have it."

As we trade our food around to each other, we burst into laughter.

Another day at table 9.

Cavern Kiss

by Jim Kelley

We were at Carlsbad Cavern on our month long family vacation. I was making small talk—okay, more like flirting—with a girl in line as we waited for our tour. When my arm happened to brush against her bare arm, it was nothing like being jostled in a crowd. Later I used the excuse of trying to see around the people in front of us to move closer. I pressed my shoulder against hers. She nudged me back. We took hold of each other's hand. She wanted to swing our arms but I put a damper on it. If she started to skip I... I didn't know what I'd do—but she did. She had pretty, playful eyes.

Not long after the ranger turned the lights off so we could experience total darkness, our lips met for a soft, gentle kiss. Oh, it was nice. She tasted like Red Vine licorice. Darkness lasted long enough, I was considering stealing another kiss. When we both squeezed hands at the same time I was sure she felt the same. Our noses were almost touching—when the lights came on! I retreated and coughed a nervous laugh.

Squinting in the bright sunlight we moved out of foot traffic to exchange addresses. I was holding both her hands at chest level. With our eyes, we silently agreed on another kiss. Instinctively, we each did a nervous check around. "O.K. Mom, give me three minutes! I'll be right there! Three minutes!" she said. Our faces had matching disappointed looks. I was sure it hadn't been three minutes when she squeezed my hands. Let go. Turned and walked away. Being an inexperienced girl watcher, I didn't know if that gentle sway was just the way girls walk or enhanced for my benefit. I'd have to study the subject later. Before disappearing into the crowd she turned and directed a shy, flirty little wave at me. I watched her walk away knowing it would be the last time I would ever see her.

Dad thought she was cute and wondered why I didn't take her for ice cream. Good idea, Dad—too late now.

A couple of days down the road, I was day dreaming as we passed around a package of Red Vines. I closed my eyes. It wasn't at all like the intimate darkness in the

cavern. When I rubbed my lips against each other, my rough chapped lips were nothing like the pleasure of her smooth delightful lips. Red Vines aren't nearly as good plain as they are when seasoning a girl's lips. It did seem to bring the temperature in the hot car closer to the coolness of the cavern.

When we got home, there was a post card she'd sent from the Grand Canyon. "The Grand Canyon is impressive, especially at sunset," she wrote, but her favorite place out west is Carlsbad Cavern. She didn't sign it with love. No hearts. No OO's. No XX's. Of course not. It wasn't love. There were no hugs to be remembered with OO's. XX's on a piece of paper could hardly pretend to represent a kiss by a girl's lips spiced with Red Vine licorice.

She signed it,

"remember me 'cause I'll remember you"

Just a Dream

by Kenny Lee

Caught up in the moment, I said something wrong
While working on writing a valuable song
It has no real value, except through my eyes
A vision of beauty, a trophy, a prize

I know I'm not for her, but noticed too late
She's my tomato, my one perfect song
After we met, took her out on a date
And then, fell in love, and it didn't take long

But I jumped the gun, shot a little too soon
But that's what I do, put my foot in my mouth
Instead of light betting, I shoot for the moon
Now she's going westward, and I'm heading south

We're too much alike to be lovers, but Lord?
If I could ask something, and get it right now
I'd ask God for Lisa, if I could afford
If that could be something the Lord would allow

The Lord gave us Jesus, and He gave us life
How could I ask Him for anything more?
I'll ask Him for Lizzy, to make her my wife
Bring her to the threshold, and open the door

There's a picture of Jesus I've nailed to my wall
Under that there is Liz and I, proper and neat
She's in her white dress that's now hung in the hall
I'm in my tuxedo, the Bishop to meet

Then she lied underneath me, t'was love, not just sex
Then we looked in the mirror, our faces were gleaming
Then that noisy alarm woke me right up at six
When I woke up, I noticed that I was just dreaming

Fishing, Hiking, and Hunting at City Creek

by Paul Rosser

When I was in my twenties, my brother, Don, some friends, and I went fishing up City Creek Canyon quite often. To catch the fish, we walked down the stream, stuck our hands underneath rocks to scare out the fish, and caught them with our nets. We then took the fish home and cooked them on the grill in tinfoil.

We also hiked the mountains in City Creek together. We always started our hikes at Wasatch Springs Park. One time we left early in the morning and hiked all the way to Bountiful and back before it got dark. We took water in our canteens to drink and some sandwiches and snacks to eat. While hiding, we saw an F16 jet fly right over us! The trees shook and dust flew all over! We thought we'd get blown off the mountain, but we took cover until it passed over us. By the time we got home from hiking all day, we were tired.

My dad, brothers, and I went deer hunting for two years together in City Creek, and we brought home a deer each year. We had the deer cut up and made into deer jerky to eat.

I have good memories of going fishing, hiking, and hunting with my friends, brothers, and dad.

Massacre Canyon

by Don Hale

School was out! The weather was warm, the sky was clear. To my 14-year-old mind it was paradise. What was there to be done? I was inspired to ride my bicycle out to Massacre Canyon. I'd always wanted to see what was up there. Maybe there were some artifacts left from the event that gave the canyon its name, some arrowheads or other treasures. My parents were not home, so who was to tell me "no".

I hopped on my bike and headed west out of town on the two-lane state highway. After three or four miles the road turned north toward the base of the mountains. The country I was passing through was arid farmland. Beyond the old cottonwood trees that lined both sides of the road there was mostly dry pasture populated by a few cows or horses or just weeds. There was a sign announcing the presence of "Starvation Acres," a turkey farm owned by the father of one of my high school classmates.

A few more miles and I was at the base of the mountains. The road turned west again and followed the contour of the foothills for about three more miles to where the dry water course from the canyon passed under the highway, about twelve miles from town. I hid my bike under the bridge so no one would steal it and started up the narrow canyon.

My imagination took flight as the canyon narrowed more and more. Was it the faint sound of a war hoop from a century and one-half ago that the breeze just wafted to my ears? With each step I took the climb became steeper and the sound became louder.

In front of me loomed a dry waterfall. To really explore the canyon I would have to climb it, so up I went. The sides were very steep and covered with loose rocks. Each step sent rocks and gravel cascading toward the base of the fall, and sobered my thoughts. Finally it was so steep it was necessary to crawl. Then I stalled out. Neither up nor down presented an attractive option. Higher up the rocks appeared to be even looser.

Looking down did not cheer me up either. About twenty-five feet down, the bottom of the fall was covered with a deep layer of soft sand which unfortunately was dotted with large rocks. If I jumped or fell I had a fifty-fifty chance of hitting one or more of them. As I looked around for a way out of my predicament, a movement caught my eye.

Six or seven Indian warriors were coming up the trail, moving quickly and silently. My fear was replaced by

fascination as I watched them deploy behind the larger rocks. It was easy to see them from my position. From the trail they must have been invisible.

The faint war hoops became louder and louder. A war party of ten or fifteen warriors appeared on the trail. They slowed when they saw the waterfall. The tracker out in front of them held up his hand in

a signal to stop. He scanned the sand briefly and pointed to several of the large rocks. From right behind him the leader of the party barked out a command and the battle was begun.

The breeze-borne hoops were joined by screams of terror, the sounds of arrows thwacking into human flesh and thrown rocks bouncing off the sides of the canyon. The din of deadly combat raged through my consciousness until suddenly the sounds of battle faded away as I watched the victorious braves walk out of the canyon in silence carrying the bloody scalps of their enemies by their hair. Then the entire vision disappeared. It was as if nothing at all had occurred. The silence was complete except for my pounding heart.

The afternoon was wearing on; no one knew where I was. My bike was invisible from the highway. It was impossible to stay there all night because falling asleep would cause me to crash on the rocks below. The possibility of a broken leg or a crushed skull was not appealing. Even if I didn't fall, nothing would be different in the morning.

The narrowness of the canyon emphasized the lengthening of the shadows. Several times I tried to move in one direction or another, but each effort only confirmed

**"My fear
was replaced by
fascination as I
watched them..."**

the reality of my plight. Fear gripped my mind. What was I going to do? I had to do SOMETHING!

There were no rocks visible in a spot fairly close below my position on the side of the fall. Hoping there were none just below the surface of the sand, scared or not, I jumped and just as my body launched from side of the fall, my feet slipped. Thoughts of death occurred to me, but in spite of my slipping feet I landed in a patch of soft, cool sand.

I went home.

Corvus

by Ked Kirkham

What elements this season
have encouraged you so,
that you dance in crowds
beneath the trees.

As if you were the fruit yourselves
ripening and falling
to bounce in the grass
of the game park,
the cemetery
and the school yard.

Onyx and obsidian,
I too thought you black and white
until summer lights
emit rather than reflect
from your back
as you hop then fly
from my foot step.

I approach,
are you wary of my attention?
I want to get closer;
I want to know you!
I want to look into
the night sky of your feathers
and your tar pit eyes,
to discern the depth
of their colors

and the mystery of your nature,
and the elements
of this season, magpie,
that have encouraged you so.

Middle Road Dogs

by Busaya Dimitrov

In my home country, Thailand, many dogs and cats are homeless. They live in temples, on the streets, or other areas of a village. We don't have many shelters like the USA does. We call these dogs "Middle Road Dogs".

I never thought to take care of dogs or cats because I always lived in apartments where pets weren't allowed. In 1999, the first time that I lived in a townhouse in a village in Bangkok, I saw a lot of dogs and cats on the street in front of my house. Some people gave them food. Some kicked them. Some rescued them. I heard dogs fight in the street and bark at strange people or dogs every night, and I suffered every time I heard their painful screams.

I often didn't stay in my house because I had to travel for my job. When I was home, I always gave them food and water, and they wanted to stay with me. It was hard for me to take care of them during that time. However, I rescued one dog to live in my house, and I let many dogs stay in front of my house because I didn't have much space inside.

One day I left home, and when I came back, I didn't see any dogs. I asked my neighbors and they told me that an officer came and caught all of the dogs. I had only one female dog in my house. I called her "Happy" because the other dogs couldn't bite her anymore. I would make her happy. She was medium size, with black eyes, and short white hair with black spots on her body. She wasn't a Dalmatian, but some kind of mixed breed. I took care of Happy and paid close attention to her. I learned many things from her such as how she never got angry at me when I harmed her by squeezing her mouth because she had barked at other dogs passing my house. I worried the neighbors would complain about her barking. When I harmed her, she looked into my eyes, beseeching my mercy. It made me hurt, too. I lived with her only two to three months, and then she died because someone gave her poisoned food.

After Happy died, I rescued more dogs and cats again and again until my house was full. I rescued three dogs and four cats. I took care of them like they were my family, and most of them had health problems. I took them to the

"They taught me unconditional love. They did not mind who I was."

that animals and people should not bond. It's considered more important for them to participate in religious rituals such as prayer, meditation, and making donations to the monks or the temples, in order to better themselves in this life for the next. Too many of them are ignorant about animals.

Fortunately, I had an opportunity to care for my dogs and cats. They taught me unconditional love. They did not mind who I was. They were never angry at me even if I harmed them or abandoned them occasionally because I had to go on business trips. They always gave me real happiness. I learned how to be more in harmony with nature and understood what they wanted by their body language and their eyes. The dogs and cats lived together in harmony without prejudice. They helped the evolution of my soul. I felt my spirit grow softer than ever before and understood myself better. I learned to stop thinking of only myself and my desires and to think of others.

All of this makes me want to devote my remaining time to help middle road dogs and cats in Thailand. My personal preference is to take care of my health by natural means and to take care of pets by natural means too. So I decided to learn holistic animal care, but sadly there are no classes here in the USA. However, I studied an online class at the College of Integrative Veterinary Therapies in Australia. I'll finish the program in May of this year. If I pass the examination, I'll receive a certificate. I also want to learn dog training and grooming, but I don't know where I'll learn this. I'm willing to use my knowledge to help pets in my home country as much as possible. I want to make a shelter there and train animals to help people. I hope Thai people will learn how dogs can help people and pay more attention to them. Then Middle Road Dogs will decrease.

hospital many times but they died. I felt so sad when they died. I felt guilty because I did not have enough time to pay attention to them.

In my country, many people don't take care of dogs and cats the way they take care of their children and other family members. There's a big separation between animals and humans. Many people believe

Are You Sure These Years Are Golden?

by Rae Miller

I'm not sure who it was that started calling the later years of life the Golden Years. I'm not sure why either. I am sure that it was a big mistake. I think of Golden as something of great value, as in the Olympics', the first place winner gets the gold. The gold standards, the golden idol, 24 karat gold, a gold star, all represent importance, accomplishment, power or great worth.

My experience is when one starts getting mail from AARP little changes in the body begin to rear their ugly head. Arthritis may slow you down a little bit, ache in the knees or other joints will happen, but you don't pay much attention cause it's not too bad yet. Just take an over the counter pill and carry on.

Then when you find yourself eligible for Social Security, the over the counter solution no longer works and you notice stuff really changing. If it doesn't ache, change color, sag, or stop working it falls off.

You may notice your skin starting to wrinkle especially on your face along with the multi-color complexion. Then there are the various brown spots that appear all over the body. Some folks call them liver spots. (I think they look like Giraffe Freckles.) They are truly lovely especially the ones on your nose and cheeks. Those on your arms and legs can be hidden with long sleeve shirts and long pants - course you'll roast in the summer.

I'm impressed with the skin that looks like crape paper with its slight ridges and valleys, as far as I can tell it appears mostly on the arms. Let's not forget the cottage cheese thighs (they are really great with divots that make a golf ball look smooth as silk) how quaint!

Do you remember how tall you were in high school? How many inches have you lost? I figure about 1 ½ inches were lost but then I realized my feet were longer requiring bigger shoes. Well, now I know where those inches are.

It is said that your ears and nose keep growing as you age; how exciting is that? When one has a large nose already this could be frightening. The ears quit working but why would they keep growing? It's hard enough

getting around without having to worry about keeping the ears tucked in place.

It seems, to accomplish a task takes two or three times as long as it did just a few years ago when I used to get the routine house work such as vacuuming, dusting, mopping the kitchen floor, and dishes done in a morning, and that was after preparing breakfast for a family of seven. Today, it is all I can do to get the vacuuming and dusting done before noon and that is after preparing breakfast for two. It does seem however, that I feel in my soul and heart the same way I did 45 years ago. I feel that I can do all the things I always did, yet when I try; I find I often fall short either with the time element or the stamina it takes.

One of my all-time favorites is the arm wings (aka-chicken wings). What are arm wings? Years ago it was muscle. Now it is loose skin that runs from the arm pit to the elbow and sometimes beyond. If you have on a sleeveless shirt and waive good-bye to someone, you could give yourself a black eye or even elevate yourself several inches off the ground.

Let us not forget the flatulence problem. In some cases this issue is at the bottom of loneliness (pun intended). I have seen a room cleared of all occupants, in 10 seconds flat, with the survivors showing symptoms than include runny eyes and repertory problems. Ma, on the Golden Girls used to say, "It wasn't me I haven't eaten a raw vegetable in 6 months."

The only saving grace in all of this is we would rather be here suffering all this golden stuff than facing the alternative. We'll take our dirt nap when we have to, but we'll keep it at bay as long as possible enduring and enjoying the Golden Years.

My Tiny Pets

by Betsy Maxwell

I have some rather odd pets. They are unique to me. I've been interested in snails since I was a child. Recently, I learned more about them by reading a book called Slugs and Snails. I found out that a snail's foot has a sole. Snails have teeth on their tongues. The tongue is called a radula. I also learned that snails like to hibernate, which means they seal their moisture inside their shells while they sleep. Most garden snails can live about two years. Maybe mine will live longer.

Why do I love snails? I love that they glitter when light shines on them. I love to watch them crawl and eat their food. I currently have two pet snails.

The first snail I rescued happened when I walked down the sidewalk one July day. I saw a snail shell and thought the snail was dead. When I picked it up, to my surprise it was still alive. I took the snail home and made a home for it. I looked at the shell a little closer, and it seemed to have the shape of a comet on it, so I chose to call this snail Comet.

In August, I saw another snail just outside my apartment under a bush playing by some mud. I asked myself if I really needed another snail, but I took this one in too. I called this snail Mudd-Buddia.

They have their own condos, even though snails have both male and female parts so they can produce eggs without a mate. Comet is on the bottom floor and Mudd-Buddia is on the top floor. I made the condos using household items such as plastic containers and plastic baskets. The condos have dirt and rocks in them. My snails also have toys to climb on when I bring them out, such as a slide and a little house. The house has moving parts – a window and a door. But their favorite toy is my arm, on which they love to climb. If I have an itch, then I let them go over it and the itch goes away. The slime feels cool when I let them climb on me.

I feed them vegetables such as lettuce and carrots. I have to make sure no bugs steal their food, so I randomly check for bugs. I give them a damp folded paper towel to drink water from.

Comet and Mudd-Buddia have their own unique personalities. They both like to play, but Comet is more outgoing than Mudd-Buddia, popping out of the shell the second I pick Comet up. I've noticed that Comet wakes up faster than Mudd-Buddia when I pick them up.

My husband doesn't mind it when I take one of the snails out to play. Oh, did I tell you? My snails like to be kissed, too. All my husband says is I should wash up after handling them.

So in conclusion I think this is some form of therapy. I call it snail therapy. My snails help get me in a good mood. My snails make funny faces at me. I want to have them as long as I can and be friends forever. If one or both have babies I'll have a great big party. And then I don't know what I'll do after that.

China

by Lily Wu

I am from China. It is in south Asia. The capital city is Beijing. The leader of China is Xijinping. The main industry is manufacturing. The largest river is Yellow river. The weather in south is hot, but north is very cold.

China has population of 1.357 billion. There are 696,340,752 male; there are 644,944,400 female. Chinese people the life expectancy is 75 years. Chinese languages people speak are Standard Mandarin, but China has 56 ethnic groups who speak different languages.

In China people work as: Rice harvesters, toy makers, textile mill jobs, Family businesses like selling their own crops to people at a certain place... usually called a Flea Market.

China has many religions Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Christianity.

China first emperor is Qin Shi Huang from 220 BC – 10 September 210 BC. He is very outstanding leader; He dominated all China; He has many good contributions to China.

China's oldest city is Xi'an. It more than 3,100 years of history. Xi'an have many ancient attractions, such as: Terracotta army in 210 – 209 BC.

I miss my country food, spicy noodle, steamed fish, hot pot. I also miss my family, friends and go to KTV night club, drinking beer and playing majong.

I came to USA from China Hong Kong by plane in April 23/2014. Before I lived in GuangXi China. I came USA because my husband is American men. My husband help me find the school is ESL school, learning English.

Now, That's a Piece of Cake

by Annette Dennis

Two elderly brothers, Larry and Saul, are sitting at the table in Larry's kitchen, preparing to make a cake for their friends. The ingredients are in the middle of the table, as the two men begin their task.

"OK. Now Saul, you have the flour, sugar, baking soda, and baking powder, right?"

"Yes, Larry, and I will assume that you've got the eggs, and, of course the chocolate, and whatever we need for the icing," Saul impatiently replied. "So what's the reason we're doing this again? I can't seem to remember."

Larry let out a big sigh, "Of course you don't remember. All you think about is that old biddy, Doris, giving you the eye all the time when we're at the senior center. Just because you have the silver hair, you think that all the old broads are always drooling over you. Other than that, we look about the same, and to remind you why we're doing this, it's because we both wanted to bake a cake for a friend, Doris probably. We decided if we made enough batter for both cakes, we could save time and be done with it!"

"You old codger! I've seen the way you look at Doris. You're so jealous of me it's pitiful. OK then, let's get this thing started," Saul grumbled. "Just get your ingredients, mix them up, and I'll mix mine up, then we can just throw them together. Do you have the recipe so we know how much of everything we need?"

"Do you think I'm a doddering old fool? Of course I have it. Geesh! So who are you baking your cake for anyway?" Larry murmured.

Saul answered, "I don't need to tell you. It's none of your business."

Larry just shook his head and said, "Fine, then I guess I won't tell you either. You sure do complicate things sometimes."

When the cakes were finished, they put them on a rack to cool. Saul looked at Larry with a slight grin, saying, "I'm so glad THAT part is over! We're almost done now. What kind of frosting do you want to put on this?" Saul asked.

Smiling slightly, Larry responded, "Oh, let's just use chocolate icing since the cake's chocolate. That should be good enough."

"Sounds good to me, Larry. They seem to have cooled down now. Let's finish this up with the icing and go deliver our cakes!"

The brothers' looked at each other with a big grin on their faces, grabbed their cakes, and handed them over to each other. "Happy Birthday Saul, you old coot."

Saul chuckled, "Happy birthday to you too, Larry. Remember, I'm still the oldest by six minutes, so let's put the candles on the cakes, and I'll even let you blow yours out first!"

"Sounds great to me! Hey! Do you want to get a few beers and shoot some pool somewhere?" Larry asked excitedly.

"Absolutely old man, absolutely."

Mom's Quilts

by Catherine Wright

Mom loved to quilt. She belongs to two quilting groups which met every week to gossip, laugh, share stories about their grandchildren, & O' yes, "Quilt". My sisters & I had all her quilts tucked away in our basement closets, faithfully displayed whenever she & dad came for a visit. Quilts weren't vogue during this period of decorating our houses. Comforters were the must have items with matching shams & bed skirts. Box stores became popular, so one could always find the perfect set for a reasonable price.

When my boys were growing up they loved the grandma's quilts. The idea she had designed & made it just for them was too irresistible to pass up. I often felt a nearness to mom when I'd see her special quilts on their unmade beds. Yet when they left home the quilts stayed behind. So I packed them up trying to make more room in the basement closet. I never dreamed of giving these quilts away, my mother had made every one of them.

After dad died mom's quilting time became even more important, she had a purpose, a reason, to leave her apartment with friends waiting to see her. Now mom was making all of us larger quilts which could fit queen size beds another new home furnishing must have. She would call the grandchildren to discuss color schemes & pattern designs at great length. We all knew how important it was to encourage her to have an interest, stay focused on the art of living, & feels needed by her family. Somehow it seemed easier to buy larger storage containers than tell mom we didn't need any more homemade quilts.

As the years passed mom's health declined, she could no longer live by herself in rural Montana. She relished the idea of moving closer to my family & finally living in a big city. Mom imagined herself starting a new life at 87. As I helped mom unpack her few but prized possessions I discovered a quilt she had made for herself. It was a masterpiece made with scraps of fabric from various stages of her life as a mother of three daughters. Mom didn't want me to put it on her bed, even though this was the last quilt she would ever make. Mom did not believe it

was worthy of being on display instead she wanted to go shopping for a comforter set at one of the many box stores. I honored her wishes, which seems to confirm mom's idea of being modern & starting that new life in the city.

Mom was with us for five years, three full of fun activities, numerous outings & holiday celebrations. However, as life has a way of reminding us we are wearing out her last years were drawn out with too many doctor visits, adding, changing prescriptions, & days in bed. As mother's failing health dominated our conversations I suggested unpacking that beautiful quilt she had made & laying it gently at the bottom of her bed. She agreed. Mom died ten days later.

This was over four years ago & yes, I still have all of Mom's quilts in my basement closet, but the last one she quilted. This prize quilt is resting on my oldest sister's bed, proudly displaying years of memories designed into a unique pattern of reflecting our lives growing up with mom.

A Foot of Hair

by Karlene Kelley

I looked around the hair salon and clutched my gallon-sized zip bag as I waited for my turn to get a haircut. I smiled wanly at my daughters. They had zip bags too. We were here to get our haircut. The bags were for donations to Locks of Love—the charity that makes wigs for cancer patients. We would have three donations of a foot or more of hair. I would start my cancer chemo treatments next week. My doctor's assistant had strongly suggested I get my waist length hair cut short. My daughters were supporting me, and the charity, by cutting and donating their hair.

I planned a chin length page boy cut. It would be strange to have hair that short. The last time I had a page boy was in seventh grade, about 40 years ago.

I was called back and settled into a chair facing the mirror. I explained that I was donating my hair from the ponytail holder down to Locks of Love. Then wanted a page boy finish.

I looked into the mirror and remembered this morning. I had washed my hair. Then gone into the backyard with my husband. As I sat in the warm June sunlight, he brushed my hair straight out from my head and let it fall back. He was helping me dry the hair. Maybe it was more like he was playing with my hair.

The salon employees took the zip bags, now with hair in them, to send to Locks of Love. The haircuts were free so I made sure the ladies cutting our hair go an extra good tip.

I was still a little unsure about the cut when I got home. My husband looked at me and said, "You look cute. It even makes you look younger."

I smiled at him.

I took a deep breath. "I'm not going to mourn," I told myself. "It's just a foot of hair."

Anonymous, Barry

by John Wilkes

I want to see Barry live. I want to meet him, shake his hand, and thank him for everything.

You might think, from the amazing State of the Union Address he delivered recently and his staunch refusal to quack like a Lame Duck, wielding the mighty weapons of Executive Order and Presidential Veto that I mean our president, "Barry" Obama. But no, he is not the man to whom I refer. I am talking about an equally famous, perhaps even more popular person.

I was on shaky ground one night, contemplating a return to a life of rejection, hiding in the shadows, isolated and ashamed. I needed a meeting. I located and entered the nearest church basement. A large room was full of people clutching coffee cups and downing doughnuts. Someone called for attention, then asked that everyone take a seat.

First came The Karaoke Prayer:

*"Grant me the serenity to accept
The songs that make the whole world sing,
The courage to sing those songs which I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference."*

Then we all recited The First Step:

*"We admit that we were powerless against Barry, and
that our lives had become unmanageable."*

"Who would like to share?" came the invitation.

I was the first to stand. "My name is John, and I like Barry."

"Welcome, John. Keep coming back!"

"Thank you. I have been Barry free for 20 years now, but he's coming to my town and I don't know if I can resist the temptation."

"Work the program, so the program can work for you," I heard the chants of support and encouragement. "Call me, or your sponsor," a few in the group who really wanted to help chimed in. "You do have a sponsor, don't you?"

"I did," I replied, "but he succumbed to a Greatest Hits Box Set."

"I relapsed for six months after watching that Family

Guy episode where, Joe, Peter, and Quagmire go to His concert,” a man in the crowd interrupted. “I lived in a storage unit filled with case lots of Ramen noodles, lay on an U.S. Army cot, and listened to a scratchy 45 rpm of Mandy over and over on a Kenner Close’N Play Phonograph. It was a nightmare.” The moans of pleasure and the sighs of disdain were numerous. One man fainted dead away, and someone had to splash water on his face to revive him. Once he was back in his seat, I continued sharing.

“It started in junior high school for me,” I confessed. “I was already a big Carpenters user, and partook of a bit of non-*Saturday Night Fever* Bee Gees now and then, too.” Audible, but non-judgmental gasps rippled across the room, over the heads nodding in shared acknowledgement.

A woman stood up, and in a cigarette-and-whiskey-ravaged voice, proclaimed, “My name is Lola. I was a showgirl. This is the one that got me hooked.” Her raspy snarl broke into song. “When will our eyes meet? When can I touch you? When will this long yearning end?”

Then, the entire room joined in. “And when will I hold you...again?”

Suddenly, all the Friends of Barry in the room were singing Weekend in New England amid shouts of,

“What’s the date?”
“Where is the venue?”
“When do tickets go on sale?”

This meeting of Barry Lovers Anonymous quickly descended into utter chaos.

I left the group that night singing still, “Last night I waved goodbye”

The Twelve Steps had failed me. I was even more determined to be present at Barry’s upcoming performance. I had no choice. I had owned every album, knew every word to every song, and was intrigued by the questionable gender identity and sexual preference of the man, the legend. The Barry.

After all, hasn’t he written “the songs of love and special things,” “the songs that make the young girls,” (and me), “cry?” He even wrote some Rock and Roll, so we could groove. Barry’s hold over me is insurmountable. Barry is my Higher Power.

Damn you to hell, Manilow! (See you soon. Please do *Copacabana*.)

The Loch Ness Monster

by Fran Crookston

The Loch Ness Monster is the name given a creature that has been rarely observed in a body of water named Loch Ness which is in Scotland. Loch is a Scottish word for lake and Ness is the name given the largest lake by water volume in the British Isles; it is fed by seven rivers. Monster is the name given the creature of that lake. According to the dictionary, this creature qualifies as a monster because it is unusually sized and shaped, not because it is a threat to others, particularly humans. It has been nicknamed Nessie by an internet website dedicated to making information about this creature available to anyone, so that is how I will refer to this creature in preference over monster.

The first recorded sighting of Nessie was almost fourteen and a half centuries ago by the man who would become known as St. Columba. The next known sightings were in 1933 and 1934 when the most famous picture was taken. There have been sightings and even photographs in 1955, 1960, and 1976. One possible explanation for the rare reports is that the entire shore is a sparsely populated area and the closest city is Inverness with about 72,000 people living there. In 1982, a very thorough search using lots of sonar was done, but no confirmation of Nessie’s existence occurred at that time.

Descriptions of Nessie are similar to Plesiosaur, the name given a sea dinosaur with four flippers. It has been assumed that Plesiosaurs became extinct 65 million years ago. However, other types of animals have been around since before then such as crocodiles and sharks. It may be that Loch Ness has a climate that allows Plesiosaurs to exist. The climate and water of the lake are cold.

Most of the research is from the internet website www.nessie.co.uk. Much printed materials (books and magazines) also verify information presented here and offer more perspective. My conclusion is that while I feel no need to prove or disprove Nessie’s existence, if I happen

to be in the area at some future date, I would make a point to visit the shores of Loch Ness and hope to see what others have claimed to see. If I'm that lucky, I'll try to take a picture.

Yellow

by Audrey Weigel

Presently
I came upon you

Yellow, smiling, heroic
Purple, draping, oozing
Green, splendid, spreading

I walked
You followed me

I turned
You winked

I fell
You padded

I left
You came with me

The Walk

by Mary Pat

When I thought of you this morning
my heart raced, and the sun seemed to light up the very
corners of my mind.

Later on today when I thought of our meeting tonight,
everything stopped and I could feel my back stiffen with
anxiety.

Now you are here, and you are tired and cross and want to
be
alone with your own thoughts.

I can feel the anger that follows disappointment start to
make a lump
in my throat.

What happened to the days when everything that touched
us, touched
us together?

You are walking a few steps ahead of me, and I know if I
stopped, you
wouldn't notice and just keep going till you arrived at some
predestined place alone.

I need a beer, and someone to tell me how wonderful I am;
but I'll
keep walking behind you, hoping you may turn around
and smile
after all.

In a New Land

by Muhina Awes

I came to America from Kenya in 2003. I was nervous
because there were so many new things to learn. Suddenly,
I didn't know how to get around, how to cook my own
food, or even how to ask for help. It was like being a little
kid again except I had a wife and children to care for.
Luckily, there were people here to help me.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) was the
agency that got my family and me to Utah. IRC assigned
Ahmed to be our caseworker. He taught me how to get
around using the buses. He also taught us how to use
the household appliances like the range and the washer
and dryer. We learned how to shop in the U.S. because
it is very different from shopping where I came from. In
Kenya, the price of each purchase was not set like it is here;
the price in every transaction was negotiated. In time, I
learned to drive a car and get a job.

With Ahmed's help, I registered for Horizonte School to
learn English which was a requirement of IRC assistance.
IRC offered its services for one year. After that, IRC was
available for help, but had already taught us most of
what we needed to know and my children were in school.
IRC has continued to advise me and in 2008 I became an
American citizen. In 2013, I was able to help a new family
by driving them around.

I am still learning about life in America. I am thankful
for all the help I already have received from IRC and
Ahmed. Through their efforts I am confident and
comfortable here.

Flame Out

by Stephen Proskauer

Cloaked in forest green
Urgent to unveil be seen
In all our hidden hues
We pray for fall to come

Only then we tiny minions
Doff our verdant costumes
Dance silver in the chill moonlight
Quake naked in the clarity of night

Weary of alchemy with light and air
To build a proud arboreal presence
Bulking bark and wooden muscle
Arcing twigs and branches to the sky

We throw down our tattered robes
Stoke the pyre with golden tongues
Suck what summer sap remains
In parched and brittle splays of veins

Our skin blazing
Orange bodies
Paper fragile we
Crumple crackle

To final ignition
Flaming crimson we
Twist off our twigs to spin
And plummet to the ground

Burying each other
In brilliant heaps
More fiery dead
Than ever we were alive

Crumbling into tawny flakes
We offer ourselves at last
To nourish the earth feed
Tender roots down deep

Where no wind kicks up the dust
No sunbeam singles out the strongest
No season calls forth praise or blame
Life and death are all the same.

She Never Guessed Him

by Judy Johnson

Twenty-five-year-old Ruth Lehman walked into the Music Box music store to ask Alice Swensen, her friend, if the store had received any new tunes she could listen to. The store had sound booths with record players inside them where customers could listen to music or sing to the songs without bothering other customers. Ruth looked over at one of the booths and heard a man singing. "Gosh," she thought, "He has a good voice!"

"Who is that singing?" Ruth asked Alice.

"Let's go over and I'll introduce you to my friend," Alice said.

"Okay."

They walked over to the sound booth.

"Ernie Johnson, I'd like to introduce you to my friend, Ruth Lehman," Alice said.

"Nice to meet you," Ruth said. "You have a nice singing voice."

"It's nice to meet you. Thank you," he said.

"Where are you from?" Ruth asked.

"New York City," he replied. "I drove out to Salt Lake City with my friend, Clarence Place, to visit Canyonlands. After talking with some people, they told us it's really hot down there this time of year. We decided to forgo visiting there because I don't like the heat. We stayed in Salt Lake and walked around the temple grounds. I wanted to see my friend, Alice, who is also from New York City and sing some of the new songs that had come into the store."

"I better hurry back to work before my lunch hour is over," Ruth said. "It was nice to meet you. Goodbye."

The next night, Ernie called Ruth, "I heard that Guy Lombardo and The Royal Canadians, your favorite band, is coming to the Coconut Grove this weekend and I'm wondering if you'd like to go with me."

"Yes, that would be fun," she said.

On Saturday night he picked Ruth up from her parents' Granger home. Ruth had a great time talking and dancing with Ernie and listening to the band. She thought, "Ernie sure is a good dancer."

Ernie and Clarence stayed for two weeks and then returned to their jobs in New York. During their stay Ernie took Ruth out to Cowboy and Indian movies, not her favorite. They also went dancing which was her favorite thing to do.

Ruth had many male friends who were fighting against the Axis powers in World War II and received many letters from them. Her sisters teased her whenever letters from fellows arrived, making her guess who the letter was from. Ruth would name every fellow she knew.

One October afternoon, her sister, Lila, teased, "Well, guess who you got a card from?"

Ruth named every fellow except Ernie because she didn't know him very well to expect any correspondence from him. They only had known each other for a few days.

Lila said, "No, it's from Ernie Johnson."

"How did he get my address?"

"Well, I guess he's not too stupid; he read it off the mailbox," Lila replied.

This began their year-long correspondence from August 1942 through November 1943.

However, a couple of times during the year, Ernie took the train from New York City to Salt Lake City. One of Ruth's brothers would pick up Ernie at the train station and let him borrow the car to take her out to the movies and dances.

When he visited at her home, they listened to "Your Hit Parade," a half-hour long radio program sponsored by Lucky Strike cigarettes, featuring popular songs of the day. As they sat on the couch, Ruth wondered, "Will he kiss me tonight or just hold my hand?" If he was going to kiss her, she knew he could be trusted to be a gentleman. All of a sudden, Ernie bent over and kissed her on the lips. "Besides being a good dancer, he is a good kisser," she thought. Ruth knew he loved her very much by the way he looked at her with longing eyes. She felt safe with him by her side.

One Saturday night, after Ernie returned to New York, Ruth was listening to "Your Hit Parade" when the doorbell

**"She
wondered,
'Will he kiss me
tonight or just hold
my hand?'"**

rang. A florist delivery boy stood at the door with a dozen red roses.

"I wonder who sent these?" Ruth thought.

She took out the card and read they were from Ernie. The strong fragrance filled the living room. "They smell divine," she thought. "What a coincidence that they were delivered during the broadcast as the number one song for the week was 'One Dozen Red Roses,' that had played on the radio tonight. That was sweet of Ernie to do. I need to write and thank him for these lovely roses."

On August 29, 1942, Ruth received a letter from Ernie. A few sentences in, he had written:

A fellow in the Manhattan Ward married a girl from some city in Utah, after only going out with her a few times and corresponding for a year. I guess you are wondering what I'm driving at. First of all, it's not a good idea to stay single and everyone should be married as we are instructed.

I have had a desire to get married for a long time, but your mind changes and you have different ideas. This is a bit unusual, but I'd like to marry you. One of the reasons I was hoping you'd come to New York this summer was to talk this matter over. If you were to answer yes, I'd do everything to make you happy. I like to have a wife that dresses well and I'd see to it that she could. I like children. I'd like to make married life seem like a continuous romance and not like some marriages, or maybe I should say most marriages. I don't think that the wife should sit home, while the husband goes out for a good time. I think they should do things together. I think they should cooperate with each other too, and do everything to make for happiness in the home.

When I started this letter, I didn't think I'd propose to you. I was only going to answer your letter of August 24.

After reading the letter, she read it to her mother. "Mom," she said, "I don't know what to think about his letter. Does it sound like he's proposing to me? Is he a good man? Would he be a good provider? I don't know what to do! What do you think?"

"Ruth, Ernie is a good man and would be a good provider and a good catch. I don't think you could go wrong with marrying him if he asks you," her mother said.

In the fall of 1943, Ernie helped move his brother and his family to Salt Lake City from Rhode Island. During his time in Utah, he drove to Ruth's parents' house to see her.

"Ruth, will you marry me? I promise I'll be a good husband and father. What do you say?"

"Yes, I'll marry you," she said.

"You've made me a very happy man today."

When Ernie arrived back in New York, he designed a platinum quarter carat diamond ring for Ruth and mailed it to her.

Before they were married, Ernie told her they needed to leave after the ceremony because he had to report for military duty in New York.

"Ruth, would you mind living with my parents' in Everett, Massachusetts when I leave for boot camp?" he asked. "They are nice folks and you can go shopping and sightseeing with Elly." She had never met his parents and didn't know what it would be like to live with strangers in a strange place.

"That will be Okay," she replied.

The morning of her wedding, Ruth felt afraid to get married because she didn't know what to expect. As she was getting ready for the ceremony, several thoughts were running through her mind. "Have I made the right decision? What kind of wife will I be? Will I be a good mother?" They hadn't discussed how many children they wanted to have. Ruth hoped he didn't want a lot of children.

They married on February 23, 1944 in Ruth's parents' Granger home, even though she'd wanted to get married in the Salt Lake Temple, but they didn't have time because Ernie had to report for military duty. Ruth wore a beige suit with an orchid corsage that Ernie gave her, and he wore a grey double-breasted suit with a white carnation in the lapel. During the ceremony, when Ernie placed the ring on her finger, her hand shook, and he had to hold her finger to put the ring on.

The next day they left on the train. They honeymooned for the next few days before arriving in Everett, and then Ernie left for navy boot camp.

Ruth wasn't in love with him when they got married, but she grew to love him. As the years passed she saw how kind, honest, and spiritual he was, and he would let her buy anything she wanted.

The Tumult of the Cell

by Ben Berger

Mine is an existence
governed—and characterized—by the
laws of thermodynamics, kinetics, and forces: quanta;
predicated on probability.

My world of milli-, micro-, nano-, pico-, phento-,
immensely intricate and
confoundingly complex,
writhes with incessant, innumerable interactions.

My ornate, functional coils,
stout, supporting sheets,
domineering, discrete domains,
and eminent, familiar motifs,
denote an exquisite predetermination.
A bound, wound, sound assemblage,
I am a design,
a purpose.

Tumbling, careening, sailing
about my primordial sea of local chaos,
I collide-repel-collide-expel-
knocked about
in sporadic, senseless collisions.
I jilt
myriad suitors,
dissatisfied,
until
a fortuitous, fruitful encounter:
We match—complimentarity.

I glom onto
my elongated, twisting target,
fastened by particular, preordained pairings
specifically and selectively
wrought by the pressures of deep time.
Only a moment, though,
and I snag—get caught, tugged, slammed
and relax.

My purpose served, I idle
while my recruits go about their befuddling business
of reshaping and remolding
the string on which I am perched.
The feverish, frenzied whirring
of the polymerases ceases as they lose their holds, and
tumble away into obscurity.
I tumble, too, leaving only muffled vibrations
and silence.

Barney and Fred's Lifetime

by Julie Liljenquist

"When you lose a pet, you are never ready for it."
-Author Unknown

Barney and Fred were our two cockateels. They lived in the same cage as brothers. They spent their lifetimes making us happy. When they were out of their cage, sometimes they sat on our wheelchairs and on our shoulders for hours. Other times they played in their playpen. Their playpen had a collection of toys, like a swing and little balls, made just for birds that we kept on a special table. My husband, Terrell, and I enjoyed watching them play. We loved the birds, and we thought of them as our children.

At 10:00 am on Saturday morning, May 10th, my husband told me he thought Barney was dying. When I rolled myself over and said goodbye to Barney, he was lying face-down on the bottom of his cage. He died moments later.

Terrell had thought something was wrong all week. Ordinarily, Fred and Barney stayed on their perches at the top of the cage. During that week, Barney had moved to the bottom of the cage, and Fred had stayed beside Barney until Barney died.

We could not have guessed that about one month later we would lose his brother, Fred. One night before I came home from school, Terrell saw blood dripping from the cage door. Still staring at Fred when I came into the house, he asked me if I could see where the blood was coming from. I said no.

As Terrell called our staff, I saw a pile of feathers on the floor of the cage. We finally realized that the blood was Fred's. He had been picking out his feathers. We thought Fred was just feeling sad because his brother had passed away.

I took Fred to the vet three days later. The vet discovered that Fred had a tumor on his left wing. The vet said Fred was dying from cancer and to let him go.

I called my husband from the vet's office. We agreed to put Fred down. Then, I talked to Fred. I told him I was sorry because I didn't see the tumor and he was in pain. I told him he would stop hurting and be with his brother, Barney, again.

I told the vet to put Fred to sleep and then cremate him. He sent one of the technicians in. She wrapped Fred in a towel. I asked the technician if I could pet him once more. Losing Fred was very hard after losing Barney.

I know that Fred and Barney are okay now. They are in a better place. I know they are no longer in pain.

I am very appreciative of my friend, Kathy, who took Fred and me to the vet. Not only did she comfort me, but she put the bill for the vet on her credit card until Terrell and I could pay her back.

I now have Fred's remains in our home in a Redwood urn. We have a stone memorial for Barney—a rock with his name on it. We put them on the shelf below our TV.

Although I loved Barney and Fred, we got new birds in July. I named my bird Mary Jean after my maternal grandmother, who also loved birds. She would throw food to the wild birds, and she had lots of bird houses in her yard. My husband named his bird after his maternal grandmother, Pearl May. Even with our new birds, we still love Barney and Fred. We think about them a lot.

Coping Mechanisms

by Appio Hunter

I have a secret to share. Well...it's not really a secret, but it often comes as a surprise when I share it. The reason why this secret surprises people is because they usually see the side of me that's positive, upbeat, and living life to the fullest. I'm generally smiling, laughing, and joking around. It's how I am most of the time, and it's how I earned the nicknames "Happio" and "Happy Appio." What a lot of people don't know however, is that my naturally upbeat disposition is a fortunate counterbalance to a condition that has followed me around my entire life. That condition is known as depression.

That's right. Depression. I've battled depression for as long as I can remember. I was born in the late 1960s, when society viewed depression as an emotional problem rather than the serious medical condition it is. When I was growing up and through my teenage years, I had no idea why I would go through periods—often lasting weeks or months—where I had no motivation and the only thing I wanted to do was to stay in bed. I couldn't understand why I would entertain thoughts of killing myself, even when life was pretty idyllic compared to many other teenagers. I just thought that I was being an "ungrateful, lazy, good-for-nothing".

I spent almost two decades battling myself, my beliefs, and the attitudes of a community that embraced modern medicine, but that looked at anyone who visited a psychotherapist as being wacko or crazy. My own family wasn't immune to that perception, so the depression that plagued me went undiagnosed until I was in my early 20s. When I discovered that I wasn't crazy, and that there was a medical explanation for why I felt the way I did, it was as if a huge weight was lifted from my shoulders.

I didn't take any medications at first—mostly because I was resistant to the idea—but as I aged and the condition grew worse, I reached the point where I could barely function and suicide started to look more and more appealing. Lucky for me, the thought of how suicide would

affect my family prevented me from acting on those thoughts. So, at my doctor's urging, I started taking anti-depressants. I'm glad that I listened, because between the medication and therapy, I was able to crawl away from the dark place that almost ended my life.

I have to say that while the anti-depressants were helpful, they turned me into a zombie. I didn't feel sad, but I didn't feel happy either. I simply didn't feel. I felt cut off from everything that I felt made me who I am. I felt separated from my natural enthusiasm, my natural exuberance, and from my connection to Source. I felt completely detached from everything and everyone, and to me, that was scarier than the peaks and valleys I experienced when I could feel. After much internal struggle, I decided to wean myself off the anti-depressants. I preferred to face the depression head-on, with full

"...I didn't feel sad, but I didn't feel happy either. I simply didn't feel."

knowledge of what I was dealing with, than to live disconnected from everything that made life worth living.

I knew my doctor would have a fit if I told him of my decision, so I said nothing. I merely took what I learned over the years and developed my own coping strategy, after which I stepped down the dosages of my medications until I stopped taking them entirely. I have now been medication-free for more than 10 years, and I can honestly say that I'm stronger and happier now than I've ever been.

Before I continue my story, I should make clear that I am in no way suggesting that anyone currently taking anti-depressants should stop taking them. There is a place for those medications, and they serve a purpose. What I am saying is that I made a decision that felt right for ME. I wanted to feel the ups and downs of life. I wanted to feel connected to my true self. I wanted to feel. By choosing to follow the path that felt right for me, I put myself on course to be where I am now.

So what is the strategy I developed that gets me through the depression? What are my coping mechanisms? Here is what I do:

1. I acknowledge how I feel. If I ignore my feelings, or if I try to suppress them, I only feel worse. It's like trying to paddle a boat upstream against a heavy current. When I suppress my feelings my muscles ache and I get tired quickly. So, I just let myself go with the flow. The natural state of our feelings is flowing anyway, so I acknowledge that I feel awful, and then I let myself feel awful.

2. I find something for which I can express gratitude. While I let myself feel awful, I'm also searching for ways to feel better. The fastest way I know of to do that is to express gratitude. It can be something as simple as being grateful that I can watch a sunset, or that my dog loves me no matter what mood I'm in. I look for ways to laugh, and then I express gratitude for whatever it was that made me laugh. My point is that if I look for little, simple things, I quickly discover that I have a lot to be grateful for. That moves me through the Valley of Depression faster than anything else.

3. I keep moving forward. While passing through the Valley of Depression (which I jokingly call the "VD"), I keep moving. I don't stop to go sight-seeing, I don't allow myself to be distracted by the vendors along the way who want to sell me I © Depression buttons, and I most certainly don't buy real estate there. I used to own whole neighborhoods in the VD, but when I realized that being a landlord didn't suit me, I got rid of all my property and I moved out as fast as I could. By the way, I occasionally run across what I call a "wallow pond" along the way. Those wallow ponds are very inviting, and they're a lot of fun to play in. I've found that it's okay to wallow a bit - just as long as I remember to keep moving. If I wallow too long, that pond turns into quicksand, and then I get stuck.

4. I take long walks. I swear my dog loves it when depression hits. That's because I pay a lot more attention to him, and he gets to take much longer walks than usual. I can see the compassion in his eyes when he senses my inner pain, but I can also see his unspoken question of, "Soooo? Are we going for another walk? Are we? Are we?" Truthfully, the walks benefit both of us. I may be alone with my dog and my thoughts, but I use the walks to be fully present in the moment. Rather than focusing on my thoughts and my mood, I focus on everything around me. I see my dog's lolling tongue as he trots beside me. I see

his happy expression. I see the mountains that surround the city. I see the variety of trees in my neighborhood. I see the interesting ways people landscape their yards. I see the birds as they fly overhead. I also hear the birds as they sing, and I hear the cars as they go by. I smell fire pits, and I smell barbecues. I feel the breeze as it passes over my skin. I feel the sweat on my back if it's hot. I feel the pattern on the silicone shell protecting my water bottle, and I taste every molecule of water as I drink it. I use all five of my senses, and I appreciate every experience. Not only does this distract me from how I feel, but it also reconnects me to everything I value. Renewing that connection is a powerful way to speed up my journey through the VD.

5. I remind myself that the sadness I feel is only temporary. The truth is that in spite of my lifelong relationship with depression, I've felt exuberance and joy far more often than I've felt lousy.

6. I forgive myself. One of the most common things I do when depression takes over is to beat myself up over the simplest things. So, when I'm in that place, I use a little technique called "flip that thought." When I start to criticize myself, I flip the criticism around and I turn it into praise instead. I then forgive myself for not being perfect, and I remind myself that I have nothing to be ashamed of.

7. I love myself. I complete the process of forgiveness by loving every part of me. And I mean every part - from my hidden abs to my zest for life. I love myself unconditionally and completely. After all, if I can't love myself, how can I love the people around me?

I have other ways of coping, but these are the ones that have proven to be the most effective for me. I'm so glad that I now understand that of us who face depression don't have to do it alone. We have many, many tools at our disposal - including medication and therapy - that can get us through the VD. My experience taught me that it takes some trial and error to find the right combination of tools that work, but once I found them, I used them. I also discovered that it's okay to switch it up if I find that tools that once worked aren't as effective as they once were.

Perhaps the most important lesson I learned was this: Everyone's default setting is happy and thriving—and that includes those of us who face depression. We're not meant

to live in survival mode. We're meant to enjoy our lives. The good news is that when I'm forced to use my coping mechanisms, I know that they serve as a bridge to get me to a better place...and that is the place where all of us exist naturally.

Ode No. 44: To Damson Plums

by K.E. Concannon

Barely ripe,
their flesh is a pale olive green
while their skin is so purple
it's nearly black. Still firm,
their biting tartness
softens by growing sweetness.

During my German childhood,
their season was just a week,
or so it'd seem, and my mother,
when not on the stage,
would put on an apron,
put another on me,
and we'd make her
zwetschgendatschi,
Bavarian plum cake
(though it's really a tart),
the pastry dough
pressed into the pan,
the damsons sliced thinly
and arranged in concentric circles,
a flower blooming before us.

While it baked,
we'd practice scenes from Madame Butterfly,
make coffee and whipped cream,
in peaks as the kitchen would fill
with a smell like shortbread and jam.
We'd sit as though we were at the finest café
while my American father was at work at the base.
In the whole summer, we'd have two, maybe three,
a season so fleeting, each savored slice felt once-in-a-
lifetime,
like seeing Pavarotti on what would be his next-to-last tour.

When we moved to Florida,
damsons rarely came to market shelves,
the tart never available in the bakeries.

And Mother, always the performer,
would attend the PTA meetings
in leather pants and false eyelashes,
as though she were just waiting for someone
to request Act 2 of *La Bohème*.

We'd started making apple pies,
resigned to leave the damsons in Bavaria.
As I grew up, my chagrined mother
slowly realized that my crescendos
were to be in the kitchen
rather than on the stage.

In my bakery last week,
a customer came in and described
these desserts he'd had in Germany in the War,
how they reminded him of moments
of leisure off the front lines.
Zwetschgendatschi.
It could be nothing else.

He asked if I could get a recipe,
but I didn't need to look through cookbooks,
just a matter of finding the plums.
I reluctantly agreed,
having not made one since before
my mother passed away,
yet I knew the steps.

I brought the bakery staff
back to the kitchen to teach them,
showed them the gentle dough,
the light kneading of it,
the spreading into the pan,
the delicate slices of fruit,
dark on the outside, then red, then honey tones.

Relieved that I had kept myself composed,
after forty minutes, I opened the oven door.
As that barely sweet, earthy aroma filled the kitchen,
so too did her arias.
I heard her voice rise,
the cavatina from *La Traviata*,
verismo of *Tosca*,
each note circling with tinges of plums,

never overly sweet,
grounded in a buttery richness.

In the middle of this, I began to weep.

I heard my staff diminish behind me,
whispering that I must have done it wrong.
But as I bowed forward to pull it out
and the juice of the plums started to run,
I knew I'd done something right.

Untitled

by Mohamed Othman Suliman

My name is Mohamed Othman Suliman. I am from West Sudan, Darfur. The capital is Alfasher. The leader of the Sudan is President Omer Bashir. Industries in the Sudan are farming. The Blue Nile River is the largest river. The population of Sudan is 37,962,306 people. There are 19,045,818 men and 18,918,488 women. Life expectancy in Sudan is 62 years for men and the women is 64 Years. The main language in Sudan is Arabic. There are 114 Languages in Sudan.

My Language is Beria it is Zaghawa. 100,000-200,000 speaks my Language. 97% of Sudan is Islam, 1.5% is African Traditional Religion 1.5% Christianity. The first leader is Ibrahim Abboud (18. November 1958). The oldest city is Sennar Al-Medina, 1504 and 1821 this is sultanate.

I came to United States on June 27, 2013. I came because we have war in my country. The war started September 21, 2000. I came to here as a Refugee. I have not seen Sudan for 13 years. All these years I lived Refugee in Libya for 10 years and in Tunisia for 2 years. The United States took me refugee. Now I live in Salt Lake City with good people in United States, but I am sad because the President Omer and the janjaweed they kill all my family and my two sons and my wife. Now I Ask, today why do you let Bashir and janjaweed go free?

My grandfather was a king. I have a photo of him and his brothers with his lion.

Ground Zero

by Christine R. Ireland

Demon on a day pass from hell;
you made me feel safe, like
Big Brother, before the towers
fell.
Our own black operatives or enemies?
Intercepting planes, would have averted
certain tragedy.
In search of a willing victim; you
found me easy prey. Mared by
unkempt promises, my heart is in
decay.
When governments wage war, men and women
die; “combatants” detained without due
process or a reason, why?
What common ground can we share?
You shook me to the core. Bruises
fade away with time, it’s trust you can’t
restore.

A Good Day Shot to Hell

by Kenny Lee

One day I was happy, while I was off duty
I just sat in a club, having drinks with a friend
My best friend, a freeline, and I had made plans
About our soon marriage, and who would attend

I said I’d invite Jim, my best friend from high-school
She said she’d ask “daddy” to give her away
We had just hurried back from a day on the beach
I had two days off from my radioman stay

I was enjoying shore duty, ‘twas way different than sea
We could think of our families, and plan for tomorrow
I wanted two kids, and a camper for fishin’
The best day of my life would, too soon, turn to sorrow

I sipped my long island, on top of the world!!!
In an officer’s club in Norfolk Va
Was reading a newspaper planning the weather
Seein if it would rain on my wedding that day

I went to the pisser to blow out the ballast
‘Twas such a good day, were my thoughts as I walked
A sailor approached from the end of the hallway
He was strung out on drugs, inhibitions were lost

His ship came to port from 6 months on the sea
He was lookin’ real sharp in his dressed blues attire
What was he thinking? I thought as he cut me
What stopped all the blood? 13 staples of wire

I ran to the head, wrapped my neck for the pressure
The blood from my neck drew a line on the wall
My nightmares remembered that terrible night
There lasting a lifetime, winter, spring, summer, fall

The best day of my life, or it seemed at the time
Quickly turned to that nightmare in port from a cutter
My best friend got orders, somewhere in New-Guinea
My fiancée left me and married another

No, I wasn't shot in the war to end wars
Nor was my leg blown off by a clusterfuck bomb
My career ended quickly from some fucked up sailor
By a friend, not an enemy gook up in Nam

I still dream of my life and how it might've been
If this Swede and that freuline got married that day
I ask God, when I'm praying to bless wife my children
And I say that I'm thankful it ended this way

Untitled

by Mary Pat

I ride the bus with a little man from Japan.
And like his national characteristic, he is determined to
live forever.
He probably will.
Over eighty and working in a hospital,
his pride and his dignity are contagious.
We all love him.
He knows we love him.
He sits with his son secure in his immortality.
He will live always,
rising always
with his rising son.

Truck and Lincoln Logs

by Richard Clegg

It was proving to be a very bad morning—unrequited love, money owed that I didn't have, health and vehicle collapses were involved. This was all greeted with tears, frustration, sadness and a pathetic text message to Steven who was dead now for 14 years. Does it surprise you that a waiting room in a car dealership workshop appears at this point in my tale?

The waiting room smelled of new cars. There was a TV informing me over and over again of all the tragedies in the world, about which I didn't want to know and at this juncture, about which I didn't care. Tragedies or inane advice about my aging skin or how to prevent rectal cancer. Italian designed display racks offered glossy Lexington Avenue brochures of US designed and built cars inspired by their German or Italian brothers and sisters. "Inferior" I thought. All this to the music of Shania Twain on the showroom sound system.

If things had been different? If I'd been as excited about brightly colored toy trucks and "rough housing" as I was about soft teddy bears and Lincoln logs, things may well have been different. I might not be sitting here. The pure red and yellow colors were nice, but the toys were hard and angular with a sharp unpleasant to the touch corners. So different from my teddy bear or the round smooth logs with which I could build things. The toys did roll and function like the real dump truck and fire engine they were meant to emulate. I wasn't much interested. Because I was male, they were given me with great expectations as to my enjoyment of said "hard and angular" objects. The toys were actually my mother's doing. She had for some time then assumed the role of both Mother and Father. The idea was sweet, but how could she have known. They were set aside in my mind and I didn't play with them.

Alone, I fantasized castles and knights in tights while my older brother and father worked together on the family car, a 49 Chevrolet DeLux. Many an oil change, new spark plugs, tire rotation, or a fuel pump installation were accomplished by them and done with what I interpreted as a strange sense of enjoyment on their part. Greasy hands

and dirty Levis attested to work done and the bonding between them—to the extend my father was even capable of such a thing.

That I was not what my father had expected in a son most likely had less to do with the sadness of my childhood than the sniper fire he took in his arm and leg in Leipzig in the Second World War. Today he would have most likely been given treatment for PTSD

rather than being sent home to his wife to raise his two boys like all the other returning WWII vets. He didn't want a wife. He didn't want the two little boys. He didn't want the responsibility and manifested that in ways that were ultimately devastating to me, the second and disappointing son.

But the tiny me didn't understand any of those larger reasons. I just knew he didn't touch me. He didn't hold or cuddle me as I did my teddy bear. Basically he had little to do with me and when he did, it was a belt thrashing for some major violation which I didn't comprehend.

If I had soiled my hands and jeans with them on such auto related projects, I might not be so panicked by dealership service shops. I might be able to change my own oil, install new spark myself plugs myself or at the minimum have an interest in cars other than a means to point B from point A.

As I wandered about waiting and ruminating, I was surprised by my encounter with a mom, a stroller and a little boy just recently walking and not yet talking. My unexpected presence in his very new and wobbly world of delighted treading caused him to crash like a wind up toy into the nearest wall. His mother and I gasped, expecting him to wail away from pain or just from surprise due to his unexpected encounter with the wall and resulting fall. He didn't. I apologized to them both and like the men in North Africa, I squatted to his side, smiled, looked into his sweet and ageless face and asked in that tone adults reserve for toddlers, "Are you OK? Did you hurt yourself." Not yet talking he answered with a smile which I interpreted as "no." He was OK. Being childless myself, I was surprised when this innocent and accepting little soul crept for only seconds (but seemed to me like a lifetime) into some

"But the tiny me didn't understand any of those larger reasons."

delicate region of my being. He then scampered quickly back out - and about, leaving me to catch my breath.

I waited for my car to be done and for the bill. That would go on the credit card - "money owed I didn't have." As I paced, I glanced from the tiny male child, to the slick brochures for expensive cars, to bored faces of others waiting. Following a greater plan, my eyes were caught by and rested upon a small box of miniature brightly colored cars, buses, helicopters that were for sale. Toys. One was red, another yellow. "Buy him a toy" spoke a voice from that delicate just now stirred region of my being. As a loving father might have done, I agreed. Would he? Could he enter there again? If so, \$4.95 was the cost of admission.

I checked with Mom first and then asked the sweet toddler which one he would like to have. He chose the blue helicopter. As I took the toy to the counter where I would eventually pay my own bill, the little one followed. With the toy in my left hand and my right hand dangling at my side, I suddenly felt him grasp my little finger. Warm and tightly. I was stunned but delighted by his innocent trust to grab the finger of a man he had never seen before. Tragically, in our culture, only a toddler who could barely walk and talk could get away with such a loving and audacious act. I bought it for him. I squatted again and replaced my finger in his hand with the blue helicopter. He looked at it, at me and smiled.

Like a frozen stick of butter you want only to soften, but have left a second or two too long in the microwave, the grasp of his warm tiny hand had melted a distant part of me that had never yet been touched in quite such a manner. I resisted picking him up and embracing him in my arms. I wish I had.

Had things been different? I could have been one hell of a father.

Mother at 90

by Stephen Proskauer

Holding her teacup with wrinkled mottled hands
She gazes at the empty space between my wife and me

Turning her life over and over
Like a coin she found
Or a curious shell picked up on the beach
She casually crosses the line
Between musing and monologue

She summons events and people long gone
They fade as fast into shadows

Mother's uncensored soliloquy pours out
As if we did not exist
As if it were safe after a lifetime
To crack the outer gates
Of her heart's stone citadel

I never loved anyone in my life she declares

Her face does not change
Do I even raise an eyebrow

She is admitting what I have sensed all my life
Something falls into place like the click of a lock

When my mother rises and hobbles to the door
I see a withering old woman crippled outside and in

Somehow she has survived
And so have I

Last Day

by Ked Kirkham

Pale moon
breaking off,
drifting up
from the snow cover
on the Wasatch range;
made of the same
elements:
sky and distance,
blue become white,
silence.

Platinum sun
opposite
above the Oquirrh,
white icy hot.
Drifting down into the lake
now but a streak
of burnished metal
on the valley bed,
where winds last night
scrubbed away all color
save the gray
of the oaks,
the black
of the locusts,
dark of the evergreens.

Please Mind Your Dog

by Peter Lowe

Experts will debate the proper pre-hike meal, but speaking from experience, I can tell you that Dairy Queen is not ideal. The weather being so hot and clear in the day, I'd planned on setting out from Pearisburg Virginia in the evening and hiking until I tired out. The shotgun decision to trade money for a milkshake on the walk out of town put an end to the night-hike plan, and I stopped after six miles at Rice Field Shelter.

A man in the shelter called out as I approached in the night. Walt, another thru-hiker, was with his service dog, Patches O'Houlihan. Patches is a peaceful hound, despite his namesake, and conversation turned to the source of need. In the 1990s, Walt responded to a domestic disturbance call in rural Rhode Island, and as the situation escalated, he and another officer attempted to enter the apartment via the fire escape. He woke up a few months later in Florida, retired. The man, whom Walt later forgave from his hospital bed, had thrown a large tube television into Walt's face, throwing him onto the pavement 2 stories below. The irony, he said, was that he'd been a union carpenter in Manhattan and had only joined the force because he wanted to stop getting hurt.

When he asked, I told him a bit about myself. I had been on the road for a few months and at this point I was bored of sharing my history with strangers, so I turned the conversation back to him at every point. Walt had travelled the continent by motorcycle, and so his stories relied on long descriptive tangents of locales I had no image bank to draw from: Tallahassee, Taos, the Red Slipper in the Florida Keys. We were enjoying ourselves when we saw a headlamp appear in the starlit meadow before the shelter.

It was an older woman, and we heard her swearing long before she arrived and slammed her colossal hiking pack on the floor of the shelter. Before exchanging any sort of human pleasantries, she informed us that the dog would not be allowed to stay in the shelter. I looked to Walt and he said nothing. The woman complained out loud about all the circumstances that lead to her arriving so late at the shelter. I couldn't care any less about this woman or her problems, but I noticed that she kept looking at Patches and Walt with a sneer. Eventually, when she had settled down, she made a firm demand that it was now time for the dog to leave. Walt argued that he needed the dog, and I said that Patches

had not barked a single time since I had arrived, and she finally consented with suffering in her voice.

In the dead night, because this is how things work, Patches barked twice. It was loud and deliberate. I sat up out of my sleeping bag and looked at Walt. The woman was cursing, fighting her way out of her sleeping bag. She spun and leered at Patches, who barked again. It was as if the dog didn't care what was happening in the shelter, and Walt picked up on this. He turned on his headlamp and we all looked outside to see the two coyotes watching us. They weren't ten feet from the mouth of the shelter. The light flashed across their eyes in the night, and they bolted in opposite directions.

"Good job, Patches," said Walt. And would you believe me when I tell you the woman gave the dog a treat in the morning?

Bask

by Audrey Weigel

Place
Where I disappear
Dew on a petal
In sunlight

Only then
What is congruous
What is not
Is clear

Kissing
Other and gatherings
There I live
Bask

First Timer

by Sarah Rose

"You'll like it," Linda said. "I did it and it was great!"

It is upon your reluctant consent that you appear promptly at 1:00 pm for your first massage. Linda rents this space for her realty business. Two other offices are for other enterprises. Norma sets up her massage table in the commons area. Fluorescent lights, sickly green walls, stark, brown utilitarian carpet, a dusty plastic palm tree in the corner.

You haven't met Norma before. She has tightly permed brown hair with shards of gray, a pocked complexion. She wears a short sleeved floral printed blouse with tan polyester pants, the kind with the creases sewn in. Your children would call them 'high waders'. Then there are the red crew socks and brown oxford shoes with squeaky crepe soles.

"I hope the guys from these offices don't come in," she says.

Ohmigosh!

"Why don't you leave your clothes in that office, then come lie on the table on your tummy. Cover up with this sheet. I'll go into the other room and wait till you're settled."

What is this? Half a twin sheet? It's supposed to cover me?

She enters and sets her egg timer. Lowering the sheet down your back, she rubs oil on her hands, then slathers it all over your back. Sounds of slurps and smacks.

It feels like she's finger painting on me, with her whole hands.

You peek up and see the container's label—it's canola oil! Ten minutes. The timer goes off. Ding!

Squeak goes her shoes. Left arm. Ten minutes. Ding!

She works on your arms, hands and fingers, ten minutes on each side. Ding!

When the timer sounds again, she moves, shoes squeaking, to your legs. Each of them is worth ten minutes also. Since she began, she is talking, first about her religious faith, then more about her religious faith. You are

a captured audience.

Whoa! She's a fervent believer!

The outer door to the building opens, and a tall, handsome man in a suit and tie enters, carrying a black briefcase. He's obviously taken aback by the sight, wide eyes and open mouth, then, averting his eyes, ducks into his office and closes the door.

Ohmigosh! My clothes are in there!

Norma is nonplussed. She continues her verbal rhetoric, adding invective about non-believers. The timer is still directing her activity, ten minutes here, ten minutes there, dictated by the timer. Ding! Squeak.

She reminds me of those flip books. The kind where you turn the pages really fast and see jerky motions of an object or person.

When she's finished, she knocks on the closed door and asks for your clothes. The man hands them out. You dress in the vacant office, anxious to be gone. Before you leave, she hands you a few business cards to give to your friends.

Untitled

by Andy Vogen

When I wander the streets and sidewalks of the city and neighborhoods I am struck by some of the seemingly abandoned homes and very beautiful architecture and am led to venture guesses as to the history of those now abandoned and loving shelters of families and why they are so tragically 'tossed off' from the lives of those families. Can those people not hear that once happy shelter saying 'Please do not abandon me. I once sheltered for many years, all of You. Helped welcome new members of your family; kept you all warm and dry from the rain and snow storms and did not once complain. Put up with yapping dogs and cats chasing mice which they would on occasion catch. Good for you, cat.' Many times I witness some of those beautiful homes being demolished to make way for a parking lot, All hail the cars, or shopping center. Many times I wonder if any member of that family walks, drives by that now abandoned member of the family and has heartfelt feelings for that structure. Oh, well, just some thoughts on how easily some forget the good times and leave them behind us in our hurry to get on with the inequities of life.

The Chest

by Sandra James

It is moving day and the family was excited. We were going to the city. Daddy has a job with the stables to care for the racing horses and mom is going to teach at the grade school. We have a month to finish here and relocate.

My brothers are in the yard trying to catch chickens we always run. They are laughing at each other. I sat with Gramps on the front porch, he doesn't seem excited at all. He seems quiet, just looking at the hill and saying "Soon Mamma." He hadn't told mom that he wasn't coming with us and waited until the rest of our belongings were on the wagon to say he was staying there. Mom begged then cried but he wouldn't come. She hugged him and helped straighten up his things and pushed his trunk to the rear of the closet. She turned around for a last look and knew it would be the last time she saw him but she wouldn't cry in front of us kids.

A few months later, mom got a letter from the people near the town where Gramps lived, to tell of his passing. They buried him next to Grandma on the hill behind the house. It was a long time before anyone thought about the house and we went back after we were grown kids of our own. We went to show the grandkids where we got our start.

Love's Desperate Alternatives

by John Wilkes

"Do you think it's possible for a person to die of loneliness?" He asked.

DeVaughn looked up from his soy mocha latté. "What prompted that question?"

Leonard stirred his chai tea and replied, "I'm 50 years old today, and I'm alone."

"You're not alone, girl. I'm here."

"I don't mean right here, right now." He paused and took a bite of his cheese danish. "I'm talking about personally. Romantically."

"I thought you were seeing that—what's his name? —Roberto fellow."

Leonard sighed. "He hasn't called or texted me for a week now." He looked down into his cup. His eyes welled up, but he set his eyelids as dams to keep a flood of tears within the reservoir. It was his birthday. He would be happy, for DeVaughn's sake and everyone else's. No crying.

"Huh," DeVaughn took Leonard's hand in his and lightly squeezed. "Seemed like such a decent bloke." He switched to his cheering up voice. "I know he likes you a lot!"

"Sure he did. My apartment. My Lexus. My money."

"Whataya think happened?"

"Fifty happened."

"Oh, c'mon now love. Age is just a number."

"Suddenly it seems like a big number." Leonard took a silk handkerchief out of his inside suit coat pocket and dabbed at his eyes. Serves an old fool like me right for lustng after a boy half my age."

DeVaughn chuckled. "Hey, if you can still get 'em..."

"You're only thirty. You have no idea."

"Thirty's middle-aged in our crowd."

"And fifty's an old troll. No one in the clubs gives me a first glance, let alone a second look anymore."

DeVaughn laughed again. "You're joking! I've seen them clamor after you. You're not the hunter, you're still the hunted, and the predators are ravenous."

"For drinks. A little powder and a puff, if you take my meaning," Leonard scoffed. "A soft, warm bed. A good

time. Sometimes they stay for breakfast and ask for cab fare. Then I watch them walk across the street and catch the bus."

"You were never promised a gay rose garden," DeVaughn teased. "What do you really expect? My sister said to me once something funny that I've never forgotten. She said, 'Dee, going to a bar to look for a good man is like going to the junkyard to look for a good car.'"

Leonard smiled crookedly, "She's absolutely right. What are we thinking we'll find at the meat market? True love? Eternal devotion? What a joke! USDA Prime Grade A beef is what's on the menu every night, with the sprinklings of coke or meth or whatever to make it more tender and savory. I always knew what I was in for, and I liked it. The flirt. The chase. The dance. The catch. It's been played out since time immemorial. Because it's fun."

"So what's changed? What makes it different now?"

Leonard's chest heaved a heavy sigh. "I promised myself I would never become one of those maudlin, jaded old queens we used to make fun of. I want more. I can't explain it. Start to see a few more wrinkles and blemishes in the mirror every morning, notice the waddle under your chin, notice your buns aren't quite as perky as they used to be, start needing a nap in the afternoons and you start thinking, 'My god, I'm getting old.'"

"Certainly better than the alternative, don't you think?"

"Please don't remind me that all the movie and television stars I loved as a child are dead or dying," Leonard spat. "It isn't helpful."

"Sorry."

Leonard cocked his head back and up a bit to the right in reminiscence, "Those from our old crowd have gone off somewhere else. A new town or a cemetery plot. Others have stopped going out. Either they found what and who they wanted—what I think I might want now—or they've just given in or given up, tired of the same old scene every night, excerpt after excerpt from *Groundhog Day*. Except I don't know anyone when I go out anymore. I am alone, surrounded by strangers."

"True love? Eternal devotion? What a joke!"

"You and I, we're not strangers," DeVaughn replied, "and you have so many friends who are still around."

Leonard sighed, "Around, yes, but we just don't seem to interact with one another like we used to. We no longer share in each other's lives. We don't call each other just to talk. It's always, 'so and so is very ill,' or 'what's his name died, didja hear?'" Leonard grasped the top of his head with both hands. "Why don't we call to catch up, or get together, to share the joys and triumphs of our lives anymore?" As Leonard opined, DeVaughn kept looking around the café, as if he expected someone. Leonard reached out and shook DeVaughn's arm. "Are you even listening to me?"

DeVaughn blinked rapidly a few times and shook his head. "Sorry, brother. What was that?"

"What happened to our togetherness?"

DeVaughn reached across the table and took both of Leonard's hands in his. "We're still all practicing that togetherness, Lenny. We've all just moved on and are being together with different people, that's all." DeVaughn again glanced around quickly before he continued. "It's like the Billy Joel song that goes, 'So many people in and out of my life. Some will last. Some will just be now and then. Life is a series of hellos and goodbyes. I'm afraid it's time for goodbye again.'"

Leonard grimaced and released himself from DeVaughn's grip, "I'm single and have no plans for my big five-oh, and you're quoting Billy Joel to me?"

"I can't think of a better way to explain it to you, Lenny."

"You are a musician after all," Leonard conceded. "So what happened to me? Have I failed to launch? Missed the boat? What?"

Once again, DeVaughn had to turn back to face his friend. "I wouldn't say that. You just took a different road, had different aspirations." DeVaughn raised his hand and shook it around to get the waiter's attention. "Lenny, you're being too hard on yourself, mate. You are the most successful person I know. Everyone looks up to and adores you. When I see one of the old crowd, you're always the first guy they ask me about." The waiter came to their table and DeVaughn requested the check. "That should make you happy. Not many people achieve that sort of adulation from any group. It's commendable."

"I don't want adulation," Leonard admitted. "I mean it's nice to have respect, and we've all taken secret pleasure

in being envied by our peers at one time or another." He reached into his back pocket for his wallet. "I need love. I've always needed it, sought it, sometimes even came close to demanding it. Why has it proven so elusive? What have I done wrong, to deserve being unattached this late in the game?"

"You want to know what I think?" DeVaughn asked as he paid the waiter and waved away Leonard's money. "I think you have always tried too hard and been looking in all the wrong places." He left a few bills as a tip on the table. "Lately you come across as desperate, and that turns people off."

"Well!" Leonard snorted, "Don't hold back to spare my feelings."

"You know me well enough to know that I won't," DeVaughn retorted. "You asked. You needed to hear it. You wanted to hear it."

"You're right. I'm sorry. I just wish I could figure out what the trick is."

"The trick, my friend, is to not be looking, or to never reveal that you're looking." DeVaughn got up from the table and pushed in his chair.

"Are we going somewhere?" asked Leonard.

"Yes," replied DeVaughn, "I'm taking you somewhere where you will have fun on your birthday and stop whining."

"Where are we going?"

"You'll see. It's a surprise."

"I hate surprises," Leonard moaned.

"I know, you ungrateful bugger, but remember, I'm in control now."

"Will I need a safe word?" Leonard giggled. "Are you taking me to the bath house?"

"I will if that's where you want to go," DeVaughn teased.

"Absolutely not!" Leonard nudged DeVaughn with his whole body. "I got such a rash last time I was there. But it was worth it," he added. As they walked, Leonard renewed their conversation from the coffee house. "Sometimes I think it would be just my luck to find the person to spend the rest of my life with me on the day just before I die."

"And what would be wrong with that. You will have achieved your heart's delight, and spent the rest of your life with the bloke of your dreams. You'd die happy. Not many people's final day of life is that great."

"But I'd die thinking of all the time we could have spent together had we met earlier in life," Leonard opined.

"And if he died the day after you fell in love?"

"Oh my god!" Leonard rasped, "I thought you were trying to cheer me up."

"Just covering all the bases." DeVaughn grimaced. "If you adopt that negative an attitude, you are going to die alone."

Leonard thought a moment before replying, "I guess the positive way to look at it is to be glad to have that one day. At the worst, things just revert to how they were before we met."

"Bingo! You're getting it. There may be hope for you yet," DeVaughn winked at his friend, "but I remain skeptical."

"You're no help. All you do is criticize."

"Constructively and lovingly, my friend."

Leonard paused and stamped his foot. "Well stop it! It's my birthday and I won't be nitpicked. I already called my mother today. She doled out enough guilt and criticism to last me until my next birthday. That's her job, not yours." He grinned and took DeVaughn's arm as they continued their walk. "How far is it?"

"How far is what?"

"Where you're taking me."

"You haven't figured it out yet? Nothing looks familiar?"

Leonard stopped again and looked around. "We're a block from my condo," he noticed with suspicion and disappointment.

"Yup."

"Oh my god," Leonard spat, "Are you telling me you're taking me home to my place for my birthday?" Leonard's face flushed as he spat, "It's my birthday and I have to host and provide refreshments and snacks? I never!"

"That's a lie, brother. You certainly have, and everyone knows it." DeVaughn put his hands on his hips and flipped his dreds defiantly. "I'm having my carpets and tile cleaned, so we can't go over there."

"When you said you were taking me, somewhere to have fun, my own residence was not what came to mind." Leonard wore a hurt look, "I thought you meant, like, out."

"We were just out. Am I made of moolah? Take it or leave it."

"I'll leave it, thanks." Leonard seemed close to tears again, and he took out a silk handkerchief to dab his

eyes. As he blew his nose he added, "I knew I'd spend this birthday alone."

"Suit yourself, mate. I'll walk you home, use your loo, and leave you to your own devices."

"Fine," Leonard crossed his arms and walked faster. DeVaughn did not attempt to match his friend's pace until they came nearer to Leonard's condominium. Then he trotted to catch up and grabbed his companion by the arm.

"C'mon mate," he implored. "Give it a go. If we aren't having fun, you can send me on my way."

"All right. Leonard hugged DeVaughn tight. "I suppose it beats drinking alone." He planted a kiss on his friend's cheek. "You are my best, true friend. Thank you."

"Let's shall then?" Leonard swiped his card in the security gate, and the two stepped into the elevator. Immediately, Leonard noticed that DeVaughn seemed on edge, shifting from foot to foot, fidgeting with his ropy hair, his hands everywhere.

And then it hit him.

"You didn't!"

DeVaughn tried to sound nonchalant. "Didn't what?" he squeaked innocently.

Leonard's face flushed. "You invited them here. You invited everyone here for a surprise party, didn't you? That's why you asked me to the coffee shop. So they could all get here and be ready to jump out and scare the shit out of me when you brought me home."

"Shucks, Miss. 'Tweren't nothin'." DeVaughn quipped as he looked at his feet, twisting one into the elevator floor.

"You sonofabitch!" Leonard screeched, "How could you? You know I hate surprises. The place is a mess!"

"I didn't want you to be alone on your birthday."

DeVaughn wore a crestfallen look. "All of us only want you to be happy."

"Well, I'm not happy."

DeVaughn adopted a scolding tone. "At least try to act like you are, you ungrateful ass. And act surprised. We went to a lot of trouble for you."

"You really shouldn't have, any of you, and I do mean really," Leonard snapped, "but I'll try and be a good host."

"It's your party."

"Can I cry if I want to?"

"Absolutely not." The elevator opened, and the two exited to the right. "Relax and have a good time." DeVaughn reached for the door knob to his friends condo unit, "And smile."

“Surprise!” Everyone shouted in unison as DeVaughn opened the door and Leonard stepped in. He was inundated with a wave of people who stretched their arms out in embrace. Leonard felt smothered. He’d never imagined so many people in his place at once, surrounded by black balloons and crepe paper, adorning signs reading So You’re Fifty and Over the Hill. Plastic tumblers and paper plates and napkins had been arranged on one card table, gifts, on another. All black. So much blackness.

Leonard couldn’t breathe, could barely move. Suddenly, he frantically forced his way out of the crowd, pushing and shoving until he stood in the center of a circle of his friends and acquaintances, who were all still smiling and laughing.

The cheese stands alone, he thought.

Leonard snapped.

“So all of you are here to celebrate the fact that I’m old,” he scoffed at them. “To laugh it up over the end of my social life, the beginning of my sad lonely dotage.” People had stopped smiling, and begun to look at one another quizzically. “Well you shouldn’t have wasted your time.” The room grew funereally silent as Leonard continued.

“Did you think I would appreciate you invading my home to pity me while you drink my liquor and make a mess?” Leonard was apoplectic with rage. “Did you think that would be my dream birthday celebration? Did you? I would have thought my friends would know me a little bit better than that.”

Leonard’s screaming decrescendoed to a hiss. “All of you get the fuck out.” He went to the bar, poured himself a double bourbon neat, as everyone stood silent and aghast. He took a gulp from his glass before turning toward the crowd again and saying, “Didn’t you hear me? I said get the fuck out. Now.” Then he turned back toward the bar, his back to his friends, as they gathered up their coats and bags and filed toward the door, hugging DeVaughn as they exited.

When everyone had gone, DeVaughn approached his friend, who hadn’t looked up once, and was pouring another double bourbon into his tumbler. “That was really shitty, bro.”

“Yeah, well,” Leonard paused for a sip. “Just go, Dee. Thanks for trying.”

“Yes.”

“Yes what?”

“Yes to what you asked me at the café. I think a person can die of loneliness.”

Leonard turned away from the bar to contemplate his friend’s answer, and watched him walk silently out the door, closing it behind him.

Memoir Limerick's

by Annette Dennis

My sister named Cheryl was funny.
She loved to get into the honey.
We would laugh till we cried,
couldn't stop, but we tried,
and both of our noses got runny.

My little best friend we called Nina,
just wanted to be a ball'rina.
So around we would prance,
and we'd call it a dance,
then we'd laugh and we'd laugh like hyenas.

One morning I heard something scurry,
And was scared that it might be furry,
So I yelled to my dad,
"Please come here, I'm so mad,
A mouse just ran 'way in a hurry."

My mother, who had some big ta-tas,
Was shopping around for some new bras.
A nice looking old man,
Ran into them. KA-BAM!
And now he walks 'round whistling doo-dahs.

There came a time when I would marry,
To a man whose first name was Terry.
Then one day we realized,
That each other we despised,
So I married a new man named Harry!

I once had an old friend named Mandy,
Whose hair looked like pink cotton candy.
She was walking one day
And she heard a child say,
"I bet that her hair tastes quite dandy."

My brother was always so kind,
Whenever I'd get in a bind.
He would always help me,
Cuz he always could see,
I might get a spank on my behind!

The Chokecherry Two-Step

by Don Hale

The creek bed came down off the mountain, under the road, through the corral, took a 90-degree turn and headed toward its juncture with the Uncompahgre River a mile and one-half away. In the spring-time melting snow up on the mountain filled it to the brim with rushing water. Now, in the middle of the summer it was dry unless a cloudburst up on top filled it briefly. Right after it passed through the corral its banks were riprapped with logs to a height of five feet to keep it within its channel. Hanging over the bank on the uphill side of the creek were the branches of many chokecherry bushes loaded with fruit.

My gentle readers—all six of you, if I'm lucky—because four or five of you probably live in urban areas and have never heard of chokecherries, I shall explain. They grow on large bushes in well watered areas, look something like cherries and are extremely bitter, sort'a like cranberries. If you have a lot of sugar on hand, you can make excellent jelly or jam which goes well with most meats, sort'a like cranberries.

My aunt, a plump matron of about sixty years of age, used to make this jelly every once in a while from fruit picked from trees at one end of the vegetable garden. When her lady friend from Denver, who fit pretty much the same physical description, came out to the ranch to visit, the two of them decided to pick a batch of chokecherries from those along the stream bed. They would be in the shade and they, like everyone else, favored the concept of low-hanging fruit.

They each retrieved a grocery bag from the kitchen, walked carefully across the corral studiously avoiding any natural leavings of unpleasantness, talking and laughing and entered the creek bed. Their conversation waned a bit as they very slowly and carefully picked their way through the boulders in their old ladies' flat shoes until they came to the beginning of the riprapped channel. It escaped their awareness that they were now confined between two unclimbable barriers or maybe they just thought that it didn't matter. It turned out that it did.

Conversing happily, picking only the best of the fruit and not too deftly negotiating the boulders under their feet, they clung to their now weighty grocery bags anticipating a leisurely stroll back to the kitchen to deal with their fruit. It was not to be.

The logs confining the channel had been placed there several decades earlier and now were well rotted, making them favorite homes of hornets. My aunt's friend stumbled over a rock and fell none too gently against the wall of rotted logs. The hornets inside one of them passionately resented this insult to their environment and instantly marshalled all their forces for the enthusiastic defense of their home.

No one mentioned hearing any bugles or shouted verbal commands, but the onslaught was extremely well organized and delivered with great energy. Almost instantly the two ladies realized they were in deep trouble,

dropped their bags of fruit, and as they felt the first stings of the attack began to rock-hop at top speed down the creek bed in the direction of the corral. Their movements resembled a couple of football players as they lifted their knees running through tires.

Unfortunately, the lifting of their knees also lifted their skirts and the hornets immediately

took full advantage of that phenomenon, attacking furiously in the shade, causing the rock-hopping duo to let out blood curdling war whoops and slap frantically at their skirts as they careened crazily over the rocks toward the open ground past the beginning of the ripraping.

The hornets, on the other hand, were satisfied by the time the rock-hoppers had covered about 2/3 of their exiting itinerary and gave up the chase. Those no longer in possession of their armament headed for that great rotten log in the sky and those who were whole flew back to their home to inspect the damage.

Normally I'm a kind-hearted fellow. I've never murdered anyone, kicked a dog, or set a cat's tail on fire. I don't laugh when a blind man runs into a lamp post or when the ice cream falls off a toddler's cone, but this time I couldn't help myself. For weeks I would break out

in raucous laughter for no apparent reason and even my uncle, perhaps the most humorless person in this quadrant of the universe, would chuckle quietly to himself a couple of times when I did it, and gesture to me not to do it in the presence of my aunt.

I never heard the word “chokecherry” mentioned in that house again.

Mona

by Kathleen Rice

After the end of a difficult relationship in Portland, Oregon, Mona drove down Highway 1 along the beach heading from Northern to Southern California. Feeling angry and confused her mind was racing. Her tears were making it difficult to see. Highway 1 had many high cliffs, narrow roads and bridges. Upon realizing this, she breathed deep and tried to clear her mind or at least ignore it.

Her engagement lasted for three years. It felt like being married. The relationship became very painful during the last six months. She realized that her fiancé had fallen out of love. The night before she left on her ride, she had totally lost control crying, screaming and being hysterical.

She stopped her car on the beach near Monterey. While she was parked there, the sound of the waves crashing against the black rocks calmed her down. Realizing that she had been driving for hours and had gone a long way, she decided to keep driving south until she could figure what to do. She had already decided not to return to her home in Oregon.

She had to make her money last, so when she got tired she drove near the beach and slept. She was never disturbed.

When Mona pulled into a gas station to fill her tank, she realized that her money was running low. She had enough money for a motel, so she decided to stop in Ventura, where she would look for work.

Ventura was a small beach town. The old part wasn't noticeably pretty, but the beach and the hills above it created many peaceful places to go and relax, at times when she was feeling stressed.

A winding road, led to the top of a hill that looked over the city lights showing the curved outline of the beach. There was a big cross on that hill. It was the kind of place people wanted to share with a partner. Sitting there, alone she thought about Daniel, but decided not to dwell on it. She returned to her motel room and went to sleep.

While job hunting, Mona applied at a local hospital, applying anything that was open. They offered her a job

as a switchboard operator. She enjoyed her new job and when she got her first paycheck, she had enough money to rent a studio apartment.

Mona had always been a loner, because of her shyness. The ladies she worked with were friendly and reached out to her, in curiosity. She confided in them about her Mormon religion, and about her recently failed romance.

The ladies often went out together to night clubs. They followed a band, and one evening they invited Mona to come along. Part of going out included drinking, and Mona had never tasted alcohol. Her new friends knew she was a Mormon and probably had never touched liquor. While at a night club, these friends thought it would be fun to watch Mona get drunk for the first time. They coaxed her into ordering a drink.

"What should I order?" Mona asked. "I don't know anything about mixed drinks."

Her friends recommended a Harvey Wallbanger. She could tell by their faces that it was a very strong drink. After drinking three of them, she was feeling more than a little tipsy. She felt sicker than she had ever felt in her life. She was in the bathroom stall for a long time unable to get up. Drunken women were pounding on the door, telling her to hurry. Finally someone helped her out of the stall, and her friends took her home.

Mona felt guilty about drinking, but she had been questioning her religious testimony and continued going out with the girls. She didn't enjoy the high feeling and losing control, but she discovered that when she was depressed and couldn't keep from feeling sorry for herself, going to the bar made her forget.

She was sitting at the counter in a bar, sipping on a Vodka Collins, when she noticed a lady a couple of stools down, looking like a drunk. Her wig was on crooked, and she wasn't wearing her dentures. Leaning on the counter, she slurred, "I'll have another Tequila Sunrise, bartender."

Mona was minding her own business, and trying to ignore this pitiful looking lady.

"Hi, Lady. My name is Sharon. You must be new in town, I haven't seen you around."

"Mona felt guilty about drinking, but she had been questioning her religious testimony..."

"My name is Mona."

"Mona, do you have any kids?"

"No, I've never been married."

"That's Ok. I have nothing against lesbians."

"I'm not a lesbian. I just broke up with my boyfriend. We were engaged for three years."

"Oh, I'm sorry honey; I didn't mean to insult you. Of course you're not gay you don't look like it. I've got three kids, but my husband has custody of them. I'm trying to get them back."

Taking a closer look Mona thought Sharon was a dreadful sight. With no teeth and her clothes were old, worn and too small. She couldn't button her shirt, and the flap on her arms was hanging.

Mona thought to herself, "She got somebody to marry her and give her children! I haven't been able to get anyone to marry me, but then I never wanted anyone except Daniel.

"Bartender, give me another drink." Sharon demanded, then suddenly she fell off the bar stool.

"No more drinks for you, lady," said the bartender.

"I live in a dump. Really, it's old and run down. I live on welfare and don't get much money. Do you think you could give me a ride home?"

Mona walked Sharon out to her car, trying not to drop her. She was kind of wobbly. In the car, while Mona was driving, Sharon asked, "Do you have a job, Mona?"

"Yes, I work at the Community Hospital, where I run the switchboard."

"Good for you. I bet you have more money than I do. I bet you even have a bank account."

"Yes."

"I've had a lot of men in my life. I could be pregnant, and if I am I don't know which one is the father."

Mona asked herself, "How did this old looking woman with no teeth or hair attract these men?"

They arrived at Sharon's apartment, where Mona walked her inside and sat her down on the couch. Sharon hick-up'd, then said, "You know, I hate asking people for help, but I need some money. I'm actually desperate for \$200. Mona, could you write me a check?"

"You're drunk," was Mona's response.

"When I get my kid's back, I'll have a higher Welfare check, so I'll be able to pay you back."

As Mona was trying to say, "I don't even know you." Sharon stood up saying, "I gotta take a leak."

She walked into the bathroom, pulling her pants down on the way. Upon entering the bathroom, she passed out on the floor. Mona heard a thud and ran to her.

Sharon appeared to be unconscious and her pants were half way down. Her wig had fallen all the way off. Sharon had a little blonde hair, but it was very thin. Lying on her stomach on the floor, Mona thought she looked disgusting with her pale, fat and dimpled rear end.

Mona felt all of the stress and hate that she hadn't even been aware of, rushing to her head. It was all directed at Sharon. Mona thought to herself, "Besides looking gross, she doesn't even care about her children. The only reason she wants custody of them is to get a larger welfare check. If I had kids, I would take care of them."

Reminiscing about Daniel, Mona remembered he had an afternoon shadow, and she could feel his whiskers against her cheek. She still loved him, and couldn't help it. With Sharon's phone, she dialed his number, and a female voice answered the phone. She felt an unbearable pain.

"Daniel didn't love me. Am I that unlovable?" Her insides were rumbling and seemed to swell. She didn't know whether she was experiencing hate or anger.

Staring at this pathetic body lying on the floor, Mona mumbled to herself, "I could get a knife from the kitchen and cut her throat."

"What am I thinking? Do I have the mind of a murderer? Am I a psychopath?"

Somewhere in the Bible, she had read something about lustful thoughts being as bad as the sin itself. She wondered if that applied to other sins, like murder.

Drinking was a sin and she had quit going to church. Sin was one thing, but this was much worse. She felt like a demon was inside her.

While sitting on the couch, she noticed a bottle of pills on the coffee table. She picked them up and swallowed them. In an instant it was done.

For a few minutes she sat there wondering when it would hit her. Realizing what she had done she wondered if there really was a Hell. If there was, she would surely go there.

"I'm not sure I want this to happen. I guess I should call someone for help." She was mumbling to herself.

She started looking for a phone book and the number

to suicide prevention. When she found the number, she called them.

They answered, "Suicide prevention, Can I help you?"

"I hope so. I'm afraid I'm going to die."

"What's going to make you die?" The man asked.

"I took some pills."

"What kind of pills?"

"I don't know. They're not mine. I stole them."

"Do you have the bottle? Read the label."

"It says Tofranil" she spelled it for them.

"We're calling an ambulance. I want you to stay on the phone until they get there."

As they continued to talk on the phone, Mona failed to mention that Sharon was unconscious on the bathroom floor.

In a few minutes Mona stated, "Someone's knocking on the door."

"Answer the door, It's probably the ambulance."

Mona answered the door. "It is the ambulance. I'll let you go," she hung up.

The first thing the paramedics saw upon entering was Sharon lying on the bathroom floor. One of the men yelled, "She's in here. She's breathing, but I think she's unconscious. Come help me stand her up."

The two men helped Sharon stand up. Although she was still partly out, she was beginning to wake up.

"We're going to walk you around," They told her. "What did you take?"

She didn't answer.

While walking Sharon around the room the men demanded, "You have to tell us what you took."

Mona tried to get their attention saying, "She didn't take anything. She's drunk."

They didn't seem to hear Mona. Again they asked Sharon, "What did you take?"

Sharon lifted her head and said, "Tequila Sunrise."

"She's never going to tell us. Let's get her to the hospital."

Mona sat there not believing what she saw. She had a soft voice, plus she was such a timid person, she didn't cry out. Instead she sat on the couch in shock as they rolled the gurney in and put Sharon on it, then left.

"They left me!"

Mona was feeling the effects of the pills she took, combined with alcohol. She could see molecules in front

of her and when she looked up she could see the ceiling falling down.

At this point she didn't care whether or not she would die. She was feeling peaceful. She thought to herself, "It's not so hard to die. It's peaceful."

After spending the night at the emergency room, Sharon returned to her apartment. She saw Mona lying on her couch. "Mona," she asked, "Are you OK?"

Suddenly, Sharon realized that Mona had passed away. Mona's heartache was over.

October Eulogy

by Ked Kirkham

Rabbit bush fades;
the golden yellow, exciting
as it leaped from the pale
sand
of the hills and canyon sides,
slips into
white skeletal down.

October is passing away.
His complexion wan,
dry, jaundiced
by fatigue
and age.

Darkness comes
early in the face;
his songs raspy
as dry leaves caught
in a wind,
tell old stories.
Snow will soon mat
in the tangled branches of his hair.

Despairing,
he pulls night over himself;
in so doing the sun falls
beyond the edge,
while stars
like crumbs from
the hearty summer
cling to it.

With that,
October is done.

Intermezzo for Joy

by Helen Allison

Becky sat at the piano, not touching the keys, just looking at them. In her mind she could hear Rachmaninoff's Prelude. Slowly her fingers found themselves following the notes she knew so well. She was hurt, she was angry. The Prelude was a good choice it was meant to sound disruptive. She knew that every piece told a story and Rachmaninoff displayed the many contradictions she was feeling. All of the anger and frustration was displayed with the abruptness of the double fortés. The many crescendos that started softly then built up so fast you could feel the lightening as it crashed against the mountain. Then it was quiet until another flash built up and did the same thing.

The man she was going to marry had abruptly left town telling her he wanted to see the basketball game that was going to be played in another state. That would have been alright, but it was also when she was scheduled to perform in a concert at the University and she wanted him to be there.

She shifted from Rachmaninoff to Fritz Spindler and Charge of the Hussars. The key signature with the six flats and the charge of octaves scraping down the rough mountain was not enough to dispel some of her frustration. She thought it might help to go for a brisk walk so she gathered Ronnie, her dog, and told him she hoped he could keep up.

She was still agitated as she and Ronnie charged into the nearby park. Wasn't she more important than a basketball game? The limb of one of the trees was bent in such a way as to say, "I'm bent and I hurt but I'm glad you're here in the park with me." She saw a couple sitting on a bench and holding hands. He was whispering something in her ear and she was smiling. Becky and Ronnie stopped running and walked over to the pool where she saw two little boys splashing and throwing handfuls of the water into the air and laughing. When it came back down on their heads. They are so happy, she thought. They are unaware of the tormenting anguish that sometimes wraps its arms around you.

When they got home, she gave Ronnie a drink then she noticed the light on the phone was blinking. She picked it up and heard, "Hi honey. I wanted to see the game but when I got here I thought of your program. I checked and I guess I got it mixed up 'cause I was thinking it was next week. I love you and I want to be there with you. I'm on my way home and I'll be there tomorrow morning."

Tears came into her eyes and she meandered back to the piano. She started to play *Clair de Lune*. It was her favorite, she played it often. Whenever her feelings were soft and gentle, she could count on it to fill her with peace. It was extremely expressive and her fingers responded. When she saw the diminuendo she visualized holding a ball of ice cream in her hand, watching it slowly change from a ball to a liquid as it ran through her fingers. She began the last section and saw the orange and rust of the sky as it blanketed the blue when the sun was starting to set.

Becky got up from the piano and remembered a quote she had read. "Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remain silent."

The Itchy-Knee Incident

by Karlene Kelley

One day I came upstairs into the living room. My son was sitting there. "Itchy knee," he said. I immediately went into "mom" mode.

"I have some cream or an ointment that will take care of that," I offered. I assumed he was talking about a dermatological problem. He just laughed. "Mom, I'm counting in Japanese," he replied.

Of course he was taking basic Japanese as a language class at college. I knew nothing about the language. I don't remember if the words I heard were one number or the first two numbers, but I think he told me the words were "one" and "two" in Japanese.

It has since become a private joke, understood by family members. My son and I tease each other by using the phrase. Then we laugh.

Recently, at the dinner table, I groaned, "itchy knee." Then I looked at my son and emphatically added, "and I'm not counting in Japanese." I was the one with a dermatological problem. All of the family laughed.

I suppose we'll continue to tease each other using this phrase and that's all right. It is nice to have something to laugh about.

How My Mom and Dad Met

by Busaya Dimitrov

My mom, Bunlieng Kaewpitak and my dad, Bunchoo Kaewpitak lived in the same city in the south of Thailand. My dad was sculpting a Buddha statue for the temple. My mom was a tailor. She liked to go the temple to donate homemade fresh food to the monks in the temple once a week. It was Thai culture that many people did that, like Christians go to church.

In 1955, the temple hired my dad to make a statue as a monument, representing an abbot who had passed away. People wanted to worship the abbot. Only a few people were able to do that work during that time, because most people worked in agriculture. So, when he made it, many people were interested.

After he was finished with the sculpture of clay and used wax on the whole sculpture, he had to replace it with bronze or gold. There were many steps of replacing the bronze or gold on the sculpture. He had to melt bronze or gold in melting pots by heat and pour it in, replacing the wax. Many people came to watch.

My mom was there, and she was impressed with him. My mom thought he was handsome, with his tan skin and his large nose. She thought he was a hard worker, and very responsible to get the job done. He was very careful to include the details, such as moles, a scratch, or wrinkles, when he was sculpting. My mom thought he was very helpful such as the time he set up electricity and dug wells for the whole village.

After my dad placed bronze on the sculpture, he was smoothing it with sandpaper. My mom went to the temple every day and walked past him. They made eye contact. My dad felt interested in her. They fell in love and wanted to date.

In Thai tradition in their generation, the woman's parents did not allow the man to date unless they were engaged. So my dad's parents came to my mom's parents to ask for an engagement. During the engagement ceremony, my dad gave my mom a ring, and other gifts as money or gold to my mom's parents. An engagement was a part of

the marriage agreement according to family law. If a man broke an engagement, the woman did not have to return engagement items. But if a woman broke an engagement, she had to return everything.

After their engagement, they were allowed to date. They were very excited on their first date. They went to the temple's yearly festival in the evening. My mom wore a nice pink dress. My dad wore black slacks and a blue shirt. They watched a variety show at the festival for about three hours, and my dad sent my mom back to her home. At other time, they went to the beach near my dad's house. There weren't any movie theaters in their city at that time.

In 1956, my dad and mom were married. In Thai marriage ceremony tradition, the woman's parents prepared a place in their house and invited the monks and cousins. The bride and groom wore Thai traditional dress. The monks sat at the place provided and blessed the bride and groom. They and their parents gave food to the monks, then the monks went back to the temple. The bride and groom sat on the chair, and put both arms flat on the table, with palms together. So all the parents and cousins could slowly pour water over their hands and bless them. After that they had a party in the evening, and their friends who were invited sent the bride and groom to a bedroom in the bride's house.

Martha

by Don Hale

The exhausted man mechanically dug the hole that was to be his wife's grave. There were so many rocks. He could only remove two or three shovels of soil and then he would have to pry loose another rock, climb down into the hole, and toss it out. Some of the rocks were too big to move, so the grave was not straight. It formed sort of a flattened-out "s" shape. It was not right, not deep enough, not what he wanted for her, but it was the best he could do. When the final trace of energy departed from him, he stopped and leaned on his shovel.

His mind flooded with memories of their courtship and ten years of married life. It started out with such joy and laughter. They bought the farm with a large mortgage and hearts swollen with hope for the future. It rained and the grass grew. He cut it with his scythe, forked it onto the wagon, and hauled it into the barn. There was plenty for the horses and the cow for the winter.

There was a boy-child born to them, but he was not alive. Through their grief, the farm extracted all the effort they could make, as it always did. His meals were always served at six, twelve and six. His clothes were always clean, as was the house. She grew most of their food in her garden. Neither of them yielded an inch in their pursuit of their dream.

A girl-child was born seven years ago. She was the delight of their lives. The love shared by the three of them outshone the sun. He hoped for a son to help him with his labors, but it was not to be. All of his love was expended on his loving wife and beautiful, intelligent little girl, who loved him beyond belief. Everything would be alright.

Three years ago his wife began to feel unwell. At first, she managed to do all that she was accustomed to do. Despite her best efforts, she started to show fatigue. She became weaker and weaker. He drove her into town to see the doctor who told them she had cancer and there was nothing he could do. Soon, in spite of her most gallant efforts, she became bedridden. Excruciating pain attacked her in waves until she passed out.

"They looked to be as happy as any two people could be."

Her mother's screams ripped her soul as if they were the claws of a cougar. The little girl's heart was overwhelmed with love for her mother and heart-rending questions. Where is God? Her mother had told her about God and His love and mercy for all His children. How could this loving and merciful God allow her kind and gentle mother to suffer this horrible pain? She didn't understand. Her pain was nearly as severe as her mother's. She wanted to scream and cry, but she couldn't. There were no more tears left to shed and she didn't want to give more pain to her father, who had enough of his own.

She thought about the picture on the shelf in the kitchen, taken when her father and mother were married. Her big, strong, handsome father had his arm around her beautiful mother in her pretty white wedding dress. They looked to be as happy as any two people could be.

Her mother had told her how happy they were as they started their life together on this farm, committed to each other for the rest of their lives and determined to make the farm prosper, mortgage and all. They were blessed with their daughter, and with sunrise to sunset back-breaking labor they made a success of the farm. Now, all that was gone.

Her father came in and stood looking down at their skinny little girl, his heart torn by love and grief. It was over now, over with his wife and over with the farm. He thought if it weren't for their precious daughter he might as well join his wife, but he couldn't bring himself to leave her.

She stood looking up at him wearing the last dress her mother had made for her. It was well worn and threadbare. She had no other. Her eyes were large in her thin face. She felt sorrow and pain, but no fear. She had her daddy to look after her. Everything would be alright.

He bent over and wrapped his wife's body in their last bed sheet and gestured to the little girl to open the door for him. She did and followed him outside to the hole he'd dug. Carefully, he lowered the nearly weightless body into the grave. Remaining on his knees, he drew their daughter

close to him. He wanted to say some words over her, but all he could remember from his church-going days was, "dust to dust." It wasn't enough. There were no Sundays on the farm. There was no time for attending church.

Instead, he drew their daughter close to him and asked her to always remember the wonderful mother she had, how she had always loved her and always would, to always... His voice trailed off. He could not say more. His exhausted, emaciated body shook with sobs.

Eventually, he gained control of himself and stood up to retrieve his shovel. Slowly he returned the loose soil to the grave and finished by covering it with the rocks he had taken out. He took their daughter's hand and led her into the house to go to bed.

In the morning he milked the cow. She was going dry and didn't give much, but it was enough for breakfast. The little girl had dug a few potatoes from her mother's garden the day before and cooked them all. With the little milk and leftover potatoes they had breakfast. Afterward he went outside and prepared to leave the farm for the last time.

He harnessed the horses, hitched them to the wagon and tied the cow to the back of it. From the barn he brought his scythe, shovel, pitchfork and what few hand tools that were not completely worn out or broken. In fifteen minutes, he was done.

Their daughter climbed up on the wagon seat while he checked out the harnesses on the horses. When he was done, he mounted the wagon seat, took the reins and headed the team for town. The little girl, deep in her own thoughts, was paying no attention to her daddy until she heard him snore. She looked over to see he was fast asleep. She didn't do anything because the team was docile and there wasn't anywhere for them to go but to town. When they got there, she took the reins from her daddy's relaxed hands and guided the team in through the open doors of the livery stable.

The owner was standing at the side of the barn talking to one of his sons. He was very surprised to see a wagon come in driven by a tiny little girl while a grown man sat motionless on the seat beside her. As soon as he figured out what was happening, he told his son, "Go get your mother and tell her to come out here right now!"

A little indignant, the woman came hustling into the stable and demanded of her husband, "What's so darn

important out here you call me out like this?"

The man said nothing, but nodded in the direction of the little girl.

His wife took in the situation in an instant and said, "Oh, my gosh!" She marched over to the wagon and climbed up on the seat with surprising agility, frightening the little girl a bit with her energy. The woman took the little girl's hand in hers and said, "My name's Nola, little girl, what's yours?"

"Martha, ma'am."

Poetry

by Kenny Lee

They call me "Rock," and rock is me! I spend my day with
"poetry".

I've known this lady quite a while! I dig her moves and like her
style.

She's been with me for quite some time. She tells her story in a
rhyme.

I met her when I spilt my hog-after driving in a fog.
The asphalt scars they covered me-along with scars from surgery.
The asphalt scars healed long before I was walking out the door.
My brain took much more time to heal. An out of water, wounded
seal.

A 13 months hospital stay, was 13 months poetic pray!
I felt my Lord was always there, in my room and everywhere.
Right beside my poetry, residing deep inside of me.

The Lord used me to spread his word when I was young and
innocent.

Now I use him to regain strength, recover from my accident.
Maybe, someday I will see, how my life with "POETRY"
Has helped me be a better man, to do more than just what I can
She's so sexy, always there, helping me with every care
Helps me to celebrate life's delights, helps me cope with all its
frights

Helps me hold fast to God above as I fall in, and out of love
It always frightened me to see my life without my "POETRY"
Like God, she carried me through battle. On a notebook in my
saddle

she made lifes struggles less sublime, if I could only make her
rime

My Daughter's Favorite Animal

by Judy Johnson

On a Saturday afternoon in May 1985, my husband, Rod and I told the kids we were going to the zoo. The four younger children, who were still in their pajamas, were so excited to go, they didn't know whether to eat first or get dressed.

Rod and I loaded our six children into the two-tone brown station wagon and headed for Hogle Zoo. Rod paid the entrance fee. I put my youngest child, Julie, two and half years old, in the stroller. As we entered through the turnstile, I smelled manure and hay, not my favorite smells, but the smell of popcorn, cotton candy, and hot dogs replaced the nasty smell.

"Can we get some cotton candy?" the kids asked.

"When we leave, Dad will buy you some," I told them.

The first stop was always the building where the gorillas and baboons were housed behind tempered glass. The kids knocked on the windows trying to get the apes to show off to us. We left the building and walked over to Monkey Island to watch the smaller monkeys. As they hung from tree branches, swung to other branches, or dropped to the ground to retrieve peanuts that had been thrown to them by the crowds of people, we all laughed.

We walked over to watch the birds and ducks in the pond. However, the kids weren't interested so we hurried to the elephants. As we came closer to the elephants, Julie got so excited, kicking her legs trying to get out of the stroller. I took her out and walked her up to the chain link fence that surrounded the outer edge of the elephant area. She wove her tiny fingers through the open gaps and stood there for thirty minutes watching those big, tough skinned animals.

She looked at me and said, "Mom, can I have an elephant for my pet?"

Julie had been bugging me to get a pet for the last six months. I told her, "Not right now, but maybe when you turn eight years old we can get a dog. Would you like that?"

"No," she answered. "I want an elephant! I want an

elephant!"

"Julie, elephants are too big to fit in our back yard, plus they eat lots of food and need to have shelter during the cold winter months. We can't afford to keep such a big animal. We live in the city, and the government won't let us have wild animals as pets."

Her bottom lip quivered, and tears rolled down her plump cheeks.

"Julie, let's go to the zoo's gift shop, and I will buy you a stuffed elephant. Would you like that?" I hoped that she would stop crying. That did the trick, but she wanted to get it right then instead of looking at the rest of the animals, so I took her to the gift shop where she picked out the best stuffed gray elephant. As we finished walking through the zoo, she held tightly to that stuffed animal. She wouldn't let her siblings hold the elephant, they could only look at it. That night when she went to bed, she fell asleep with her elephant by her side.

When Julie was in the fourth grade, her teacher gave the class an assignment to write a report on their favorite animal. She wrote about elephants. Part of the assignment included making a cover for the report. Julie got busy with her crayons and drew a front view of an elephant.

The teacher told me that Julie is very artistic. She also told me that in past years children haven't been choosing elephants as their favorite animal, and she was surprised when Julie chose it for her report. Since then, Julie has drawn or sketched many pictures of elephants.

When Julie was six years old, I started her elephant collection with a figurine of a mother elephant with four babies following behind. Then other elephants arrived. One from India, Ty Beanie Babies, one from Mount St. Helen's ash, a porcelain one, wooden ones from Kenya, book-ends of green marble, and jade from China. The collection has grown to over 200 elephants from all over the world.

Recently, I asked Julie why she's so fascinated with elephants. She said, "I feel I possess some of the characteristics of elephants. Now that I'm a mother, it is

**"That did
the trick, but
she wanted to
get it right
then..."**

my responsibility to be protective and guide my children as elephants protect and lead their young. They are responsible to make sure the herd stays together as I am to keep my family together.”

Julie is a leader and makes decisions every day that will benefit her family. She teaches her children to choose their clothes and shoes when they get dressed, how to clean up their toys and keep their bedroom clean, and how to be kind and respectful to everyone. Elephants are also leaders and make decisions that will benefit the herd. If one falls behind due to injury or sickness, a decision has to be made—will the herd wait for the one or keep on moving? Julie teaches her boys to have compassion when a member of the family gets sick by helping take care of a sibling or bringing things that will help the person feel better.

Julie feels connected to elephants because they are tough, they don't back down to any animal that approaches them and neither does Julie. She has had many health problems since giving birth to her first son five years ago. Procedures and surgeries have been performed, looking for a diagnosis, but without any results. However, Julie doesn't let these issues keep her down. She is a good mother and works hard to keep her family together. She graduated from beauty school and is a hairdresser. She plays with her boys, helps her autistic son with homework, gives her boys birthday and Halloween parties that are a lot of fun, goes hiking with her kids and other family members, rides her bicycle for miles, and keeps up with a busy two year old while dealing with chronic pain.

Just as a mother elephant connects to her babies by having each one hold the tail of the one in front of them with the first one holding the mother's tail as they travel from place to place, I see Julie keep her boys close and safe as she holds their hands.

The Four Season

by Peggy Kadir

Spring greets
With lilac-scented rain
Summer basks
In rays of golden sun
Autumn whispers
Red and yellow poetry
Winter bids you slumber
'Neath quilts deep and white

Bad Accidents

by Paul Rosser

In 1964, when I was in my teens, I saw two bad car accidents. The first accident was close to our house, and I saw it with my brother. The other accident I saw happened when I was riding my bike home from West High School.

The first accident was on Second West. Earlier in the day, my brother Dave and I were in our backyard. We saw two cops driving quickly up the alley until they saw us. They stopped and asked us if we'd seen anybody run up the alley. We told them, "Yes." We had seen one guy running up the alley. The cops continued to look for him.

Later that day, we were in the house and heard a noisy boom. Dave and I ran outside and up the street towards the group of people standing outside our local tavern. We saw a burning car with the top blown off and body parts everywhere.

By the time we got to the accident, the cops were there. The cops had been at the tavern, and they saw the car blow up. They called the fire department. We found out that two men had been in the car with gasoline in the back seat. The men had been smoking, and sparks from the cigarette ignited the gas fumes. We left after the fire was out.

Much later, after everyone left, we went back to see what we could find. We found skin on the ground. The skin looked like it was actually from one of the guys' fingers. Dave picked it up with a stick, and I said, "Are you hungry for lunch?" He tossed it aside. As we started walking to the corner, we saw a dog pick it up and take off.

The second accident was on Sixth North. One day as I was riding my bike home from West, I heard a squealing sound from half a block away. I pedaled faster to the corner, where I saw that a car had been t-boned by another car. I thought that the car had run the red light because the light was already red.

The car that had run the red light had been coming down the viaduct on Sixth North. I could tell that the other car must have been turning the corner onto Sixth North. The driver that ran the red light went through the windshield; his head was almost cut off and he was dead.

The car that got t-boned flipped over and got pushed fifty feet. That driver also died. Both cars were smashed up with blood everywhere. I don't know who called the cops. After they got there, they covered up the bodies, and I left.

I don't want to see another bad accident, and I don't want to be in one. I don't want to see another one because it was gross seeing heads cut off and cars with people blown up.

On The Bus

by Kenny Lee

Yesterday while riding trax
I met a girl with sandy hair
She told me that she had MS.
That info took me unaware

She wore her cane so beautiful.
I told her that it matched her eyes
She seen my trouble walking
Right as I was looking at her thighs

She wore her struggles sweet n sexy
sitting quiet on the bus
“I lost my love”, she said. I answered,
“I’ve enough for both of us”!
I taught her ‘bout a “bee sting therapy”.
Some MS patients had some luck
To stimulate their legs to move.
To give them strength, so they can walk

We talked of other recent breakthroughs
She seen not that she’s helping me
Through “erotic stimulation”.
She then asked, “How could it be?

I explained to her my bold idea,
how love could stimulate the mind
We see the truth in that emotion!
It also helps our strength, in kind!
I not only want to prove to you,
“Not only can you walk, but screw”
As bee stings stimulate your nerves,
I’ll stimulate your heart for you.

This could help you concur life itself
It’s a shot. I hope you take it!
All you need do is just say YES!!!!!!!
Then all we need do next is “Make it”!

You’ve been stung by bees before.
All we’re adding is the passion.
If this helps stimulate the neurons
I’ll pencil in another session

Untitled

by Mary Pat

I am old.
I don't mind.
What I really minded
Was the getting here.

There is a smugness
about resignation
that I should despise.
For old age is
the only pain Christ
never knew.
Who can possibly pray to a God
twenty years their junior?
Maybe that's why lately
I've been talking a lot
to his Dad.

If Not Now, When?

by Catherine Wright

I'm not sure I can do this, but I don't want to go through it again. Emotionally I just do not have the strength to face this ordeal. My husband is not capable of making such a difficult decision he can't stop crying. It is up to me. Why do I seem to always end up being the strong one? Enough we are going ahead as planned. I will not bring her back in a week or possibly a month later, today is the day.

My mind is flooded with visual snap shots of our girl. What a beauty in her prime, long before that overgrown tumor hanging from her front leg; the open sore on Izzy's forehead and the wobbly back leg. How could I have gone so long blinded by her deteriorating quality of life? Why do I see my wrinkles, graying hair, and stooping posture but ignore my girl Izzy's decline?

Even Dr. Pope was surprised she had lasted so much longer than her condition should have allowed. However, she too said it was time. Time where did it go, why just yesterday Izzy was retrieving the tennis ball, jumping in the back end of our car, or barking for a treat. Now her milky brown eyes stare at us as we wait for the vet to come back with the fatal injection. Does Izzy know, I think so if she could talk would say, "Thank you," or "How could you?" I'll never know.

Izzy has been part of our small family for eight years. I have held teaching positions longer than that, have friends for over twenty years and been married for forty five years. How can a mere eight years seem like a life time of such simple heavenly joy with a dog?

She had a presence about her from the first day of arriving at our home. My husband had rescued this 85lb yellow lab from a young man who spent more time impregnating young women and doing drugs than caring for Izzy. We surmised that was why she continually displayed an obsession with food. Her specialty was stealing anything accidentally left on the kitchen counter. A whole pie, dinner rolls, meat thawing out or whatever else Izzy could reach without too much effort. As we wised up to her weaknesses, the counters were cleared before

leaving the house. This was not a deterrent she learned to open the refrigerator selecting any item or the lower shelves. My husband put a child's safety lock on the door, Izzy moved to the small freezer above, another lock with numerous teeth marks covering both doors. How could a clean neat freak like my husband put up with such behavior? Unconditional love is the only answer I can come up with.

It is time Dr. Pope and her young assistant are back needle and blanket in hand. The heaviness in my chest is unbearable but I need to be strong even though I am not really sure why. Quietly we stroke her thick mane trying to anchor a tissue box between us. As the injection goes in her eyes look up at me one last time. The nervous panting has stopped her head rolls to the side. Just like that it is over she is gone. As we settle up the bill, the vet consoles us by saying we gave her a wonderful life. Close friends repeat these exact words with emails and texts. We say our Izzy gave us eight years of nonstop amusement and unconditional love. We were the lucky ones.

Music Tells a Story

by Helen Allison

"I know I should have told you sooner, I just couldn't... I just... oh, Mr. Barber, it was so hard to tell you. I couldn't bring myself to do it."

"But it would have been easier to deal with if you had just given me a hint, Becky."

It was difficult for Becky to tell Mr. Barber and she knew she should have told him sooner. However, after all her training, she certainly thought she would be able to overcome the way she felt about it.

"Is it the whole piece or just portions of it?" he asked.

"It's the entire thing. Every other piece of music I've ever studied and performed has had a story to tell. But I don't hear what the composer is saying in this one. It's like he begins and then loses it, tries again then loses it again."

"Every piece tells a story, Becky, you know that I thought I had chosen the right one for you. This is an extremely important competition and I certainly want you to do well. Let's go over it again, I'll see if I can tell what the problem is."

Becky sat at the piano and ran her fingers lightly across the keys, then played the first section. Mr. Barber stopped her at this point.

"This nocturne shows Chopin's originality, his power, and his diplomacy," he said. "It demonstrates a great variety of emotion and genuine dramatic spirit. The entire ending is in contrast to the dreamy beginning. There's much contrast throughout this piece, it cries of despair, then there's a feeling of hope. There are smiles... then there are tears. One of your problems is that your talent far exceeds your experience of life. I hear your ability to tell this story, but you must make your feelings deeper and stronger than you ever have before. Do you think you can do that?"

"I want to. I have it in me, I know. I showed you that with Debussy and Rachmaninoff."

"Yes, you did. Well, we have a little more time until the competition. You know it very well, now let your emotions tell the story. I truly believe you can do it, Becky."

She studied the piece until she did, indeed, hear and feel the story. Mr. Barber's confidence in her led the way to her understanding of what Chopin was truly saying.

Self-Expression

by Joe Bradshaw

I wanted to write about and share some thoughts about one of my favorite things in life. As I started to write I realized that it would be quite a challenge. I thought it would be easy to write about something we all do and I truly enjoy yet it is so enormous and diverse. I have a deeper admiration and understanding of what "self expression" is now that I chose to write about it.

As I explored what self-expression means and the many ways we express ourselves it began to remind me of trying to define what love is. Have you ever thought about the definition of love? When I ask that question in a group of friends or writers the answers are so varied, some are simple, some are quite complex very rarely do I get two people that have the same answer. My own answer varies at times from the simple "Acceptance" to the complexities expressed in the hundreds of pages I have written on the subject. Well the subject of self expression I had thought would be quite simple.. My original simple answer was "I love to express my thoughts in the creative realm of poetry."

Poetry? I began to really think about self expression and realized just saying I love to express myself poetically was not going to give the respect due to such an immense subject. After all when you look at the true heart of what self expression is it is the art of being you!

Take for instance a painting by a great Master, say a Picasso or Michelangelo for instance, the masters painted in layers each a form of self expression adding depth and dimension. Much like the changes we go through and the various ways we express ourselves as we live our lives. Sometimes the Masters would just look at their progress and decide that the piece they were creating was not at all what they wanted to express, not being able to remove the layers of paint they used them to add even more depth to their creations as they painted new layers and colors over them creating a whole new piece that in the end often became a Masterpiece. A Master piece takes many strokes of the brush and many layers as well as colors before it is complete, some take a lifetime to create.

Smiles, frowns, purple hair and green nails, yelling, laughing, painting, singing, silence, writing and well the clothes you wear are all forms of self expression. I look around me where ever I may be and it occurs to me that everyone one I am looking at is expressing themselves every minute of their waking day I also realize I am doing the same. I found that even when I am just sitting in silence by myself I am still expressing myself in thought and action.

Through the realization that self expression is the art of being you, I found it to be quite insightful in regards to how I express myself. I often find myself thinking more about what I wear or how I present myself when I am speaking with people. We are all Masters in the process of creating ourselves. Those that we interact with are like the colors of a painting some bright, some dark some kind of grey the whole spectrum surrounds us and interacts with us. We use our thoughts and feelings as the brushes on our personal canvases over the course of a lifetime we add to our master pieces sometimes choosing to paint over the existing layers with a new more vibrant color or the darker colors adding depth to our beauty. Am I creating with beautiful colors and sharing beautiful colors or am I adding the depth from shadow and darkness runs through my mind as I work on my own masterpiece.

Not all works of art are seen as beautiful by everyone who sees them; they are for the most part beautiful to the one that created them. Much like our individual way of expressing ourselves is not always considered beautiful to everyone. I thought I would have some beautiful revelation to share yet the more I think about it the more I come to the conclusion that as works of art, masterpieces we are as unique and diverse as the forms of self expression we share as we live our lives.

In conclusion I would like to say:

“The Art of Being You”

I appreciate the diverse ways that people express
themselves with me every day
I truly appreciate the smiles they share and the words
they say
Every frown and every tear is a gift as well
Colored with emotion in ways I see and hear
Like strokes of a brush on the canvas of my soul

Each one of them I cherish and hold dear

-
We all express ourselves in all that we choose to say and
do
Self expression is the art of being you

-
As you choose your form of self expression
I hope that you choose to do so beautifully
As you share your masterpiece with me
As you create the master piece that is beautiful you!
Self-Expression is the Art of being you

-
To me you are a Master, Creating a Masterpiece
Quite a beautiful masterpiece indeed
You are the Beautiful Masterpiece I see

Ode No. 6: To Empty Glasses and Mismatched Forks

by K.E. Concannon

The last Petit Verdot upon our lips,
we head upstairs to bed.
He lies to watch as I undress—
the years of wine and sweets adorn my hips.
But there is nothing to confess,
no words we haven't said.

In bed, I run my fingers through his hair—
a little grayer, it's true.
What celebrations can occur
on private nights when we've the chance to share
our imperfection as though it were
a crème brûlée for two.

Author Bios

Helen Allison—Helen has had music in her life since age five. She no longer plays the piano and has found that writing fiction is like making music...it comes from your heart.

Cheryl Banks—Cheryl is an every once-in-a-while writer of sudden inspirations.

Fran Crookston—Fran has mentored the Thursday evening writing group of the Literacy Action Center since November 2009 and has had submissions in each edition of the *sine cera* since then. She is now leaving the group to work on other projects.

K.E. Concannon—K. E. Concannon has spent her life in love with the written and spoken word and welcomes every day within this literary community.

Annette Dennis—Annette has been writing for most of her life and she joined a creative writing class two years ago. Primarily, she wrote poetry before she joined and she has now learned many genres of writing.

Busaya Dimitrov—Busaya writes about dating of her mom and dad, generations, and marriage tradition in her country.

Donald Hale—Donald is a retired driver and warehouse man who, after a lifetime of working for others, is finally getting around to doing something for and by himself.

Appio Hunter—a writer, presentation designer, Certified Infinite Possibilities Trainer, and happiness expert. He teaches classes on emotional wellness and living a happy, passionate life throughout the Salt Lake metro area.

Sandra James—Sandra is 62 years old. She loves to write, and is a member of Copper Quill writing group. She dreams of publishing her work.

Judith A. Johnson—Judith loves to write her personal history and write about her grandparents, parents and great grandparents. Her mentor has opened her eyes on how to write so it isn't boring!

Christine Ireland—a native Ohioan, Christine has lived in the greater Salt Lake area for thirty years. She enjoys trivia games, attending writer's meetings and conferences, and dines somewhere new each month.

Peggy Kadir—A professional painter and admirer of the written word, at 87 Peggy believes that her obituary should read, “She lived, She loved, She left.”

Jim Kelley—almost fifty years ago, Jim dropped creative writing to concentrate on professional classes. After retiring he resumed writing and became the founder of the Copper Quill DiverseCity writing group.

Karlene Kelley—Karlene was born in Fillmore, Utah. She has spent the last thirty-four years as a wife and mother in magna. She is a member of the Copper Quill writing group.

Ked Kirkham—Ked Kirkham has participated in the Gay Writes group since October 2011. His intention was to improve his essay writings with the result of having renewed his pleasure in and appreciation of poetry and an opportunity to try creative fiction.

Julie Liljenquist—Julie is female, has a husband, Terrell. Her birds are named Mary Jane and Pearl May. Julie grew up in Utah County.

Rae Miller—Rae has worked in health insurance and law enforcement. She loves crafts, sewing, camping, and new adventures. At age 72 she joined a writing club which encouraged her to write.

Awes Muhina—Awes is part of the LAC Thursday evening writing group. He works and has a large family which keeps him busy.

Mary Pat—At Mary's age, she feels lucky to remember that much. Mary writes poems. She has stopped writing the real and has thoroughly enjoyed being eccentric.

Kathleen Rice—Kathleen is a single, never married lady, currently living in an assisted living center in Salt Lake City. Kathleen has struggled with both physical and mental illness. Some of her writing is dark because of her depression.

Sarah Rose—Sarah is enjoying her writing groups and being a teen mentor. She is a retired speech therapist.

Paul Rosser—Paul likes Utah football and West High football. He likes to ride his bike. He likes NASCAR racing. He likes to watch gory movies, not accidents.

Audrey Weigel—human being. Enjoys family, writing, painting, singing, nature. Retired and likes to sleep.

John Wilkes—John is the longest serving SLCC-CWC volunteer and long-time DiverseCity Writing Series writer who currently resides in Murray.

Doug Woodall—is a longtime volunteer for the CWC. Currently he's one of the mentors for Gay Writes, a DiverseCity Series writing group. He's proud to say he's won multiple speech contests, and recently he's started work on Toastmasters' top designations, which is Distinguished Toastmaster. Doug loves to outdoors but when he has to be indoors, he likes to read, write, and challenge his math skills.

Catherine Wright—Catherine is a retired educator, and a contributing writer for the Wasatch View and other local papers. She placed third in a state writing contest. She enjoys writing as a creative hobby.

Lily Wu—Lily likes her country, China. Lily would like to thank the CWC so much.